

CURRENT LOCATION

Waiting Room

Joseph G. Cruz
Kristina Estell
Isa Newby Gagarin
Jessica Henderson
David Horvitz
Kathryn Miller

Essays by

Mary L. Coyne
Jehra Patrick



Current Location was exhibited in Minneapolis, Minnesota at Waiting Room from January 15th through February 28th, 2016 and was curated by Jehra Patrick and Mary Coyne. This exhibition catalogue is a co-publication by Waiting Room and Mystery Spot Books.

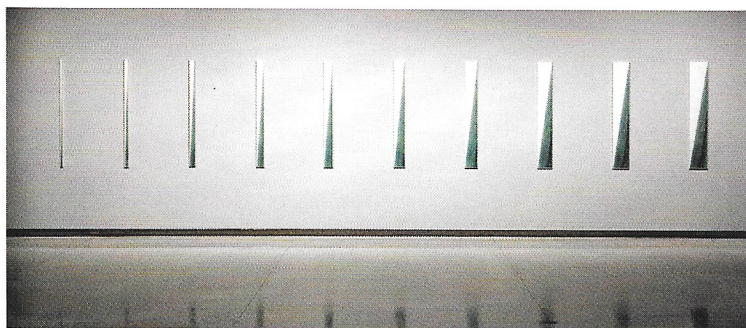


CURRENT LOCATION

Mary L. Coyne

In 1968, the Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets began photographing oceanscapes, turning the resulting prints by incremental degrees, toying with the horizon line in relation to the eye of the camera and the viewer. Absurdly simple, yet historically radical, these gestures shattered the indisputable signifier of place in the world — the single horizon now duplicated and literally turned on edge.¹ The power of this gesture rests in Dibbets taking on the penultimate representation of place as perceived by humankind, the Dutch landscape, and rethinking his relation to the limits of those places.

I often return to Dibbets while considering my own, somewhat itinerant past, in the context of my innate desire to always know, geographically, where on earth I am. *Current Location* is the result of an exploration of how we represent geographical and cosmological distances. As opposed to relying on the usual organizational and communicative methods by which we understand the planet earth, the cosmos, and our place in it, I feel most at home when river, oceans, mountains, and streets can serve as topographical indicators of my reaction to the land and my place in it. Living (for the first time) in a city nearly landlocked, the Mississippi is generally out of view from my daily routines; as a result, my current location at times feels unclear to me, a feeling that wreaks havoc on my internal compass. Without ready access to that geographical place-finder to situate my occupation of this space, I began thinking through the systems or representation we, as a society, have otherwise used over time to comprehend distance, time, and space. Dibbets's horizon line, and its shift upwards to an aerial, birds-eye perspective became the nexus of this history, traversing quite literally the curvature of the earth as surely as it did the expanding limits of technology and knowledge. These systems of representation of geographical expanse form the root



Jan Dibbets, *Horizon 1° - 10° Land*, color photographs, 1973. Walker Art Center Acquisition Fund, 1978. Copyright Jan Dibbets, Courtesy Peter Freeman Gallery

of this exhibition, which unites six artists from Minnesota, Chicago, and New York in examining contemporary systems of comprehending distances. The artists' works are grounded in the histories of such schemas: the compass, the map, the archive, the stenograph, all tools that provide not only methods of wayfinding, but a language by which we can comprehend our location in the universe.

The tracking and mapping of the circulation of ephemeral artworks -- a technique employed by Dibbets and those of this circle -- is the art historical lineage upon which Kristina Estell draws. Her ongoing series, *Feeling the Distance*, creates physical evidence of the distances between herself and a network of friends and colleagues around the world. Estell has built identical boxes of drywall in which she placed a small granite stones gathered from the land around her home in Duluth, Minnesota. The work develops as the boxes pass through the network of international and domestic shipping regulations; they accrue dents, nicks, and other physical evidence of their passage. Ground, train, air transportation -- each produces its own form of destruction to the boxes, just as each nation's customs laws present new challenges or queries about their contents. Once received, the boxes were then returned to Estell in Minnesota, where she coated the drywall with graphite to emphasize the record of the boxes journey. As they are installed in the exhibition, the opened boxes are oriented towards the locations to and from which they traveled, effectively functioning as abstractions of the very distances they traveled.

