

Extract discussing Susan Stockwell's work from:

The Blueness of Water in Cartography, Culture and Art: Conventions, Ontological Security, and Creativity

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also a founding; its agency lies in neither reproduction nor imposition but rather in uncovering realities previously unseen or unimagined, even across seemingly exhausted grounds" (Corner 1999, 213).

Map art can serve as political statements to question boundaries and territorialities, contradict the immutability of the map space, and unmask power relations conveyed by map contents and projections. Simply put, "[a]rt maps are always pointing toward worlds other than those mapped by normative mapping institutions" (Wood 2006a, 10). The list of carto-artists is constantly growing, and map art exhibitions have been organized in all parts of the world (Harmon 2009; Wood 2006b).

On the following pages, I will present diverse map art projects that specifically employ or even play with the color of water and its geographies. The artists follow different motivations and purposes that somehow are related to space and place. The examples must not be read as a sequence of ideas or a classification of mapping approaches, but rather as a train of thought or journey between loosely related artworks, the meaning of color, and cartography.

In summer 2010, the *Institute of International Visual Arts* in London organized an exhibition with the title *Whose Map is it? New Mapping by Artists* (INIVA 2010). Among the displayed

pieces, Susan Stockwell's *River of Blood* (INIVA 2010) depicts the meanders of the Thames River and its tributaries as a capillary and dendritic network of blood vessels that are projected in bold red strokes, symbolically used to separate the wealthier North from the poorer South (Figure 4). In previous projects, the artist had depicted roads as red arteries in maps of Manchester and London.

The following example is far more abstract. In March 2008, the *Museum of Modern Art in New York* opened an exhibition with the title *Color Charts: Reinventing Color, 1950—Today*. The more than 90 exhibits created by the hands and minds of a wide range of renowned artists aimed to examine “the use by artists of ready-made color in two separate but related senses: color as store-bought rather than hand-mixed, and color as divorced from the artist’s subjective taste and decisions” (Temkin 2008, 17).

Among the artifacts were the pages of a thin booklet *Yves Peintures*, produced by the French artist Yves Klein in the 1950s (Klein 1954). The slim volume with the character of a mock exhibition catalog contained a series of 10 monochromes in different colors that were labeled with the names of cities where Klein had lived: Nice, Madrid, London, Paris, and Tokyo. In the following years, Klein pushed his obsession to individualize and “un-relate” colors and transcend representation even further with his exhibition *Proposition Monochrome: Blue Epoch*, which consisted of 11 identical gigantic canvases covered by glossy ultramarine pigments suspended in resin. This characteristic color would become Klein’s trademark when he patented it as IKB—International Klein Blue. The paintings were not directly hung on the



FIGURE 4 Susan Stockwell: *River of Blood* (2010), used with permission.

walls, but positioned about 10 inches away from them so that the images “created an impression of weightlessness and spatial indeterminacy. The viewer felt drawn into the depths of a blue that appeared to transmute the material substance of the painting support into an incorporeal quality, tranquil, serene” (Weitemeier 2001, 19). Klein employed color as a pure form of “expression of a free-floating sensibility,” which prompted him to reject lines and restrict contours “as an imprisonment in formal and psychological concerns, and to rely solely on the perceptions of the spirit” (Weitemeier 2001, 7–8).

Why blue? Klein wrote that blue is “beyond dimension ... Blue suggests at most the sea and the sky; and they, after all, are in actual, visible nature what is most abstract” (quoted in Recio 1996, 50). In November 2016, the *Brooklyn Museum* organized *Infinite Blue*, an exhibition that featured examples of blue art objects across different periods and cultures, including the page from *Yves Peintures* that depicts Paris as a deep blue square. Yves Klein did not restrict himself to flat surfaces. He began painting relief maps of parts of Europe in blue, in which he preserved the topography, but relinquished borderlines. In a cartographically very small scale he produced his blue globe, “and with his gesture it became a world without divisions between countries, between land and water, as though the earth itself had become sky, as though looking down was looking up” (Solnit 2005, 168–169). Solnit poetically defines this as blue of distance, expressed in the infinity of the horizon and as “the color of longing for the distances you never arrive in” (p.30).

Curiously, cartography may offer a similar serenity as in Klein’s monochrome paintings. An often-quoted example of a monochrome empty map is the Bellman’s ocean chart in Lewis Carroll’s *Hunting of the Snark* (Carroll 1876) (Figure 5).⁷ The ship captain

had bought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land:
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
A map they could all understand.

What’s the good of Mercator’s North Poles and Equators,
Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?
So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply
They are merely conventional signs!

Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
But we’ve got our brave Captain to thank
(So the crew would protest) “that he’s bought *us* the best—
A perfect and absolute blank!” (Carroll 1876, 15)

Echoing the “perfect and absolute blank” of Lewis Carroll’s map, the topographic map sheet of Rozel Point SW, Utah at a scale of 1:24,000, is an equally simple light blue rectangle as Klein’s blue painting (Figure 6).⁸ The serenity of the smooth surface of the Great Salt Lake is only marred by four crosshairs that mark geographical positions (41°20’N, 112°40’W; 41°20’N, 112°42’30”W; 41°17’30”N, 112 °40”W; and 41°17’30”N, 112 °42’30”W, information about the altitude above sea level (ELEVATION 4193 NOVEMBER 1966), and, in spread-out capital letters in the center of the sheet, GREAT SALT LAKE. Much more is going on outside the rectangle to describe the emptiness inside. The text at the four margins indicate three sets of coordinates (geographical, UTM, and Utah State Plane coordinates) and the names of the