

# Mappers, Mapmakers, and Cartographers and Where to Find Them in Contemporary Art (a Modest Proposal)

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**Abstract** The so-called ‘art map age’, a phenomenon marked by the convergence of visual arts and cartography, emerged between the 1960-70s and early 2000s. The close relationship between cartographic and artistic language is a ‘commonplace’ of the present world: if the artistic experiments with the maps have been supported by a vast bibliography, in this paper I follow a strictly geographical approach to describe some trends of contemporary art. I take inspiration from a terminological distinction introduced by Arthur Robinson and Barbara Petchenik: and that is between ‘mapper’, ‘mapmaker’ and ‘cartographer’. Furthermore, combining the ‘types’ of the mapper, the mapmaker, and the cartographer with the different attitudes regarding maps (as medium, image, abstraction, etc.), I will suggest a small classification scheme.

**Keywords** Geography. Map. Cartography. Contemporary art. Iconology.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Mappers, Mapmakers, Cartographers in Art. – 3 The Artist-Mapmaker and the Map as Medium. – 4 The Artist-Mapper and the Map as Image. – 5 The Artist-Cartographer and the Map as Abstraction. – 6 Conclusion.



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Now it's as though everything on the map  
represents something but representing  
is not represented on the map

Ludwig Wittgenstein  
in Bouwsma 1986, 343

## **1 Introduction**

To introduce the topic of my paper to the reader I will start with a twentieth-century anecdote taken from Igor Stravinsky's *Chronicle of my life*:

I shall never forget the adventure which later befell me in crossing the frontier at Chiasso on my return to Switzerland. I was taking my portrait, which Picasso had just drawn at Rome and given to me. When the military authorities examined my luggage they found this drawing, and nothing in the world would induce them to let it pass. They asked me what it represented, and when I told them that it was my portrait, drawn by a distinguished artist, they utterly refused to believe me. "It is not a portrait, but a plan", they said. "Yes, the plan of my face, but of nothing else", I replied. But all my efforts failed to convince them, and I had to send the portrait, in Lord Berners' name, to the British Ambassador in Rome, who later forwarded it to Paris in the diplomatic bag. The altercation made me miss my connection, and I had to stay at Chiasso till next day. (1936, 114-15)

This episode is very suggestive, and according to Franco Farinelli it would be the ideal reverse of *El hacedor*, Borges' tale in which a man intends to draw the world. However, shortly before dying he realizes that the patient labyrinth of lines he has drawn - images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals - make up the image of his face (Farinelli 1992, 253). Drawn by Picasso with a fine lead pencil in 1917, at the frontier with Switzerland, the Stravinsky portrait is not functionally recognized as an artwork. The customs officers mistook it for a work of cartography and treated it as such: the musician was temporarily detained and suspected of carrying with him war plans encrypted in a drawing (it is well known that a 'plan' means both a sketch drawn on a plane that shows how something appears from above - in a wider sense a detailed map - and also a scheme or a set of things that you intend to do or achieve). Here the confusion or overlapping between painting and mapping is clearly the result of an error of judgment (World War I is underway). But it's an *unintentionally clever mistake*: as a matter of fact, it suggests a potential circularity between these two practices.



**Figure 1**  
Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Igor Stravinsky*. 1917. Pencil on paper, 27 × 21 cm. “It is not a portrait, but a plan,” they said. “Yes, the plan of my face, but of nothing else,” I replied” (from Igor Stravinsky’s *Chronicle of My Life*)

Perhaps it is worth taking seriously the misunderstanding that lies at the heart of this story: behind the misunderstanding of customs officers there may be something for us to learn. In fact, this anecdote reminds us that visual art and cartography are rooted in a common ground:

Mapping – like painting – precedes both written language and systems involving number, and though maps did not become everyday objects in many areas of the world until the European Renaissance, there have been relatively few mapless societies in the world at large. (Harley 1987, 1)

Examples of the intersections of artistic-cartographic practices have been analysed in a multiplicity of critical plans, theoretical perspectives, and historical interactions as part of a vast and multifaceted interdisciplinary field. Examples may be the following: the networks of acquaintance and/or the professional kinships between artists and cartographers (with some, such as Leonardo da Vinci, who engaged in mapmaking and others who have been both draughtsmen’s

and mapmakers); topographical map and landscape painting as alternative but highly compatible grammars or ways of representing Earth's places; the reinterpretation of the cartographic grid (which went from being a device to frame and compose the spatial arrangement and scalar representation of material places and landscapes to a figurative and representational convention); the mapping of works or artistic currents; the presence of maps in paintings (for example Vermeer's well known passion for maps; see Alpers 1983; Stoichita 1997); the standards of graphical representation commonly accepted and the aesthetics of the map - and so on.

