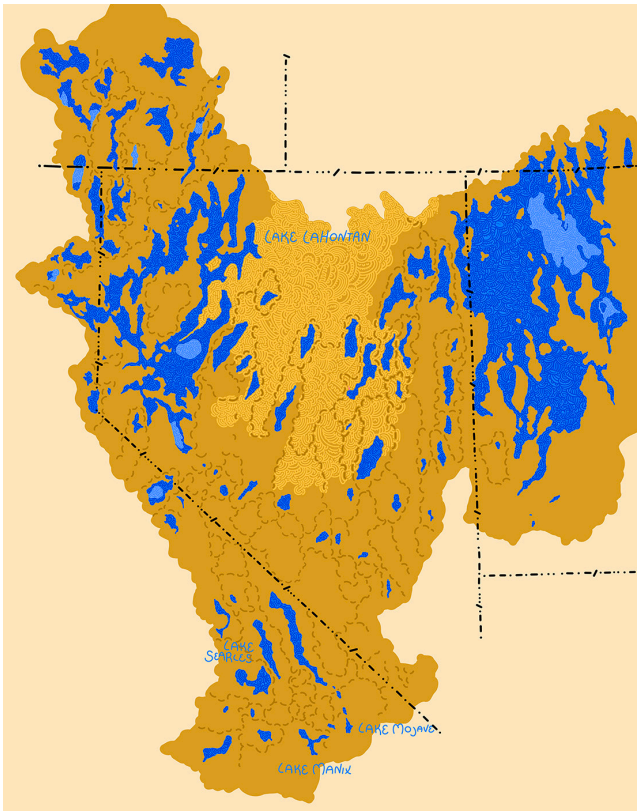
The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is delighted to present, On the Map*, an exhibition by Jon Farber and Catherine Schmid-Maybach, at the Courthouse Gallery from January 31 – May 30, 2024. CCAI extends its sincere appreciation to the artists, the city courthouse, and to all those involved with the exhibition. In addition, CCAI thanks our commissioned writer, Brett Van Hoesen, who provided the following essay.*

WHY WE MAP

Today, maps and mapping devices play a big role in our lives. They help us to navigate where we are going, record where we have been, and document memories of our relationship to trails, roadways, cities, landscapes, and much more. From physical maps to a wide range of digital tools including Google Maps, GPS navigation systems, and apps such as AllTrails and Life360, we have a close connection to the ancient field of cartography. The contemporary process of map making, in turn, helps us to organize big data and better assess comparisons that might not otherwise be perceptible. We use maps to identify new constellations, calculate land use, and track changes in population demographics. Modern medical mapping tools such as Petscans and MRI exams monitor cellular alterations and help us to identify disease.[1] While maps are practical and often innovative, they can also be very personal in nature. They can be as abstract as wrinkles on a face, not only documenting the aging process but highlighting genetic connections between us and our ancestors. When my grandmother turned eighty years old, I visited her in northern California and noticed for the first time a prominent short vertical wrinkle above her left eye, parallel to her eyebrow, probably related to the act of squinting or furrowing her brow. Years later, as I've gotten older, I see that same line developing on my face. I like to think of this little delineation as part of a genetic map that links me to my grandmother. The work of artists Jon Farber and Catherine Schmid-Maybach exhibited in "On the Map" beautifully intertwine the practical and whimsical aspects of mapping, connecting us to their personal worlds and also inviting the opportunity for us to develop our own connections to the spaces they inhabit and explore.[2]



(Unfinished) *Ancient Lakes*, Digital Drawing Print on Archival Paper, 22" x 28," 2023.

