A compass is the traditional trademark of the geographer and traveller, a tool to help chart a route. Geographers have used the compass to create many different journeys to reveal new insights into the geography of our world; to map, document and explore the world’s peoples, places and environments. Today geography is more about the understanding of our interconnected and changing world and the challenges that presents us with; whether increasing globalization, availability of water resources, or future climate change, our need for understanding is greater than ever before. It continues to be the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)’s role to set new bearings both in the search for new geographical knowledge and understanding, and in using that to inform our work with the public, universities and schools, and with policy makers. An important part of our work is seeking to engage new audiences with geography and I am delighted that The Creative Compass project – a more imaginative look at our bearings - supported by the Arts Council England, helps us explore new perspectives through the work of two artists, Agnès Poitevin-Navarre and Susan Stockwell.

Agnès Poitevin-Navarre has redrawn London’s geography from the seemingly ephemeral personal experiences of this city’s residents, locating moments of both separate and shared experiences across London’s human landscape of 7 million people. She has also focused on the equipment – the compass, dividers, rulers, pencils and brushes – that helped many generations of map makers and expedition artists transfer the 3D world to a 2D image. In contrast, Susan Stockwell’s money maps depict the world not through the cartographer’s hand but instead drawing on the indelible ink of an exchequer’s bank note. Her map dress echoes the 19th century; a time when some thought a woman’s place was ‘in the home’ but when many intrepid women, often closely linked to this Society, helped document and reveal the world.

In the 17th Century Sir Walter Raleigh asked about the origins of “Painters Wife’s Island” and was told that “while the fellow was drawing the map, his wife had desired him to put in one country for her (so) that she might have one island of her own”. Today, Agnès and Susan have not claimed imaginary islands for themselves. Instead, and much more importantly, they have mapped out their own journeys into the geographical imagination, journeys which give us new insights into the familiar and new ways of seeing our world. Rather than a fixed compass course heading magnetically towards the pole, Agnès and Susan’s bearing for this work has been creative, exploring new directions and routes less well travelled. I hope you will, as I have, enjoy sharing their new journeys into geography which are explored in the following pages.

Dr Rita Gardner CBE
Director
The Creative Compass has its origins in many different influences; the Society’s remarkable collection of maps and atlases; its continuing work to shape the development and role of geography; and its aim to engage new audiences with geography’s role in helping everyone to better understand the world’s people, places and environments.

This project brings the work of two artists, Agnès Poitevin-Navarre and Susan Stockwell, to show at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) for the first time. Selected for their particular uses of map-making and mapping, both artists approach their subjects via the map to explore discussions that may be neglected in the making of a map. Their engagement with cartography, the Society’s collection and geography as a discipline, reveals the map as a format through which to explore the power and authority that histories of mapping have produced.

Susan Stockwell explores the political produce of maps; how maps have been used to construct and direct the politics of trade, exploration and empire. She considers how maps have formed the core components of historical expeditions where lands, resources and people have been bound by tales of discovery while also reflecting on who and what remains invisible in these narratives.

Agnès Poitevin-Navarre has applied her cartographic methodologies to reinterpret some of the iconic, yet sometimes overlooked, materials in the Society’s building such as the panel of Society medalists. Exploring notions of personal achievement, success and recognition, Poitevin-Navarre opens up questions about what it takes to put oneself ‘on the map’.

The Society has worked beyond its existing hinterland to create this exhibition and was pleased to develop a successful new partnership with Iniva, a contemporary visual arts organisation. This has helped with the commissioning of new artistic work and particularly drew on Iniva’s existing interest in the artistic use of maps through its Creative Mapping project. Through the latter, Iniva has worked with artists to highlight the importance of maps in peoples’ everyday lives, in interpreting their histories and identities as well as considering the information excluded from maps.

There are many complementary parallels between the Society’s and Iniva’s respective work; the Society inviting artists ‘into’ the world of geography and mapping, whilst Iniva has used maps as the means to take artists out to collaborate with teachers, community groups and young people.

The use of maps by artists is not necessarily new and indeed, many maps are rightly revered for their artistic as well as geographical imagery. However, this exhibition builds
on recent collaborations between artists and geographers through which new tools and practices for exploring our world have been developed. To take forward such approaches the **Crossing Boundaries Symposium**, jointly organised by the Society and Iniva to accompany The Creative Compass exhibition, will bring together leading artists, cultural theorists and geographers.