Nevertheless, although their relationships are complex and enduring, it may be easy to mistakenly think that visual art and cartography had recently permanently parted ways:

Cartography has become increasingly rigorous and demanding, to the point that the pictographic and topographic elements that were such important features of earlier maps (e.g., in late medieval portolan charts and in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch world maps) have been virtually eliminated. Even the purely decorative components of maps, so widely employed in the most diverse cultural settings, have ceded place to strictly utilitarian symbols that have to do with the measurement of space rather than with the landscape of place: sober signs for distance and scale have replaced images of colossi and cities, gods and mountains. We are left with the ordinary road map, primarily of practical value, or with the detailed and precise surveyor's map. Nothing painterly in either case; indeed, nothing even ornamental. [...] In light of this divergent history, it would be plausible to think that mapping and painting can no longer communicate with each other, much less join forces in a single work. (Casey 2005, XIII-XIV)

The close relationship between cartographic and artistic language is not relegated solely to the past: anticipated by Dada and Surrealist experiments, maps' use in art is a fundamental cultural practice - a "commonplace" (Watson 2009, 293) - of the present world. The so-called 'art map age', a phenomenon marked by the convergence of visual arts and cartography, emerged between the 1960-70s and early 2000s (Lanci 2022, 104). Casey himself at the end of his reasoning admits that in the past decades "a renewed interest in the marriage of mapping and painting has arisen" (2005, XIV). For the sake of completeness, we must therefore add a second quote:

insofar as artists deal with the world around them, during the past century maps have become an increasingly prominent part of it. Because our societies are more map-immersed than any that have previously existed, contemporary map artists have grown up

bathed in maps to an unprecedented degree. It's true that they've grown up bathed in many things, not all of which have become compulsive subjects of art-making, but the unique properties of the map make it an exceptionally apt subject for an art that, as it has become less and less enamoured of traditional forms of representation, has grown increasingly critical. Maps have numerous attractions. In the first place, like paintings, maps are graphic artefacts. There's substantial formal continuity, especially with the painting of the second half of the 20th century and its grab bag of commitments to abstraction, surface, flatness, pattern, and formal systems of sign-making. (Wood 2010, 215)

Since the 1960s, contemporary art has loved to play with the artistic potential of mapping (Lo Presti 2018): precisely because, given its quantity and diversity, no single exhibition or catalogue can ever adequately cover the full range of existing material, nor delve into all the nuanced distinctions that exist between one artist (with its special creative practices) and another (Storr 1994, 14). In this sense, maps serve as an incentive or motive to create: "From *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Ortelius (1570) to the 'paint'-clogged maps of Jasper Johns, the map has exercised a fascination over the minds of artists" once stated Robert Smithson, an essential figure in the history of conceptual art. "If mapping is our most common operational metaphor today, there has been a related increase in the use of maps in art" argued Ruth Watson (2009, 293).

Hence, we can say that "among counter-mapping strategies none mounts the assault on the prerogatives of professional mapmakers that map art does, art [...] made as, with, or about maps" (Wood 2010, 189). Their 'creative collusion' has fed many reflections focused on the social implications of artworks and maps; or, to use Bourdieu's terms (1984), their 'distinction' as public, bodily, interpersonal fact. Mapping can be seen as a wide-ranging metaphorical, semiotic and cognitive activity, beyond its institutionalized and customary conceptions. Thus, it is not exclusively attributable to cartographic products *stricto sensu*; more generally, the gaze and the 'visual' as the summa of modernity (and its contradictions), and so on (Rees 1980; Calabrese 1983; Woodward 1987; Allen 2000; Casey 2002; Piana, Watkins, Balzaretto 2021). It should be noted that the relationship between 'artistic painterly' and 'cartographic precision' in turn serves as a metaphor for the relationship between humanistic values and those prevailing in science and technology in Western culture. It should therefore be included in a broader debate within philosophy, the social sciences and cultural geography in which, on the one hand, there is a tendency to move beyond the classical binary oppositions (mimesis-interpretation, art-nonart, objectivity-subjectivity, mental images-physical artefacts, etc.), and, on the other hand,

representational devices are seen as relational entities manipulated by users. In a post-structuralist and non- or more-than-representational perspective, what is privileged is the shift from the *object* (the map) towards the *practices* (the mapping) and, thus, the way in which case-by-case devices are concretely *used, looked at, and signified* by people (Dodge, Kitchin, Perkins 2009; Kitchin 2010). As critical cartography has shown (Harley 1989; Harley, Laxton 2001; Jacob 2006; Wood, Fels 1992; 2008; Crampton, Krygier 2006; Wood 2010; for an object-oriented cartography: Rossetto 2019), mapping is a technology of power because it *implies, and at the same time constitutes* its users. Consequently, if reader and map are mutually constituted and entwined; if the way in which people interact with maps is subject (in time and in space) to continuous negotiations and transformations; it follows that, for the most part, both the observer and the observed do not exist ‘in pure form’, separately and prior to any specific relational context (visibility regimes are a dynamic set of socio-culturally determined practices, strategies, and techniques) (Crary 1990).