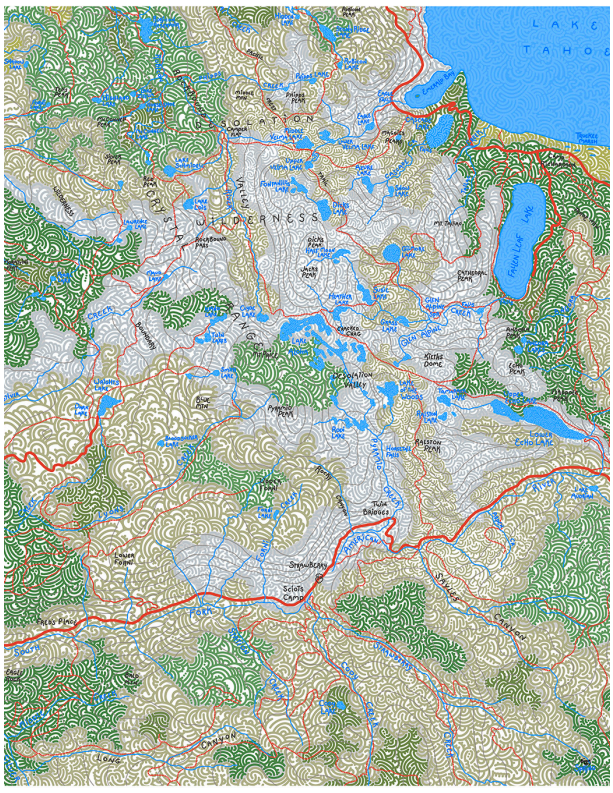
I. The Art of Mapping and Maps in Contemporary Art

In 2009, the Seattle-based author Katharine Harmon published a ground-breaking book entitled *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography*.[3] It included three hundred and sixty works of art by international artists across a wide range of media. The project was a revelation in terms of thinking about the art of cartography and the way in which maps had played an integral role in the development of contemporary art since the 1960s. Featuring popular artists such as Jasper Johns, Nam June Paik, Vik Muniz, Joyce Kozloff, Maya Lin and many others, Harmon analyzed how contemporary artists used maps to explore themes of personal geographies, global reckonings, and instances of problematic deletions. In other words, Harmon noted that artists for many decades recognized that while maps offered opportunities to materialize information, both public and personal, they were also arenas of absence and incomplete histories.

Harmon's book emerged at roughly the same time that the topic of mapping was in vogue for the field of digital humanities – when researchers, teachers, and students alike were thinking about new ways of analyzing content, grappling with the allure of big data, and still trying to make sense of small matters. This shift inspired some of my own pedagogical experiments with mapping in the classroom particularly with respect to a capstone course I teach on modern and contemporary German art. The course surveys the 20th Century to the present through the lens of World War I, the Holocaust, the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and post-unification debates around multiculturalism and globalization. While art history often relies upon maps as essential teaching guides, I was interested in prompting students to develop spatial thinking, to engage with historical case studies in a more active, material fashion. In collaboration with two librarians at UNR, we developed a project involving ArcGIS StoryMaps, where students utilized mapping technology often relegated to science fields as an integral component of their research.[4] Some charted the geographic proximity of socially interconnected artists, writers, and scientists in urban centers like Munich, Berlin, and Vienna. Other students investigated art restitution cases and mapped the points of origin for art looted during the Second World War. Collectively, these research projects engendered a new way of thinking about "real" time and space, enabling students to develop a better understanding of the importance of geographic relationships integral to the arts, not unlike the work of many contemporary artists featured in Harmon's book.