Likewise drawing on a lineage of mail art, David Horvitz's *Distance of a Day* presents videos on two iPhones as recorded by the artist and his mother, footage of the sun setting and rising simultaneously on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean. Occupied with the same juncture of space and time, the work refers to the geographical distance between a sunrise and a sunset over the

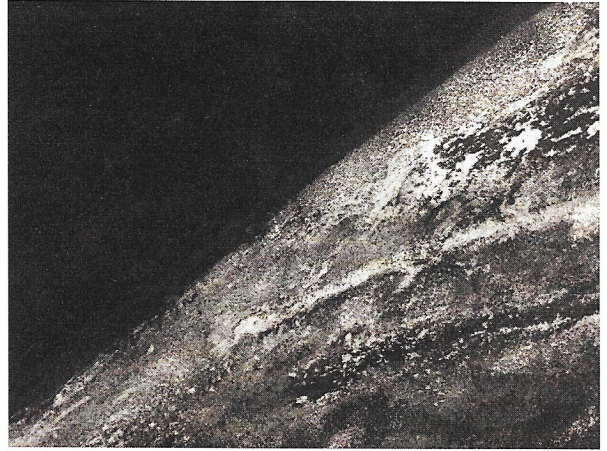


Kristina Estell, map charting the destinations of boxes for *Feeling the Distance*, 2015.

curvature of the earth, a distance eclipsed by our current ability to traverse those distances with communication. In early February (about the same time of year I am writing this), the sun rises in the Maldives, east over the Pacific, as it is setting off the coast of California. Horvitz is interested in the constantly changing time and location of sunrise and set, something mostly unacknowledged in modern systems of time-keeping. For Horvitz, the modern systems of day, night, and the format of Greenwich Mean Time are modes of representation and standardization that push up against the earth's actual, cyclical rhythms.

Jessica Henderson also considers the mediation of the individual encounter with the landscape through her series of screenprinted glass prints, *Wayfinding*. Overlaying the iconography of Google's "street-view" over abstracted photographs of nondescript landscapes, Henderson confronts the way our sense of place is informed through digital GPS technologies rather than through lived experience with a geographical place. We find our way via graphic arrows that allow us to navigate easily, with the touch of a finger, locations both familiar and distant. By simply tapping on the screen, the user is able to shift from the birds-eye perspective afforded by the regional map down to the surveying eye of the horizon line and back again.

This shift from horizon to aerial views, now made seamless through Google Map technologies, points to a fundamental ideological shift in identifying our place in the universe. Although cartographers have envisioned aerial perspectives of territories and continents for centuries, it was not until 1858, when Nadar captured the first aerial photographs of the city of Paris, that documentation from the skies became a real possibility. Despite the popularity of these aerial cityscapes, the form did not develop wide, practical use until World War I when airplane-bound



Joseph G. Cruz, *Taken from the 1st image of Earth from Outer Space (Detail)*, Powdered Shrapnel from a V2 Rocket, Charcoal, archival water paper, wood 65 x 48 inches, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

photographers mapped large regions of Europe and Africa.