## 2 Mappers, Mapmakers, Cartographers in Art

It goes without saying that such artistic experiments with cartography have been discussed in many ways:<sup>1</sup> all this is well known and supported by a vast bibliography about “the cartographic eye of art” (to quote Buci-Glucksmann 1996). Therefore, I will now follow *a strictly geographical approach*, which draws inspiration from a terminological distinction introduced by Arthur Robinson and Barbara Petchenik: that is between “mapper”, “mapmaker” and “cartographer” (Robinson, Petchenik 2011, but originally 1976). Even if these terms are mostly used as synonyms, these two scholars refer to things that are only partly overlapping. To begin with, *mapper* means someone or something that organises information obtained from the physical environment (consisting of the living being’s surroundings) into a spatial framework. This operation is extremely important, even vital to move and survive in the environment: from the high-flying eagle to the darting dragonfly to the human beings, all these have the innate ability to arrange what they see and to operate in a spatial way: what is called ‘cognitive mapping’ is precisely the mapper’s distinctive feature:

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**1** Storr 1994; Folie, Bianchi 1997; Curnow 1999; Silberman, Tuan 1999; Bender, Berry 2001; Heartney 2003; Albert 2004; Cosgrove 2005; Wood 2006; Cartwright, Gartner, Lehn 2009; D’Ignazio 2009; Harmon 2009; Roqueplo 2010; Tedeschi 2011; Monsaingeon 2013; Brückner 2015; Cabeen 2017; Reddeman 2018; Ferdinand 2019; Gates 2023.

Naturally the mapper's image [...] will be a function of his past experience and his ability to involve himself in a spatial framework. Therefore, it will vary from person to person; one can confidently assert that the images of no two mappers are alike, and that the same milieu can be mapped in different ways by the same mapper. (Robinson, Petchenik 2011, 21)

But above all, this mental image - this mental map - is *immaterial*: "in our definition of mapper we have specifically restricted the map he develops to an image which is not tangible, that is, it does not materially exist to be touched and seen by another" (21).

If *mapper* is simply one who mentally conceives things in spatial relation, the *mapmaker* and the *cartographer* are dealing with something more. For example, according to Robinson and Petchenik, a *mapmaker* is definitely a *mapper*, but a *mapper* is not necessarily a *mapmaker*. The latter is the one who communicates their cognitive activity through a tangible map. This operation implies the use of a very wide range of activities and compilation tools, from the simplest (a pen and a piece of paper) to the most refined, "with myriad technical procedures and executions in between". In short, the *mapmaker* is the one who is materially engaged in the production of a map-object. Thus, while *mapper* is the all-encompassing term, *mapmaker* is more specific: one who *makes* maps with their hands (literally or metaphorically). The moment (and *only* the moment) I draw a mental map of my neighbourhood for you, I turn from *mapper* to *mapmaker*.<sup>2</sup>

Compared to the *mapmaker* the figure of the *cartographer* adds an additional element of classification:

The term 'cartography' is generally restricted to that portion of the operation often termed 'creative', that is, concerned with the design of the map, 'design' being used here in a broad sense to involve all the major decision making having to do with specification of scale, projection, symbology, typography, colour and so on. (Robinson, Petchenik 2011, 22).

In this sense, the *cartographer* is no longer the one who just physically works on the map, but creatively reflects on ways that empower in the best way possible each of us to map the reality (a reflection that includes reasonings about scale, projection, symbology, typography, colour, etc.). From this point of view, the *cartographer* may not be always the material author of the map. Nevertheless, one thing is certain:

<sup>2</sup> For a different interpretation of the relationship between *mapping* ("a universal expression of individual existence") and *mapmaking* ("an unusual function of specifiable social circumstances arising only within certain social structures"), see Wood 1993.

for Robinson and Petchenik, in their deepest essence *mapmaker* and *cartographer* are both fully *mappers*, but they are not just *mappers*.

Specifically, in the following pages I will use these three categories, separate ways to describe some cartographic trends of contemporary art. My approach can also be called *geographical* for another reason: I take the geographical map as the 'zero degree' of artistic re-elaboration, or in other words *the formal starting point of artistic practice*. Sure, every scholar on the convergence of visual arts and cartography starts with the map in some way. However, the classification criteria adopted are mostly of heterogeneous nature (for example aesthetic or national classification schemas). With these premises, the conclusion is *all artists who use maps in their work are all cartographers* - something that resembles the Hegelian night in which all cows are black. It is therefore important to distinguish and understand: in contemporary art, who is a mapper? Who is a mapmaker? Who is a cartographer? Everything is mapping, but mapping is said in many ways: it has different senses.

Let it be clear that I am not so much interested here in the referential success or failure of the map's content, but in its being a wide-open field of possibilities. As Wittgenstein observes, "Everything a map represents is possible" (Waismann 1979, 239). Insofar as we take conventional cartography, as we know it, as the standard example of comparison, we can notice the different degrees of re-elaboration of the canon, or rather the 'distance' - the different ways in which this or that artist reworks and deviates from the model - starting from 'map' object. In contemporary art, artwork looks like a *cartifact*, that is, a cartographic artefact that has the typical, socially recognisable, appearance of a map. But it is not used, nor can it be used as a source of information (so, it is not used for orientation in space). As we will see, some artists work 'on' and 'starting from' well-known, previous, and pre-existing physical maps. Others, on the other hand, work on representation rather than on the 'thing': the cartographic *imago mundi* and its more or less explicit meanings. In other words, both exploit the familiarity of us all towards maps.