II. Tracking Self in Jon Farber's Drawings

When I moved to Reno in 2007 from Columbia, Missouri, where I taught for one year, I was clueless about the dramatic topography of the region. My whirlwind, one-day interview at UNR had only afforded me the chance to tour the campus, Nevada Museum of Art, and surrounding neighborhoods. When my husband and I drove our car and U-Haul truck across country, I had flashbacks to childhood family car rides from Iowa to California to see relatives but, still, I never fully imagined the fast tempo of elevation changes between Reno and Donner Pass. Colleagues quickly instigated my initiation to Lake Tahoe, inviting me for a BBQ and brisk swim over the Labor Day weekend. I still remember my panic of driving I-80 home, that steep grade of road that I have now become accustomed to. It was then that I insisted on always having a paper map of Nevada, northern California, and Lake Tahoe in the car. I explained to teacher friends in New York that the landscape here was serious. Jon Farber's drawn maps remind me of some of these familiar compositions, and at the same time, reiterate that despite my nearly seventeen years of living in Reno, I always have much more to learn. Farber's strong connection to the region, his upbringing as a Boy Scout and eventually, Eagle Scout, and his continued passion for the outdoors, including trail running, provide motivation for his automatic drawings. The rhythm of Farber's continuous cartographic lines provides multiple perspectives and data points that help to assess and pinpoint precise location and topography, like solving a puzzle. His maps also cleverly play to the culture of old or outdated maps that prompt questions about relationships between past and present sites of interest.

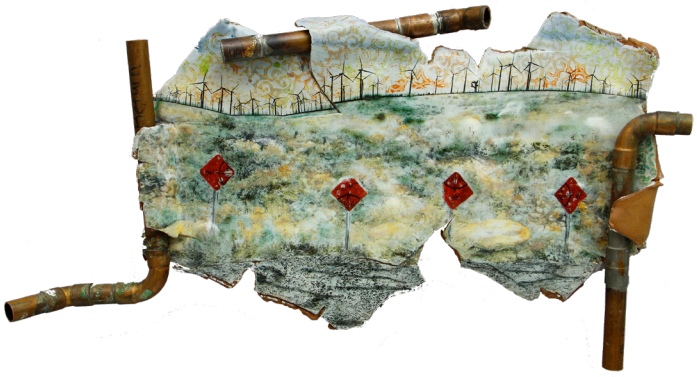


Desolation Wilderness, Digital Print on Archival Paper, 22" x 28," 2023.

After watching Farber's hypnotic Instagram reels of his drawing methods and then seeing his work in person, I was certain that there was a direct correlation between his artistic practice and profession as a nurse, who through the study of anatomy inevitably mentally maps the body. This bias was based upon my conclusion that many of my best art history students are nursing majors. Maybe it's because they study efficiently, prioritizing "getting it right," and at the same time employ notable doses of sincere interest and empathy essential for understanding the arts. But, in reality, when queried, Farber kindly offered a more realistic assessment that his drawings, composed with Sharpie, Copic, and Posca markers, often serve as meditation, as productive alternative zones to cope with the expected everyday stresses of medical work. Farber explains, "I believe my drawings do the opposite of recording/memorizing space. I started playing with this mark-making style years ago as a warm-up for other artistic practices, however, in the past five years, I have really focused on this method, as it is almost a meditation. As a nurse, at the bedside for eight years, I was intimately attached to the health of strangers on a daily basis. This was intensified when I went to work in the critical care unit, and was further intensified during the Covid epidemic. I turned to abstract art and automatic drawing as a method to forget. Laying hand to paper allowed me to turn off my mind, it allowed me to rest in silence. I was able to forget the sadness, the cacophony of alarms, and the stress of my working environment." Farber is also an avid wildlife photographer and paired with his draftsmanship, his artwork connects to the writings of early 20th Century American philosopher John Dewey, who promoted the idea of "art as experience."[5] Importantly, this mentality isn't simply about art as catharsis, but art as a truly transformative experience that exponentially impacts both artist and viewer.

III. On the Road with Catherine Schmid-Maybach's Ceramics

Photo historians like John Tagg were thinking about mapping well before the current trend in scholarship. In *The Burden of Representation*, Tagg explored the implicit and potentially insidious implications of surveillance photography in London, evidence-based measurements that chronicled traffic flows well before we allowed GPS apps to record our travel routes.[6] Catherine Schmid-Maybach's reliance on photography as a tool eschews these constraints and allows photographs to map, in purposefully casual terms, the whims and chance scenes of road trip vignettes. Layers of juxtaposed imagery create intriguing visual narratives in her ceramic platters and low-relief wall-hangings. According to Schmid-Maybach, "I often photograph while driving, without looking or composing the image. The result is a graphic sampling of patterns, bits of landscape and urban elements instead of pictures of specific things or places." Her work draws upon personal experiences in the Bay Area, Lake Tahoe, and destinations much farther away, indexed by the language of transfer techniques and decals built up through multiple firings. In this way, Schmid-Maybach's ceramics function like collage blurring locations and timeframes, creating transhistorical storylines that exceed a fixed reference.



