

## Map Portraits

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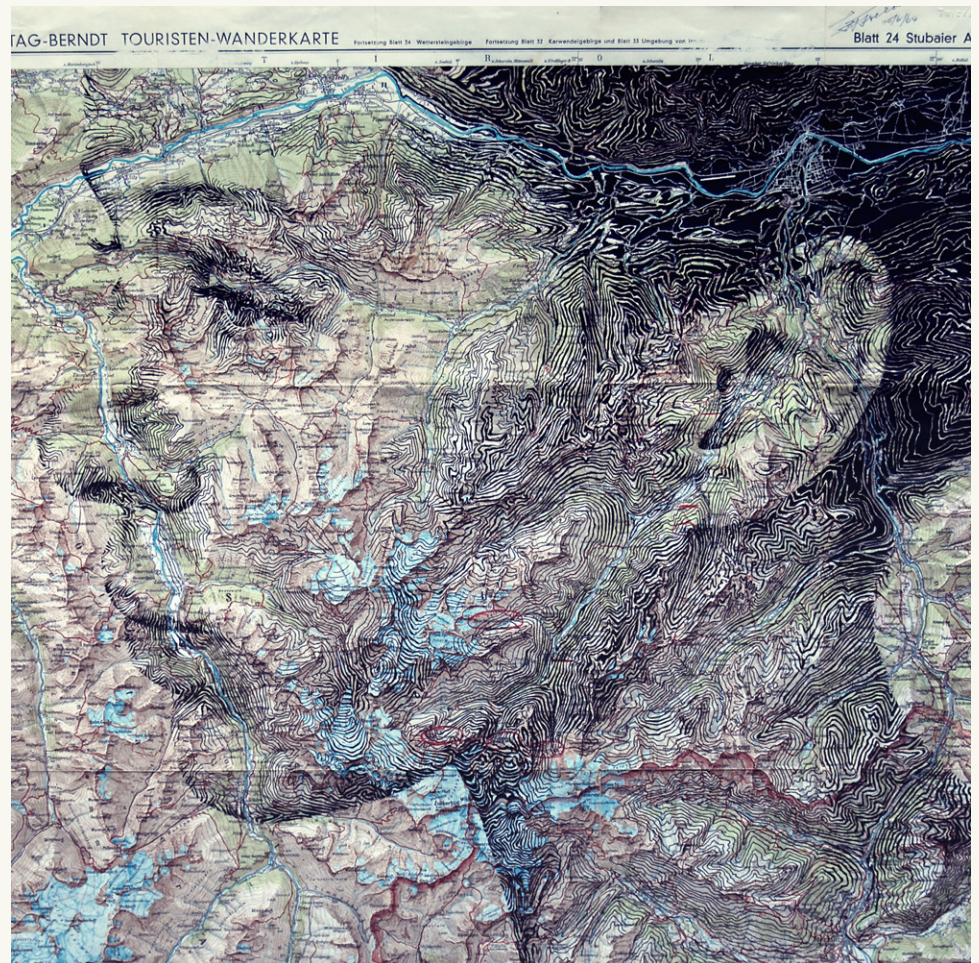
PEOPLE OFTEN ASK ME if I see faces in maps. Sometimes people assume I do. I can appreciate the art of seeing faces in things (pareidolia... and yes, I did have to look it up), like observing familiar shapes and objects in the clouds, but it's not something I actually do.

When I begin working with a map, or a set of maps (my studio is full of them), I study the rough shapes, the potential compositions and sweeping directions, making a mental note of any obvious or sharp characteristics. This is a framework, and a very loose one. As an artist, I can demolish or invent terrain, but mostly I hijack it, highlighting chosen parts of it. My framework is a "best fit" for the figure and the land that holds her; the lengthy process from here involves manipulating the organic patterns on the map to show both the landscape and the human form.

The parts I pick to draw over and around the landscape are, in relation to one another, the same ingredients laid upon the same composition as a portrait on white paper. It's just that I find white paper uninteresting. So instead I utilize patterns, literally drawing upon the similarities that exist between us and those patterns—in the case of the majority of my work, what I find really interesting, those patterns are maps.

