

## 2 Seattle exhibitions cover strange terrain

Seattle's Marquand Book Studios turns mapmaking methods to cartographic fantasy in "You Aren't Here: Artists' Maps of Personal Spaces"; while Seattle artist Brent Watanabe continues to concoct sinister-whimsical worlds with his computer-controlled installation, "This Heavy Load."

By Michael Upchurch

Seattle Times arts writer



In 2004, Seattleite Katharine Harmon put together a book titled "You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination" in which artists' imaginations took the most fanciful of cartographic turns. And in the seven years since the book came out, Harmon's map-centric obsessions apparently haven't ebbed.

That much is clear from a new exhibit she's curating at Marquand Book Studios, **"You Aren't Here: Artists' Maps of Personal Spaces."**



The show features six artists, some of whom turn the whole notion of mapmaking on its head as they explore interior worlds. Others use cartographic forms to comment on the troubled planet we inhabit.

Matthew Picton, a London-born artist living in Ashland, Ore., makes the most epic statement with "Lower Manhattan," a massive 3-D street grid, with burn marks and a crater where the World Trade Center used to be. Picton's city blocks are constructed from 9/11 newspaper headlines, the covers of Philip Roth's novel "The Plot Against

America" and video covers from the film "The Towering Inferno."

Picton strikes a lighter note in "Dublin, June 16 1904," which also uses printed materials (text from James Joyce's "Ulysses") to create an image of the Irish capital on Bloomsday, when the action in Joyce's masterpiece takes place. In his artist's statement, he notes the "underlying fragility and transience [of] structures that seem permanent and stable." His work highlights those ephemeral qualities.

Seattle artist Karey Kessler, by contrast, invents maps depicting landscapes of mood, memory and expectation, rather than any specific geographic location. In her marvelous "now there is order, or disorder, or both," as in many of her works, she uses the elements of a contour map — green for forest, blue for water — but takes them apart, reassembling them in a maplike collage marked by abrupt insets and geographic non sequiturs.

The most elaborate contribution to the show is Florent Morellet's "Paris Stupides," six reinventions of the city that transpose it to desert, jungle, Rust Belt and other settings. Each map has a different street

layout, although the loops of the Seine are repeated verbatim. All are accompanied by detailed demographics. "Rust Belt" Paris, for instance, has lost its manufacturing base and is experiencing annual population decreases of 2.6 percent.

Morellet, a French artist living in New York, has a droll explanation of what he's up to: "The choices were limited: a) demolish Paris so I could rebuild it on my own terms, or b) go back in time before there was a Paris and start from scratch. I chose c): both of the above."

The other three artists don't make such strong impressions. Miranda Maher's work seems alternatively hermetic and message-heavy. Heidi Whitman's fragile maplike cutouts don't go as deeply into cartographic fantasy as one would like. Doug Beube's "excavations" of books feel similarly limited.

If strange contraptions grab you as much as strange maps, you can't do better than Brent Watanabe's **"This Heavy Load"** at Gallery4Culture.

The Seattle artist blends computer-controlled chance procedures with quirky, naive cartoon animation. In this new work, he trades in his usual cartoon waterfowl for a cat and a mouse, while the mechanical part of the installation is triggered into action by visitors' movements and broadcasts on a police scanner.

"Heavy Load" includes a shack with two duck legs sticking out of it that move when there's action on the scanner, a black void with debris falling through it, and a pipe-organ soundtrack subject to various disruptions.

The cat, meanwhile, is jerked back and forth by some unseen force along a curved black screen, giving a pitiful squeak each time it's yanked forward or backward. The mouse is even more discombobulated, its little limbs quivering, twitching and relocating themselves in anatomically impossible ways as it tries to scramble out of harm's path.

Zany, obsessive, whimsically apocalyptic, "This Heavy Load" finds Watanabe diving ever deeper into a cyber-realm all his own.

*Michael Upchurch: [mupchurch@seattletimes.com](mailto:mupchurch@seattletimes.com)*