



Sitting on the sill of Katrina Simon's office are a twin pair of partially deflated plastic globes and since seeing these I have been unable to get the words collapse and deflation out of my mind.



Collapse physically, obviously. The brightly, printed, puckered, plastic, of the toy globes, wrinkling. But also the collapse of systems and surety, (world views, geographical stability, sovereign territory), effected through this simple act of unplugging and allowing the breath to escape, the taut surface of the globe losing all tension and becoming pliable. Is this how simple it is to undo my knowledge of the world?

As the plastic globe deflates, the surface lines, latitude and longitude, usually intersecting at set points and carefully calculated angles, (although perhaps not all that accurately given the mass-produced nature of the toy globe), become no longer a reference set, a locating device, an index, but become instead a tangle, a cats cradle with fingers relaxed. In such a state of deflation, this formerly authoritative system can no longer be trusted to mark position. A small movement, a little more air lost, and a line will shift, 40 degrees south crossing 50 and heading up, over and into a fold. A rippling surface, shadows cast, flatness overwhelmed. Pity the poor lost yacht navigating this earth's surface.

“The Earth itself thus no longer appears as the immovable, gravitational ground that defines the coordinates or vectors of up/down movement. Rather it spreads out in modulation or variation of its surface such that it is no longer possible to distinguish earth and sky, for the Earth itself has become weightless”.ⁱ

So Anne Boyman describes the effects of Cache's complex theory of inflection, which offers a challenge to Cartesian space by sustaining the idea that “*in every environment there exists the possibility of unpredictable variation, and therefore of inflection images that neither produce the presumed unity or identity of a place nor obey the rules of an abstract Cartesian space, divisible partes ex partibus*”.ⁱⁱ To me, it is this dense and difficult theory that the deflated globes so elegantly and satisfyingly illustrate.

Another writer, Paul Carter, discusses the unreliability of such projects of neat demarcation of the globe. He describes the anxious doubling that occurs as cartographic inscription meets the realities of surface:

“As a mapping device the linear net the survey throws over the land creates a set of ideal locations. Anxiety occurs when it is found that these ideal representations do not correspond to the environment we inhabit. Then the fantasy of access to endlessly multiplying squares of land turns into its opposite: an experience of being hemmed in or isolated”.ⁱⁱⁱ

The globes, sitting innocently on that windowsill, allow the positivistic project of Cartesian space to be are lost to the suddenly pleated skin of the deflated globe. How quickly the fantasy of the smooth surface collapses. Just imagine navigating by one of Simon's *Orb* maps, such as the one printed in this catalogue. These maps, made by photocopying semi-inflated plastic globes from a range of 'centres', capture the distortions and compressions of the folding plastic. How can we interpret the lines recorded as the narrow range of the photocopier beam catches the deflated folded surface and renders it white against black? Does this meandering white line mark edge or boundary? Perhaps it indicates topography, height above, well above what exactly we cannot tell. How tempting it is to apply a key to these *Orb* maps just to see if it can stick. Usually, in established, but perhaps now antiquated, mapmaking processes, the key comes first, the set of information to be described is fixed in a system of symbols and code, and it is this set that is then

recorded in the map. Other information of the space being described is then left out; it becomes invisible, not part of the record. The *Orb* maps suggest the possibility of another process – first make the map then invent a key to divine what might be there.

And how ironic that the *Graticule* show is to be housed in Objectspace! The Earth in the *Orb* maps and in the *Map Excisions* is no longer the modernist object, contained, complete, singular, unified, but is instead rendered malleable, unpredictable, dynamic. In Simon's works the finite nature of the object is shown to be nothing other than a convenient narrative, a fiction lost to this new space of variation and upheaval.

Partially inflated, the plastic globe's somewhat ridiculous construction of the earth as a PVC surface, microns thin, lacking density and weight, is revealed. This image contrasts neatly with those other depictions of Earth often seen in children's encyclopedias; I am thinking of the brightly coloured cutaway sections, showing the inner and outer cores of the Earth and the molten center, displaying the planet as solid yet able to be sliced into neat wedges like an orange. The fact that both these images of the Earth are equal in their 'constructed-ness' yet oppositional in their information, and that both are used to 'educate', is strangely alarming.

A few days after seeing Simon's work in progress for *Graticule* I came across this poem by Anna Smail:

Concentration

The mushroom's belly
is fitted with grey frills
as finely scored
as a bird's feather

Watch, as under a slow
moving finger,
the ripples pull apart
then lip together.

Reading this I had that delicious moment of frisson you get when you stumble across something that fits, at that moment, so neatly with another thing. Here was another version of this mutable world, a world of ripples pulling apart and 'lipping' together. Here was Cache's *inflection* again. Here was another instance of the fine dissection of something ordinary to reveal the extraordinary. Of course, as always with those flashes of recognition, as the days pass the precise reasons for that neat fit fade and you have to think a little harder about it.