Geography has often been described as the subject that bridges the social and physical sciences. Through this project, new bridges have been built between geography and the arts and between the Society and Iniva. These new bridges have allowed us to reach beyond our existing horizons to explore new approaches and possibilities. And with the world of geography as their canvas, Agnès Poitevin-Navarre and Susan Stockwell have followed their own compasses to traverse the Society’s history, and its present, and to set new courses into its future.

Vandana Patel (Exhibition and Project Coordinator, RGS-IBG)
Teresa Cisneros (Education Curator, Iniva)

‘Placing art at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)’: Art and the production of geographical knowledge.  
**by Dr Harriet Hawkins**  
AHRC Research Fellow, School of Geography, University of Exeter

‘A combination of the artist and the man of science is rare’ wrote Sir Arthur Shipley F.R.S. of the explorer Dr Edward Wilson, a talented artist and scientist, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and member of Scott’s ill-fated Antarctic expedition. However, as Shipley goes on to acknowledge, the combination is maybe ‘not as rare as one is apt to think’. Wilson, a skilled scientist and accomplished artist, who made studies of the work of John Ruskin and J.W.M. Turner, was one of a number of ‘travelling artists’ who accompanied explorers, as well as other seamen, surveyors and geographers who developed their own artistic practices of varying kinds.

Inspired by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) the new works by Agnès Poitevin-Navarre and Susan Stockwell bring into focus the relationship between art and geography and offer an aesthetic contribution to wider debates around the ‘cultures of exploration’ and the production of geographical knowledge. The site-specific works direct attention to the rich visual cultures of exploration found in the Society’s archives; from large landscape paintings to notebooks full of incidental sketches; coastline charts designed to aid navigation; carefully detailed drawings of botanical specimens made in situ; and, ornately rendered atlases. Since its foundation in 1830, the Society has acted to disseminate geographical information around the globe and helped to shape our geographical imaginations. Its archives have long played a key role in geographical endeavour. So it is appropriate that in the wake of the Society’s public opening of its archives through the ‘Unlocking the Archives’ programme (2004) the place of artistic practices in the development of geographical knowledge be explored, in part, through artistic production itself. An analysis of the art works knits together historical geographies of art and exploration with contemporary relations between artistic practices and geography, opening up questions of the role of art in experiencing and engaging with the world. In exploring these ideas, this exhibition sits alongside the rich interdisciplinary body of work that has examined the production of geographical knowledge, the historical geographies of art, and the intersection of projects of art and empire.

As with this body of scholarship, the critical potential of this exhibition is not just in ‘recovering’ the place of art in disciplinary histories but also in the ways in which these artworks disturb and so enrich our understandings of the production of geographical knowledge.
ARTS OF EXPLORATION

From a distance, Poitevin-Navarre’s wall map the Proustian Map of London (Land of Achievement) (2010) reproduces London’s recognisable outline clearly bisected by the Thames. Up close though, the capital is known through a series of achievements and emotions, territory is configured through a plotting of life-courses and personal milestones. Poitevin-Navarre collected her ‘data’ through questionnaires, surveying London residents, asking them, following Proust’s ‘party game’, ‘what is your greatest achievement?’, ‘what is the most important lesson life has taught you?’ The answers, plotted according to respondents’ postcodes, map ‘humanistic’ landscapes of emotional relations and the ‘everyday’ personal achievements of lives lived. Here the city is projected through work, family and social life, and these personal and subjective ways of knowing and being in the world are folded with the grammars of cartography and their implication of empirical and imperial ‘habits of vision’.

The information in the city’s northern quarters, high on the wall map, can only be accessed through the use of binoculars. This requires from the viewer a slow scanning of territory, replicating those visual traditions of the ‘gaze’ with its implications of ‘mastery’ and of the secure ‘view point’ of the ‘scientific observer’ who is assured of his capacity to see the other with a wholly objective and neutral gaze.