To be precise, in this first distinction - *thing* and *imago* - I take up a characteristic typical of Hans Belting's critical iconology, namely the analogy-difference between 'medium' and 'image': "The image is present in its medium (otherwise we could not see it), and yet it refers to the absence of that entity of which it is a representation" (Belting 2011, 20). For Belting, a real critical iconology must discuss the *unity* as well as the *distinction* of image and medium, i.e. fact that on the one hand no visible images reach us unmediated, but on the other hand images are not merely produced by their media. If the map is a necessary medium for giving visibility to certain images of the world, then we can analytically distinguish between its mediality and its content. I would therefore distinguish between the map as a thing,



medium, material support, and the map as an image – an image into which the rules of the social order seem to fit (as critical cartography from Harley onwards has shown). Map’s mediality is what makes the image of the World visible and allows its meaning or ideological content to be transmitted: “Pictures have always been dependent on a given medium, whether it was a lump of clay or the smooth wall of a cave. Artificial bodies (media) give them birth, control their visible appearance. It is their media that furnish them with both visibility and physical presence in the public realm” (Belting 2011, 18). Certainly, when in a map we distinguish *the material medium* from *the World representation it represents*, we pay attention to either the one or the other, as if they were distinct (which they are not): “they separate only when we are willing to separate them in our looking. In this case, we dissolve their factual ‘symbiosis’ by means of our analytical perception” (Belting 2005, 304).<sup>3</sup> For example, in this perspective, the mapmaker is above all the artist who works on the materiality of the map, while the artist-mapper is mainly interested in the image detached from its materiality. But according to Belting, all this is possible because the interactions between the medium hosting the image, and the same images include a third parameter: our bodies. In this setting, as Tania Rossetto observes (2015), images colonize and inhabit our bodies and brains. Remembering a map means first disembodying it from its original media – disembodying its argument about the world from symbiosis with the medium hosting it – and then reembodying his *imago mundi* in our brain. Through this process images are transmitted and imprinted in a collective memory: “The politics of images relies on their mediality, as mediality usually is controlled by institutions and serves the interests of political power (even when it, as we experience it today, hides behind a seemingly anonymous transmission)” (Belting 2005, 304); a statement Harley would have approved.

That said, as we will see in the following pages, from the map as medium and the map as image we then move on to the map as abstraction: starting from the assumption that the map is a coded representation of a place, artists want to *decode* it in order to reflect on the spatiality evoked by its grammar: it is as if they took Wittgenstein’s statement seriously that “representing is not represented on the map” (Bouwsma 1986, 343). The discussion could be further

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**3** I can only mention, here, Richard Wollheim’s ideas – very close to Belting’s position – about the two-foldedness of pictures: the configurational and the recognitional fold. The first is the picture’s physical basis (in the first place, the picture-object is a flat surface with colours, marks, etc., and in general a series of visible features); the second is *the visual awareness* of its content, or in other word the awareness of the specific objects that pictures happen to depict. The two folds do not constitute two independent experiences, but a single, unified experience (see Wollheim 1980; 1987).

extended by considering the most extreme cases: when the map is no longer at the centre of artistic re-creation as a finished product, complete in itself, but mapping exists as a production of something, a carrying into execution, a performing action. This is the case, for example, in so-called land-art, where *mapping* and *the dissemination of lines on Earth* coincide: artworking as a way of provisionally creating the world.<sup>4</sup> However, the topic is more than enough for this text and to address the issue here would take us too far from the goal of this paper.

Therefore, in the following pages I will use the three categories identified by Robinson and Petchenik specifically and distinctly to describe certain cartographic trends of contemporary art: “there is little that contemporary artists haven’t done with maps” says Katharine Harmon (2009, 10). Combining the ‘types’ of the mapper, the mapmaker, and the cartographer with the different attitudes towards maps (as medium, image, abstraction, etc.), I will propose a small classification scheme, useful to orient ourselves in the labyrinthine cartographic eye of art. Maybe this is not fundamentally new, but I would be happy to propose a useful model for mapping artistic experiments with cartography. Of course, these definitions retain value as a descriptive and comparative tool, so long as one does not circumscribe each category too rigidly: as we shall see, on a case-by-case basis, there are artists who are, for example, mapmakers and mappers at the same time (depending on what they do with their art at the time). Indeed, this conceptual apparatus, if at first sight apparently artificial or academically abstract, reveals its usefulness precisely when it allows us to grasp *real* nuances and distinctions. Beyond the rich abundance of different, even contradictory conceptions

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<sup>4</sup> In a nutshell: cartographic art is performative art because the cornerstone of these experiments is the ‘making of’ and not ‘the finished product’. Namely, in front of us we no longer have maps – cartographic objects, cartifacts, media, etc. – but a making process ephemeral in nature: *the mapping*. The difference is roughly what Tim Ingold identified between painting and music: “paintings – Ingold says – they are presented to us as works that are complete in themselves... the actual work of painting is subordinated to the final product” (Ingold 1993, 161). To exemplify: Boetti’s maps remain available for our admiration long after the female Afghan embroiderers’ work that gave rise to them has ceased. In contrast, music is a sequence of activities generated in movement. Or, to be more precise, a series of activities that come into being through movement: “Music exists only when it is being performed (it does not pre-exist, as is sometimes thought, in the score, any more than a cake pre-exists in the recipe for making it)” (Ingold 1993, 161). The mapping is exactly this: art exists only so long as people are actually engaged in the artistic activities. “Earth Art” is an artistic performance situated on Earth’ surface, a mapping that has become part of the Earth landscape. But exactly like musical sound is subject to the property of rapid fading – mapping’ effects on landscape shortly afterwards are destined to disappear, self-destruct, deteriorate, or decompose. Christo’s installations *Surrounded Islands* (Biscayne Bay, Florida) and *The Floating Piers* (the Lake Iseo, Italy) are a temporary, site-specific artworks: have a use-by date (when the artist restores the site to its original condition).