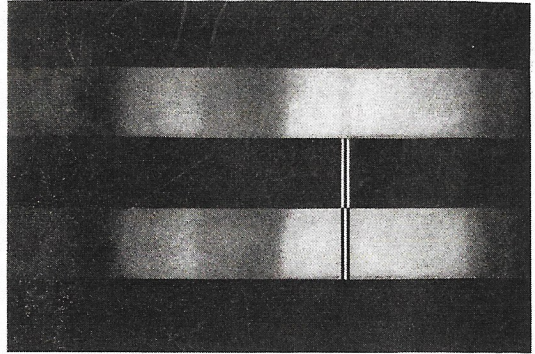
Joseph G. Cruz's ongoing project *The Death of God Left the Angels in a Strange Place* centers around what Cruz considers to be the seismic moment in this history of cosmological consciousness. In an extensively researched artist's book, Cruz compiled an archive of now unclassified documents describing the United States' development of the V2 rocket — the first manned craft to leave the earth's atmosphere. *Parts allowing us to see the sum (v2 parts at the site of birth)*, a birds-eye photograph of an array of abandoned V2 missile sections, is one of dozens of images Cruz made on his trip to an isolated German gypsum mine in early 2015. The photograph documents the site where German scientist Wernher von Braun developed and constructed the V2 missiles during World War II, shortly before his capture by U.S. allied forces in 1944. The event, for Cruz, marks the nadir of a history that continues with the V2 rocket's launch as one of the first milestones for NASA — allowing, for the first time, aerial perspective of not only land masses but of the Earth itself.² Cruz's project extends from this historical moment to the subsequent decades of NASA's colonization of outer space as a perceived right following the Space Race during the Cold War. For Cruz, the U.S.'s ability to achieve a bird's-eye perspective of the earth was fundamental in shaping our current world view.

The perceptual shift between a land-bound, Cartesian-founded representationalism to the perspective lent by gazing down upon the earth from outer space took nearly a century to complete, a charter that resulted in one of the key takeaways of modernity. This bird's-eye view is taken up by artist Kathryn Miller, who explores the northern landscape of the United States and Canada through this newfound perspective. Her work displayed at *Waiting Room*, entitled by the

coordinates of the space the maps indicate, provides three aerial perspectives from archival maps found in the archive of the National Geological Survey. Separated into quadrangles, the Geological Survey systematically charts and archives all areas of the state. Miller's displacement of this archaic system of mapping -- the maps belong to the same forgone generation as atlases or Rand McNally road guides -- points to the slippage between their representation of the spaces with which Miller is familiar. In a conversation with the artist, she described surveying the Minnesota landscape from hunting blinds as a powerful shift from experiencing it on foot. Miller's work considers the translation of exploration on ground level to the official grid of governmental cartography.

Also drawing on the archive as a system of representation and organization of experience, Isa Newby Gagarin locates color illustrations from advertisements, magazines, and books stored in the Hennepin County Library's image reference. Organized by generations of librarians and hand-labeled with the objects they represent, these clippings function like an archaic Google image search, providing a sampling of the appearance of hundreds of objects or topics. Drawn to rainbows, Gagarin xeroxed the clippings available and printed them on glass, forming a black and white lens through which to view her intimate color study paintings, placed beneath.

American feminist theorist Karen Barad argues that the breakthrough of 20th century consciousness lies in Danish physicist Niels Bohr's discovery of quantum physics, a breakthrough that challenged Cartesian epistemology and Newtonian physics.³ Central to Bohr's thesis is a reconsideration of light as a wave, not a particle. This turn forced a reconsideration of light as something which has the ability to move through space as an active force. The visible separation of the sun's light waves separating into the color spectrum, which make up the visual phenomena



Photograph from Mt. Wilson Observatory

THE THREE GREAT TYPES OF SPECTRA THROUGH WHICH THE STARS TELL
THEIR STORIES

Scan of National Geographic magazine, 1925, showing spectrograph image from Mt. Wilson Observatory.

of the rainbow, crystallizes this constant occurrence. In her *Mirfak* series (named after a supergiant star in the constellation Perseus), Gagarin returns to the archive, in this instance, images published in National Geographic Magazine almost a century ago of starlight created by spectrographs, an instrument that separates light by its wavelength. Spectrographs were developed in the 1860s to measure the distance and brightness of stars, focusing starlight onto photosensitive paper resulting in images created along a grid of the night sky.

Working from a post-Bohrian perspective, the artists in *Current Location* utilize the systems of representation and wayfinding from modernity to the present moment. Shifting up and back down from the horizon line, using location as a signifier for the limits of human perception, and thus of understanding, the artists seek to navigate a contemporary landscape where our sense of place can be determined with the drop of a digital pin.

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1. See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1982), 5.
 2. Gypsum is the main natural ingredient in the production of drywall.
 3. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 97.