The history of art and geography can be understood as a similar enmeshing of different ways of knowing the world. The Society's archives offer a rich visual culture of exploration which presents fused ways of knowing formed through the circulation of people, objects, ideas and aesthetics at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’. From the late 17th century, ‘the practical value of drawing for recording information became widely accepted’. The Admiralty, valuing graphic over written representations for navigational purposes, began to teach cartography and drawing enabling ordinary seaman to ‘record coastlines, harbours, fortifications and topographic details accurately and efficiently’. Such sketch surveys could compensate for a lack of precise measurements, especially where access and direct survey was either physically problematic or politically sensitive. Even with the advent of more accurate charts, sketching remained a valued skill, recognised to ‘sharpen the sight’ and often formed part of a sailors’ more personal record of the voyage.

The emergence of the ‘travelling artist’, with the voyages of Captain Cook’s Endeavour from 1769, saw professional artists accompanying explorers, ‘for the express purpose of supplying the unavoidable imperfections of written accounts, by enabling us to preserve and to bring home such drawings of the most memorable scenes of our transactions’. Before this time European artists largely were not encouraged to look beyond Europe, thus two and a half centuries of European colonisation, exploration and exploitation of the Americas and the Indies went largely without visual record.

However, from Cook’s voyages onwards artists’ depictions were an important part of the growing geographical knowledge about the world. Art, ‘in the service of science and travel’ had many functions, from the documentary to the inventory, it filled ‘gaps’ in geographical knowledge and was central to the geographical imagination of the ever-expanding known world, equally though it sensationalised world exploration, often helping to raise funds for further expeditions.

As artists and scientists – botanists, geographers, geologists and meteorologists – worked in increasingly close proximity on expeditions, they came together around shared sites of study and common fields of interest. This interchange of knowledge situated artistic practice within the broader 18th century inventorying of the world, forging Alexander Von Humboldt’s ‘poetics of science’, enfolding aesthetic, political and scientific goals and observations into an apparently integrated whole. Artists’ representations of coasts and populations of plants, animals and peoples made ‘on the spot’ were valued for their ‘authentic’ mimetic nature, and location-specific production. Such ‘true’ knowledge of the ‘natural world’ produced through field observation became part of the bank of measurements, samples and specimens through which distant places came to be known.

These travelling artists at times had to balance the competing needs of colonial authorities and scientific interests, such that visual inventories were often as much about scientific discovery as about fantasies of dominance and oppression. There was also a meeting of ‘art as information’ and ‘art as taste’, artists’ observation practices rarely stood apart from art historical traditions, and ultra-realist modes of image making often had to be negotiated alongside the techniques and aesthetics of European artistic training. Topographic ‘views’, more often associated with surveying and cartography, fused with European landscape aesthetics – the picturesque, the sublime – to form ‘visions’ of tropics and other distant lands characterised by rich blends of observation, iconography and imagination. These artistic images cannot be simply read then as a function of the export of European training and expertise, rendering foreign lands ‘known’ through the aesthetic regimes of ‘home’, but bear the ‘oblique stamp of indigenous actions, desires and agency’. This process disturbs any clear separation of ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ with art works forming ‘intermediaries between the new generation of artists working on the spot and the metropolitan areas of expertise, both experimenting with and diffusing new views of distant places’.
What then of contemporary geography’s engagements with artistic practices? Whilst geography is no longer exclusively a project of mapping and charting distant lands or of inventorying the world, ways of knowing and experiencing space, place and landscape still sit central to the discipline. As Poitevin-Navarre’s and Stockwell’s works suggest, artistic practice has much to contribute. Indeed, over the last few decades there has been a sustained relationship between art and geography around theories of space and place and shared practices such as mapping.28 What ties together these contemporary engagements of artists and geographers, the works in The Creative Compass and those more historical engagements of art and geography is firstly, an appreciation of the potential that blending knowledge, skills and practices can bring to our ways of understanding the world.29 Secondly, there is also arts’ ability to engage with the, at times, less known territories of everyday and intimate geographies. For geographers, artistic practices offer ways of accessing emotional worlds and engaging questions of subjectivity and identity and experiences of place that might otherwise slip past less humanistic ways of knowing.