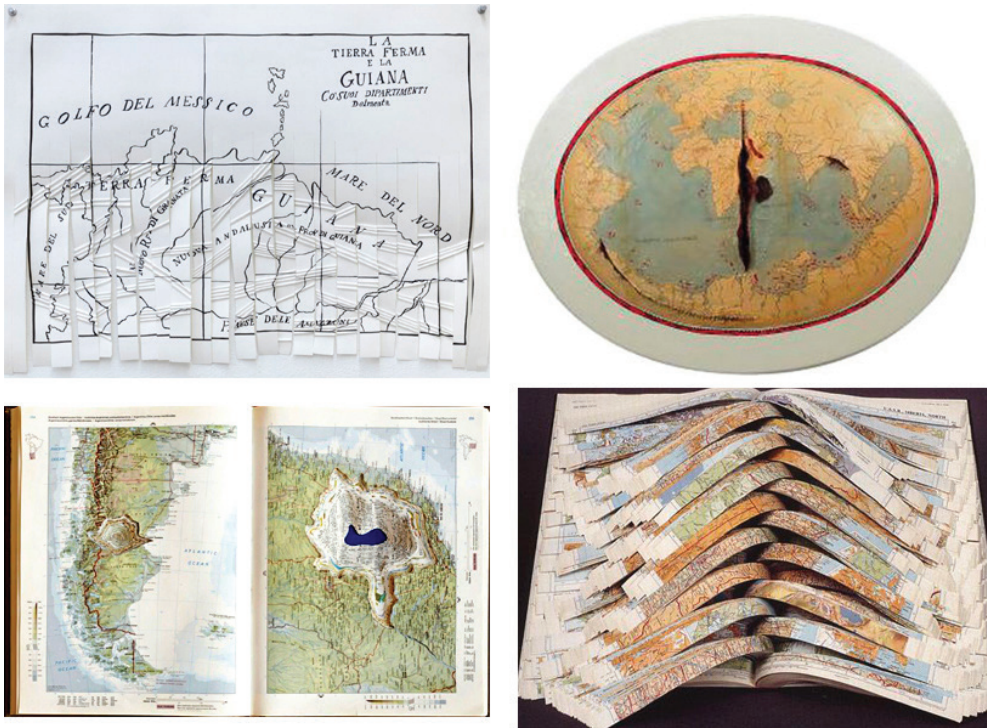
of this field of research, in the final analysis one thing is certain: artistic maps *are not dead objects*, but an opportunity to reflect more broadly about how we construct, experience and represent space.

### 3 The Artist-Mapmaker and the Map as Medium

In this first type we find artworks strongly anchored in the medial ‘consistency’ of cartographic object. The tactile experience of handling a map has been largely neglected in cartographic scholarship (Dodge, Kitchin, Perkins 2009, 229). This has, however, not been neglected by contemporary artists. Here, the tendency is to exploit the material features of cartography. The artist is a *mapmaker*: they are the material author of an artwork that comes from the reworking of a preexisting cartographic object. The final effect is a reshaped, sliced, twisted, woven, erased, distorted, emptied, contested map in its materiality: a handmade map.

Of course, the artist’s hand can be light. With *Carte de L’Europe* (Map of Europe), *Carte politique du monde* (Political World Map) (c. 1970) Marcel Broodthaers alters or adds words to a pre-existing map or retouches the image. In other cases, through the operative and operational – in short: creative – intervention the cartographic medium becomes a starting point from which to begin projecting fundamentally political and socially engaged ideas. These include the critique of maps’ long association with the legacy of colonization, the ideological implications of the cartographic representation (who maps? Who is mapped?), the precariousness and arbitrariness of borders, or geopolitical conflicts, and so on. For example, *Mapas* is a series of pleated maps by the Argentine artist Miguel Angel Ríos with the *kipu* method, a technique of handmade encoded knots used by the Incas for accounting and exchange. This system is used by Ríos to alter the smooth surface of the old map and systematically fragment it (knotted strings were used to record memories, stories, and computations). Someone wrote that “in his *Mapas*, Ríos is actually *dis-mapping* America” (Akinci, Korvinus 2022) because the rediscovery of traditional indigenous arts of the Americas meanings the re-emergence of something that religious, military or mercantilist ideology of the conquerors had erased through mapping.