Patron Saint of the Lost, ceramic, 2021.

At quick glance, Schmid-Maybach's visual cues to the magnitude of human impact on the natural world, symbolized by roadways, traffic signs, power plants, and abandoned chairs, might stimulate connections to the landmark 1975 exhibition entitled, "New Topographics: Photographs of A Man-



Presence, ceramic, 2018.

Altered Landscape" hosted by the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. This influential body of photographic images chronicled the growing phenomenon of altered landscapes for a generation that was increasingly self-conscious about the necessity for environmental activism as evinced by the foundation of the first Earth Day in 1970. Schmid-Maybach, whose passion for ceramics was spawned by early childhood activities such as "digging clay out of the lakebed at Lake Tahoe," notes that she is equally passionate about the urgent need to preserve the environment.[7] As someone who grew up in "two cultures," with parents from Germany who settled in San Francisco, the artist combines photographic imagery with ceramics to "hold narrative." This too is a type of mapping; souvenirs, motifs, and symbols that record lived experience but that also extend well-beyond the culture of mere documentation.

Conclusion

Why we map is a complicated question to answer. It is subjective, historical, imperial, political, cultural, experimental, and personal – for starters. If the history of cartography is fundamentally linked to analytical processes, then what we learn from Farber and Schmid-Maybach is that maps can also be spaces for meditative practice, sites of feelings and sensations that don't necessarily operate with clearly articulated code and key. Their work exudes a level of refreshing relatability that invites us to look, to embrace the culture of seeing. Perhaps ironically, their work also gives us the invitation to get lost, to be mesmerized by Farber's line and to be drawn in by Schmid-Maybach's narrative details. Recently my older son requested that I update my Life360 app to ensure that it "always" tracks where I am. Admittedly, I had turned off that function for weeks to allow a little breather, to let myself be permitted to wander. This was not simply about not wanting to be tracked, but to allow myself to be lost. In my twenties, living in cities like Toronto, Baltimore, and Boston, I used to relish what I called, "following my nose." Nothing was better than a Saturday, free of work, when the whim of the city might drift you from one place to another. Despite our tech-laden, highly-journaled lives, I try to instill this magic in my sons, where the art of where you are going is balanced with not knowing what comes next.

Brett M. Van Hoesen, PhD

Reno, Nevada

February, 2024

Dr. Brett M. Van Hoesen is Associate Professor and Area Head of Art History at the University of Nevada, Reno. She holds a Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Iowa and a M.A. in Art History from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her graduate training was significantly shaped by a Ford Foundation-sponsored Crossing Borders fellowship and a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) scholarship to study at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. In 2019, Van Hoesen received Nevada Humanities' Outstanding Teaching of the Humanities award. She lives in Reno with her husband and two sons.

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[1] For medical mapping techniques and its relationship to art history, see: John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

[2] I want to sincerely thank both artists for taking the time to correspond with me via email or phone and for their generosity in explaining aspects of their artistic process.

[3] Katherine Harmon, *The Map As Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009).

[4] For the published results of our collaborative project, see Brett M. Van Hoesen, Laura Rocke, and Ann Medaille, "Mapping Art History: Enhancing the Teaching of German Art History with Student-Created Maps," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 35-52. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/703509

[5] John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934).

[6] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[7] See 2018 interview with Catherine Schmid-Maybach at the Sierra Arts Foundation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CN8e-fqlqcc (accessed February 19, 2024).



Catherine Schmid-Maybach



Jon Farber

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