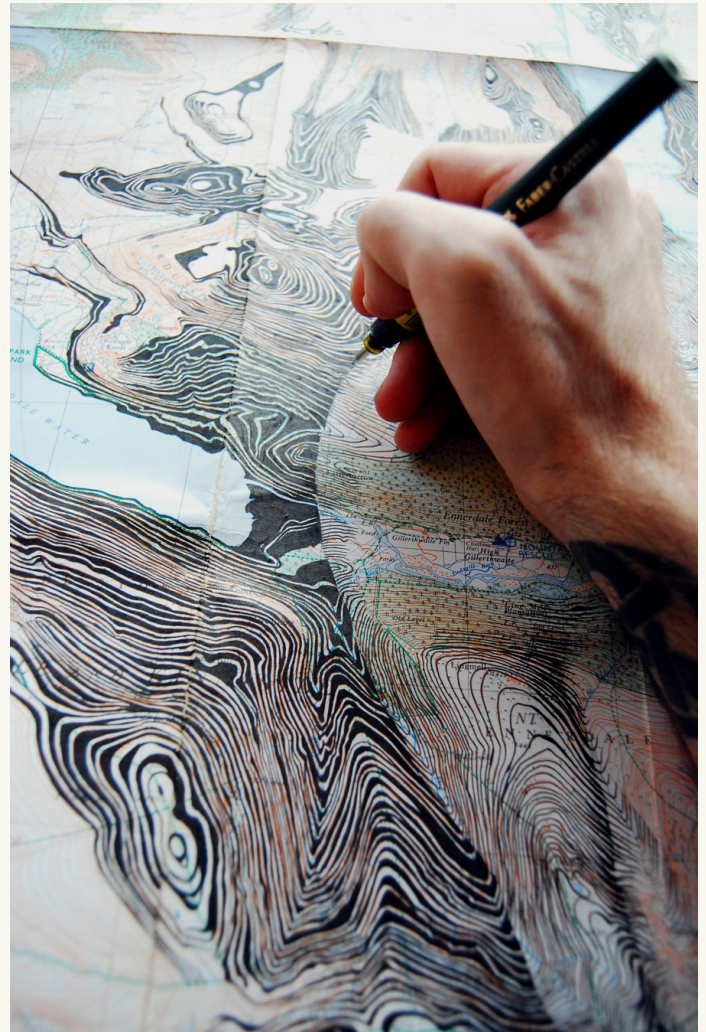
I feel fortunate to work with an ever-changing surface. The landscape is organic and unpredictable, like a fingerprint (very appropriate). Immersing myself in cartography

means that I'm always exploring, even if this exploration is on a limited level from the comfort of my studio. I do of course love to travel when I'm not working, and I get curious about particular parts of various maps when I am



working—I often find myself researching places, for no obvious reason. I think I'm reminding myself that many other places do actually exist, on a very real level—"many" being the key word. A small town is just a word on a map, but away from the map that town has occupants, a history, accomplishments and everything else your own hometown has.





I think it's both the satisfaction of synchronizing the human form with our landscapes and the excitement of actually revealing those landscapes through a pencil that makes this project an ongoing one. Sometimes I wonder how many miles, to the respective scale of each map, my pens and pencils have travelled. Each sweeping stroke is far enough.

Being able to see the landscapes first-hand is always a delight. I feel I now have a greater understanding of (or familiarity with) the geography around me. I know what to expect in certain places: the shapes of the mountains, how the flow of rivers relate to the surrounding hills. By extension I know roughly which maps will show what, but

just like a "real" explorer, I'm always keen to discover new places.

*Ed Fairburn graduated from CSAD (Cardiff School of Art and Design) in 2012. He is represented in the US by the Mike Wright Gallery and also exhibiting work in various UK galleries and a selection of international venues. More information about Ed and his work is available at [edfairburn.com](http://edfairburn.com).*

*Visual Fields focuses on the appreciation of cartographic aesthetics and design, featuring examples of inspirational, beautiful, and intriguing work. 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, Laura McCormick: [laura@xnproductions.com](mailto:laura@xnproductions.com).*