A polemical reuse of cartographic objects inherited from the colonial period can be found in the Brazilian artist Adriana Varejao with the *Mapa de Lopo Homem II* (Lopo Homem’s Map II), (2004). Lopo Homem (c. 1497-c. 1572), a Portuguese cartographer and cosmographer, in 1519 produced the *Miller Atlas* for King Manuel I of Portugal, a joint work with cartographers Pedro Reinel and Jorge Reinel, and illustrated by miniaturist António de Holanda. The atlas contains eight maps on six loose sheets, painted on both sides; the *folio 1 recto*



**Figure 2** Left-to-right, top-to-bottom: Miguel Angel Ríos, *Critical post-colonial No. 23*, 1995; Adriana Varejao, *Mapa de Lopo Homem II*, 2004; Maya Lin, *Altered Atlas*, 2006; Doug Beube, *Fault Lines*, 2003. Collage: Author.

shows the parts of the New World allocated to Portugal by Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). Africa, Europe, and Asia appear surrounded by a single, continuous strip of land (“mundus novus” below) consisting of the American colonies. Homem’s map clearly has the function of setting forth, defending, and organizing the political expansion interests of the kingdom of Portugal. To dismantle this geopolitical construction, Adriana Varejão reproduces it but with a substantial difference. She physically interferes with its medial carrier, opening wounds in the centre. Hence, the final outcome is a colonial wound map – bleeding, slashed, and iconoclastic (Almeida 2017). A similar material operation is performed to some extent by Maya Lin with *Systematic Landscapes*: carving miniature canyons into each page, the artist transforms old *World Atlases* into sculptural objects. In turn, William Giersbach pours paint on an *Atlas* in *Poured China* (1978).

As anticipated, in all these cases the artistic intervention on a disused map produces a cartifact that has at first sight the *typical*,

*socially recognisable*, appearance of a map; but cannot be used to get from A to B.

Often artists working on the compactness of cartographic medium favour techniques such as collage, installation, sculpture and so on. This is what Jeff Woodbury's *Map Works* does, for instance. Woodbury dissects the maps: he cuts out sections, cuts away everything but the roads - and reconstructs them. So, the map ceases to be a 2-dimensional representation of reality and becomes an actual 3-dimensional thing. Woodbury writes the following about his *Dissected Maps* on his official website:

Maps are generally cheap, and their value is predicated on their usefulness. When they become outdated we throw them away. By dissecting them, their use-value is destroyed by the loss of their function. But the use-value is replaced with aesthetic value, and with it a commensurate extension of the object's life-span.<sup>5</sup>

Use-value is replaced by aesthetic value, and this is very important. Sian Robertson also draws on used maps and atlases to create impressive collages. See, for example, *Optical Illusion* (2017) or *Tangled* (2017) excavated vintage street atlases. Along the same lines as these 'altered atlases' starting from an already created atlas, is Doug Beube's *Fault Lines* (2003). Text is cut, folded and transformed into something new and different: an art object.

#### 4 The Artist-Mapper and the Map as Image

For Belting, our bodies (and our brains) act as a living medium that makes us remember images and that also enables our imagination to censor or transform them. The theme of cartographic memory emerges here: that is, the pervasive and silent power - as pervasive *as it is silent* - of the images of the World transmitted by/through the maps that are imprinted in our minds. Therefore, in this category we can include examples which do not take up pre-existing material supports (such as old atlases or maps) but that work on the images of the world inscribed and imprinted in our collective memory. This connects to the Kevin Lynch's concept of *image ability*: the probability of an artwork to evoke a strong image in any given observer (Lynch 1960, 9). Artworks are at first glance graphically respectful of symbolic convention and characterized by more or less recognisable cartographic forms: the artist plays with the *World representation* to the extent that this is still largely familiar (but beware: human

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jeffwoodbury.com>.



Figure 3

Top-to-bottom: Alighiero Boetti,  
Mappa del mondo, 1988;  
Michael Murphy, Gun Country  
2014. Collage: Author

memory is an imperfect archive, and some memories are more vivid and others more vague).

To clarify this statement: I am thinking mainly of artworks such as *Map*, an oil-and-collage-on-canvas painting by Jasper Johns from 1961. Johns drew a grid on a map and, transferring its coordinates onto a canvas, began to paint. It is precisely because of this that he declares: “I was painting *a* map, not making a painting *of a* map” (italics added). Not a painting of a map, but an actual map – the artist redraws his own *imago mundi*. It goes without saying that the *recognition* by the audience, here, is made possible by our familiarity with cartographic images. Moreover, in the nearly 150 works of the *Mappa* series, Alighiero Boetti draws on a commonly known iconographic repertoire. These are tapestry-woven maps of the world, rectangular in format, with the chosen cartographic projection (focused on Europe) of a classical-conventional type and the scale of approximately 1:30,000,000 (a small scale typical of the World map); but – this is the point – each country is represented by its flag (the canvas is linen, not a painting canvas).

