Bogus Art Maps

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Visual Fields focuses on the appreciation of cartographic aesthetics and design, featuring examples of inspirational, beautiful, and intriguing work. The maps are accompanied by commentary, often from the author, to help the reader draw more meaning and value from them than by a simple glance at the visual surface. Suggestions of works that will help enhance the appreciation and understanding of the cartographic arts are welcomed, and should be directed to the section editor, Daniel Huffman: daniel.p.huffman@gmail.com.

Bogus Art Map inspired by the style of Jackson Pollock

It dawned on me one dreary January day that I was supposedly a graduate student of cartography, but I had not produced what I would call a "map" in over a year. Sure, I had partaken in map-related activities: presented at conferences, written papers, taught classes. I had also aided in the production and design various interactive maps. But not once in the previous year had I sat down to produce a single-authored, stand-alone spatial visualization.

I struggled with this fact for a while. Why had I not made a map? Was I lazy? Was I too busy? It could have been a bit of both. But ultimately, I decided the main reason I had not made a map was because I was too preoccupied with my life as a modern cartographer, or geohacker. None of the map projects I had landed required any kind of map production. What they did require was a bit of technical knowhow and scripting ability.

This made me wonder, *what is going on with cartography*? What happened to that nice, neat intersection of Art and Science, where Cartography is supposed to live? Certainly, this intersection was absent in the work I had been doing. To me, hacking away at an application programming interface in an attempt to throw lines on a web map is mostly a technological endeavor, devoid of artistic spontaneity and flexibility.

Bogus Art Map inspired by the style of Franz Kline

At first, Bogus Art Maps were my personal remedy to my frustration over the lack of an artistic element in my mapmaking. The way I had been experiencing modern cartographic production was through the lens of technology, through widgets, web tools, programming languages, and browser specifications. Bogus Art Maps were sprint-maps (I initially spent 30 minutes or less on each of them), meant to be more about the map as art than the map as science. These maps largely break cartographic convention, while they mimic the style of an artist or movement.

As the project continued, I began to think of these maps as serving another purpose. It has long troubled me to hear someone say, "I can't draw. I'm terrible at it." People make this claim all of the time. At some point, due to societal conventions, we have all decided whether or not we "can draw." But this is silly. We can all *draw*. What we draw might not be considered a masterpiece by the masses, but that does not mean that we should not draw at all.

People's perceptions of mapmaking seem to suffer from the same affliction. They worry about not being able to create a map that is "accurate" or "to scale." This is also silly. Much can be learned about the way people imagine the space they inhabit from memory maps (like those Kevin Lynch collected of Boston in the 1950s) or sketch maps (like those currently being collected by the Hand Drawn Maps Association). These maps are imbued with personality and emotion that reveal landscapes absent in conventional maps.

Bogus Art Map inspired by the style of Cy Twombly

My Bogus Art Maps are not supposed to be taken seriously as cartographic products, nor do I consider them "works of art." Instead, I present them as an experiment in modern cartography. With these maps, I have attempted to question the notions that some people "can't draw" and that maps must be "accurate" or "to scale." While some of these maps have a projection, their nature prevents any metric for "accuracy" or "scale." They are cartographic visualizations that rely less on GIScience and more on art. It is also my hope that perhaps these maps debunk the notion that people are mostly not artists or cartographers. I disagree with this idea because I believe that we can all contribute our artistic and cartographic sensibilities to enhance our collective understanding of our surrounding world.

Tim Wallace is a Ph.D. student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. You can find the rest of his Bogus Art Map series on his blog: timwallace.wordpress.com