Firstly, I began thinking about poetry, maps and scale. Both a poem and a map can act as miniatures, reducing the gigantic, (nature, emotion, landscape), to something manageable, something collectable. In this way both a poem and a map are products of culture, as Susan Stewart describes, “*there are no miniatures in nature: the miniature is a cultural product, the product of an eye performing certain operations, manipulating and attending in certain ways to the physical world*”.^{iv} As miniatures the poem and the map therefore both reference the out of reach, the beyond the page, both concentrate this 'out of reachness' into something miniature and mobile, into an artifact that can be carried, folded, pocketed, put away. Hugh Roberts describes this particular poem as “*... a small miracle of sustained attention and intricate verbal construction*”.^v Supplant verbal for textual and he could be describing a map or, in fact, the practice of cartography itself. Even the most simple of maps are intricate constructions that navigate the space between three and even four dimensionality and flatness. Mapmaking requires an intricate language, a transformation of actual things into a system of signs and symbols. Textures become uniform fields of colour, boundaries, not able to be read on the land, become purple lines of unvarying thickness and unwavering determination, roads, black, hot, rough asphalt are transformed, they become tidy, brightly coloured and labeled. This layered and codified information, collated to lesser or greater extents on all maps, sustains our attention and is the product of sustained attention to the land by the “cartographic eye”.^{vi} The making of maps is always purposeful. Simon Ryan argues that the first step of the explorer, who represents the colonial power, was always to construct the space of the land as new, unknown, under-utilised and empty, as available for inscription. For this project of inscription to succeed any other non-Western system of mapping must therefore be seen as unreliable and as having no authority, in order for this clean slate, a *tabula rasa*, to be available for and in fact require, colonising. As Ryan explains, ‘the space of empire... is understood as objectively being “out there”, a natural state, alternatives to which are difficult to imagine’.^{vii} Maps are serious business.

Another aspect of this poem that seemed to illuminate Simon's work is the way in which it renders the familiar strange. The ordinariness of the mushroom becomes extraordinary, frilled and rippling. Simon's work too, through the playful disarticulation and rearticulation of maps and globes, renders the familiar strange. The actions required in the making of these works (particularly in the *Map Excisions* and the necklaces) – rolling, weaving, threading, squashing, most importantly cutting, allow an interrogation of the 'wholeness' and order of the modern project and the determinism of Cartesian space. In these works the globe/map is literally pulled apart and alchemistically reconfigured and transformed; re-imagined in this way the familiar becomes strange. Places we are familiar with no longer look as we are used to seeing them represented in a map. The *Map Excisions* come closer perhaps to our actual physical bodily knowledge of a place; experientially we know that when traveling sometimes a distance seems longer, sometimes shorter, represented perhaps in the stretchy skeletons of the *Map Excisions*. This play with the serious stuff of the world allows us to recognise the conventions of map-making for what they are. In the transformation of the three-dimensional form onto the two dimensional surface, size and shape can no longer be preserved in relation to each other, and are altered in ways which we can recognise but most often overlook. Simon's re-making of maps allows distortion to come to the fore, to not be effaced but to be seen as an essential aspect of all maps.

The 'frilled' mushroom in the poem also suggests finery, the identification of adornment or ornament where we hadn't thought to see it before. In the compelling work *Globe Plastic* a similar transformation is made - the Earth transformed into a trinket. The complexity of the world is rendered innocent, a piece of finery, a harmless string of beads, a charm, a bauble. Again the modern project is challenged as the 'serious stuff' is transformed to ornament, the excessive and transgressive condition. In contrast to Atlas, buckling under the weight of the heavens in an eternal punishment, the possibility is suggested of wearing the world lightly around the neck.

Each bead in *Globe Plastic* is carefully constructed from tightly rolled strips cut from the lines of longitude on the flattened plastic globe. Perhaps seeing the beads in *Globe Necklace* as simple baubles overlooks something; perhaps beads are not entirely innocent. As items of trade they were once exchanged for land. *Globe Plastic* cannily reunites these two parts of the exchange economy, bead and land, into the one item.

In this exhibition maps, from various sources, are transformed into a variety of objects suggestive of other possible ways of knowing of the world and of being with the land. Roberts, writing on this mushroom poem asks, 'By what right do we "pull apart" this "finely scored" structure to satisfy our idle curiosity?'^{viii} He could be addressing *Graticule*. The works in this collection draw out the practice of cartography. Maps reveal and give access to aspects of the world. Simon pulls apart the finely scored structures of maps, structures that range from the global (systems of latitude and longitude) to the local (domesticated landscapes, streets, parks, schools, shops). Through this process of unmaking and remaking, these works reveal not just aspects of the world but also aspects of our making of the world.

Kathy Waghorn.

Graticule

An installation by Katrina Simon
8 April to 6 May 2006



i. Cache, *Bernard, Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories*. Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1995, pg x.

ii. *ibid.*, pg x.

iii. Carter, P. (2004). *Mythforms*. In Cairns, S (Ed.), *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*. London: Routledge, pg 86.

iv. Stewart, S. (1984). *On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. v. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pg 34.

v. Roberts, Hugh. *Seeing and Listening: New Poetry from Kate Camp and Anna Smail*. The New Zealand Listener, February 25, 2006, pg 40.

vi. A term borrowed from Simon Ryan, see below.

vii. Ryan, S. (1997). *The cartographic eye: How explorers saw Australia*. Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, pg 4.

viii. Roberts, Hugh. 2006