In this specific category, the artist is a *mapper*, as she/he essentially



**Figure 4**

Top-to-bottom:  
 Jasper Johns, *Map*, 1963;  
 Pedro Lasch, *Latino/a America*,  
 2003. Collage: Author

relies on collective mental images with her/his cartography. With the *LATINO/A AMERICA* series (route guides, mural version, pamphlets, posters, and special publications, t-shirts, banners, and public exhibitions), Pedro Lasch describes a new “Latinidad” that extends into the English-speaking world, changing the meaning of “America” and of being “American”. Similarly, the photographic work of Vik Muniz’s (Vincent José de Oliveraie Muniz) revolves around the theme of waste, discarding, and recycling. *WWW (World Map)*, from the series “Pictures of junk” (2008), is a world map made from discarded computers: the world we inhabit is a huge landfill of electronic waste. The challenge is to play with conventions and expectations and to use them to communicate a message or to disregard and overturn them, surprising the viewer. Once again, we meet Marcel Broodthaers with *La Conquête de l’espace. Atlas à l’usage des artistes et des militaires* (The Conquest of Space. Atlas for the Use of Artists and Military Men) (1975) a tiny atlas (4 × 2.5 cm) that shows, in alphabetical order, the silhouettes of 32 countries, all reproduced at the same scale (thus, all the countries appear to be practically the same size). More recently (2014), Michael Murphy created an installation called *Gun Country*,

which resembles a map of the United States. The work is made from 150 toy guns. In this case, we are in front of an artwork whose *image ability* is very strong: standing in front of the installation we see the unequivocal outline of the United States. *Gun Country* is obviously not a painting of a map, but *the memento of a map*. In a rather similar way, Luciano Fabro *Italia'* series (1968-75) shows many empty silhouettes of the peninsula in different materials and in unusual positions: overturned, laid on its side, etc. The world as an image or a picture of a representative production returns in the Mateo Maté' work. This artist plays ironically with our cartographic memory: his installations project *Nacionalismo doméstico* (Domestic Nationalism) (2004-14) is an invitation to rethink and reinvent the notion of living. In an era in which the micro (private, domestic space) and the macro (the total space of the nation) merge, Maté makes the plan of an apartment coincide with the outline of various countries (see *Casa España, Casa Italia*, etc.).

Art draw from a canonical cartographic repertoire to turn it upside down: Emilio Isgrò's globe *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth)<sup>6</sup> (2018) has a cubic shape; on the cube faces the only legible toponyms are "Mediterranean Sea", "Indian Ocean", "Arctic Ocean" and "Pacem in terris"; all the others have been erased by the artist (erasure is the unmistakable feature of Isgrò's artistic research). Sea is beige, mainland is white, erasures are black; on the different sides of the cube, a swarm of black ants. Again, the theme is the peculiar ways in which our mind organises (and messes up) geographical memories.

## 5 The Artist-Cartographer and the Map as Abstraction

Carolyn Lanchner reports Michael Crichton's observation that Johns's pictures are artistically positioned "between the found object and the created abstraction" (Lanchner 2009, 19). In other words, works like those of Jaspers Johns, Luciano Fabro, etc. conceptually herald another current of contemporary art in which we find an increasing level of *abstraction*: all that ensures artistic maps definitively ceases to appear as something indicative or useful as a guide. The artist no longer starts from everyday maps or used atlases to dig, cut or fold them; nor does the artist play with the cartographic image ability and with the iconic memory that colonizes our brains. Artistic research becomes an inquiry into the nature of the map as an abstract conceptual entity - an investigation into its *spatial code*. Artists increasingly play with the processes and visualisation practices that

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<sup>6</sup> *Pacem in terris* is the title of papal encyclical issued by Pope John XXIII in 1963, in full Cold War.



may be identified with cartographically ordered space: for example, working on the scalar overstatement (or the subtraction) of maps' formal aspects and the retention of only certain information – a detail is subtracted to affirm or is magnified to make it visible or invisible. But, filtered through the artistic eye, the pattern of lines and points can become poetic. As John Harley once wrote, “silences on maps may sometimes become the determinate part of the cartographic message” (Harley 1988, 58). See for example *Map to Not Indicate* (1967) by the Art & Language group: is an almost completely empty *imago mundi*, where only the American states Iowa and Kentucky appear. *Japão* (Japan), *África* and *Índia* (1972) are a triptych of drawings by Waltercio Caldas, in which most of the information has been removed – except for a few landmarks (scattered strokes and random numbers).

Another well-trodden artistic trail: symbols, signs, places, settings, everything that flows into the cartographic drawing becomes a pure, autonomous form; as happens in Yves Klein' *Planetaire (Bleu)* (1961), a sort of raised-relief map marked by deep blue (a distinctive characteristic of this French artist), the details, the supporting elements of cartographic space undergo a stylization, a reduction to a decorative pattern; artists give them an aesthetic value. Among others, a similar procedure is used by David Renaud in *Basse Mana* (2005):<sup>7</sup> the artist isolates an element of the topographic map (the contour line representing the conformation of the land) and elevates it to autonomous sign.

Many cartographic ‘reveries’ can be actually investigated to destabilize and challenge – and at turns to help to reimagine – the inward scientific cartography and the spatial relations it aims to portray or enact. In short, artworks ‘at their expense’ become a sort of meta-maps for scholars (both cartographers and geographers), who may muse on how, by comparison, the cartographic tool is used in their discipline and what horizon the dialogue with art can extend or shrink (Lo Presti 2018, 122).

Rather than the map as image, the appearance of the cartifact itself, what matters is the map as concept: the artist reinterprets the cartographic logic, its codes of abstraction, its immanent contradictions. That is to say, something not precisely defined once and for all guiding our exploration of alternative views of the world in an elastic way. Here the procedure is similar to that of a cartographer: first, the artist reflects on the meaning of the work and explores the folds of the formal grammar of cartographic thought. Of course, as in the previous categories, here too we have different gradations of “spatialization of knowledge”, to put it in Christian Jacob's words

<sup>7</sup> Basse Mana is a nature reserve located in the Overseas Department of Guyana.



**Figure 5**

Top-to-bottom: Yves Klein, *Planetaire (Bleu)*, 1961; Pierre-Alexandre Remy, *Portrait Cartographique*, 2012. Collage: Author

(2006, 201). For example, Michael Slagle is the author of map-paintings such as *Lakeland 3 (4th & Quinmore)* (2007) dominated by the abstraction of cartographic forms. I find his words extremely enlightening: “What fascinates me, specifically as a painter, is the symbolic arrangement of these formal elements and how they translate as formal elements from a map to an abstract painting” (Harmon 2009, 200). In this sense, artwork is an investigation into the nature of the map as an abstract conceptual entity. Likewise, Janice Caswell uses a reduced language of points, lines, and fields of colour. Her drawings and installations with beads, paper, ink, and pens – see *Alternate Realities-from Ft. Collins* (2006) – are mental maps in which the edges and the movements of bodies and consciousness through time and space are traced. Pierre-Alexandre Remy’s work is also similar to a preliminary reading of a map. This helps the artist to become familiar with the physical form of the places, to recognise it, and is above all an incentive to discover it. After gaining direct knowledge by traversing the length and the breadth of the land along roads paths, Remy abstracts from this experience: he shapes his internal

map with different lines to recall the shape of the edges of the places, of movements and impressions caused by the spatial exploration. With his sculpture *Portrait Cartographique* (Cartographic portrait) (2012) he refers to the three distinct colours that are used in IGN maps (maps of the *Institut Géographique National*) to symbolize spatial elements: orange for the contour lines, blue for the streams and black for the roads. It goes without saying that although Remy starts from a map, it is impossible to follow the reverse path: looking at his sculpture does not provide any useful information for recognising the physical form of places.

## 6 Conclusion

Many maps, many cartifacts, and a rich diversity of mapping practices. A heterogeneous set of techniques, approaches, and materials. Bleeding, emptied, carved, distorted, evoked, contested maps-artworks. Painting, collage, installation, sculpture. Irony, anger, political engagement, disorder, disconnections. Physical medium, collectively shared image, or abstract spatial code: as a medium of expression, map not only inspires many artists, many works, many exhibitions, and many books; it enriches notions of how and why we map and provide a tool with which to expand the boundaries of our place and space representations and our experiences within it. Artistic experiments with cartography “invite us to observe ourselves in the act of seeing – examining not only what we see, but how and why” (Berger 1984, 50); “map artists come to reimagine mapping practice and with it the spatialities of global modernity” (Ferdinand 2019, 10).

There are now by many texts providing overviews of map-based art and proposed classification schemas or criteria, but I believe or hope, humbly, the one proposed here offers something new, something that others do not reveal (mine is a modest proposal but, in my view, it is based on an important principle). In order to distinguish different kinds of map-art and their different modes and contributions, I proposed to use Robinson and Petchenik’s distinctions, as well as Hans Belting’s image/medium analogy-difference. In my opinion, these chosen points of reference are not widely used in recent writings on map art, and yet they really work. Here, we do not simply say “all artists inspired by maps are cartographers”. But: some artists are mappers, some mapmakers, some cartographers. Some of them work on to the medial thingness of cartographic object: they are mapmakers (for Arthur Robinson and Barbara Petchenik, the mapmaker is the one who communicates his cognitive activity through a tangible map). Some of them work on cartographic memory, that is, on the images of the World transmitted by/through maps that are imprinted in our minds; they are mappers (the mapper

is the one who works with the mental images). Finally, some of them work on spatial code and the nature of the map as an abstract conceptual entity; they are strictly speaking cartographers (the cartographer is the one who reflects creatively on design of the map). It is not possible to confuse them.

Mappers, mapmakers, cartographers...artists working with cartography know that a large part of the appeal of the artistic map lies in its ability to take things for granted and imprinted in a collective memory. This is a very serious thing. According to Catherine D'Ignazio (2009), they are "symbol saboteurs" and "agents-actors": on the one hand, they use the visual iconography of the map to overturn, overthrow, subvert or reverse its political meaning; on the other hand, artists make maps as mappers, mapmakers, or cartographers in order to challenge the status quo and/or change our *imago mundi*. The two are not contradictory. In fact, their works concretely test and implement critical cartography and mapping theory by trying to answer specific questions of practical relevance (how do we learn to locate ourselves and the others in the World? How do we learn to represent ourselves and the others? How do we learn to represent ourselves, the others, and things in relation to each other?). A central critical concern of this artistic research, then, is the making, or production, of images. This is why we need artists and the works they create. That is, as Laura Lo Presti writes:

Many cartographic "reveries" can be actually investigated to destabilize and challenge - and at turns to help to reimagine - the inward scientific cartography and the spatial relations it aims to portray or enact. In short, artworks "at their expense" become a sort of meta-maps for scholars (both cartographers and geographers), who may muse on how, by comparison, the cartographic tool is used in their discipline and what horizon the dialogue with art can extend or shrink. (2018, 122)

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