The Proustian Map of London, for example folds together a set of cartographic practices and techniques of the gaze with the mapping of an internal landscape of personal knowledge and often private achievement - having children, developing a business, being happy.25 These personal and felt geographies are however, not only focused on individual experience. Also, Stockwell’s elaborate maps develop interwoven terrains of the worldly and the intimate. Their contentious juxtapositions of territory and currency frame the geographies of colonialism, contemporary imperial projects and global shifts in wealth and power. However, her use of ribbons and embroidery ensures that the domestic sphere across which these issues play out is firmly stitched into the fabric of the geopolitical.26 These new artworks draw then on vocabularies of geography and the grammars of cartography to focus on the exploration of subjectivity and identity and the domestic terrain, taking care however, to knit these explorations of the intimate and proximate together with more worldly geographies.

KNOWLEDGE IN THE MAKING

From the sails of Stockwell’s Empire Builders (2010), Stockwell’s collaboration with Michael Roberts, the faces of Cook, Drake, Raleigh, Livingstone and Cabot, among other renowned explorers, gaze out across the gallery. The title of the piece and its inspiration came from a poster Stockwell found which depicted these ‘Empire Builders’, the poster was part of the Empire Marketing Board’s project to promote inter-Empire trade, encouraging the British to ‘buy Empire’ and by implication to ‘buy into’ Empire.27 Whilst in the poster the faces serve to establish the historical pedigree of empire and ‘geographies paternal lines of descent’ within the exhibition these explorer-heroes are resituated amidst an enlivened account of exploration which elaborates on where and how geographical knowledge is produced.28

Nearby these figures, Poitevin-Navarre has installed X&Y mapping her genetic heritage across superimposed projections of two hemispheres. The projections were inspired by her engagement with the Society’s cartographic archives, in particular Guillaume Delisle’s Map of hemisphere meridional and septentrional of 1714 and Philippe Buache’s Map of the globe centered on the north pole and superimposed on the south pole, Buache was Delisle’s son-in-law and pupil. What drew Poitevin-Navarre to these two maps was their sense of the instability and contingency of the practice of mapping. Delisle, a French cartographer, was unsure as to who, Gallego or Dudley, had the correct coordinates of the Isles of Solom on, so he recorded them in two locations, these locations form two of the markers on Poitevin-Navarre’s wooden map.29 Whilst on Buache’s map the globe has been imagined as transparent, allowing an appreciation of the curve of the earth as you see both North America curves towards the North Pole and South America towards the South Pole.30 One of the functions of scientific texts like maps is to obscure the work involved in the production of knowledge in order to render such knowledge objective. However, the pieces made for The Creative Compass help to situate such ‘perspectiveless’ knowledge as emerging from multiple practices, culture encounters, experiences and exchanges that are embodied, and materially and socially conditioned.
In their reflections on working in the Society’s archive both Poitevin-Navarre and Stockwell emphasise the importance of the objects of exploration they found there. The equipment and ephemera that were such an important part of the expeditions and their reportage, from Livingstone’s compass and the East-African slave chains he used to show in his anti-slavery talks, to Mary Kingsley’s hat and her photographs. Influenced by her engagements with the material cultures of exploration Poitevin-Navarre searched out and arranged a series of measuring devices, rules and gauges in one of the Society’s display cases to form the piece Collection of Measuring Objects and Books. Beneath glass, fixed and framed by the case, the aestheticisation of these objects suspends but simultaneously reinforces their function, affirming the vital place of such tools in the geographical trades of surveying and cartography. The presence of these tools reminds us that knowing the world is not the sole achievement of singular, often, male figures but rather such knowledge is a practiced co-production, involving other people and objects in its development.

Also situated close to the male faces of Empire Builders are two dresses by Stockwell, Colonial Dress (2009) and Money Dress (2010). These are made from stitched together maps and bank notes respectively and place centre stage the role of the practices and experiences of women within the development of geographical knowledge. Colonial Dress made from maps that have been stitched and glued into the shape of a twenties style dress is based on a map of the British Empire from the 1920s in which occupied territories where picked out in pink. Money Dress (2010) fabricated from notes, many bearing the heads of female monarchs, is styled after the mid to late 19th century dresses worn by female explorers such as Katherine Routledge and Isabella Bird. In its form, the dress inserts the embodied practices and sensuous dispositions of the explorer back into the narratives of geographical knowledge production. Whilst the dress might look confining and restrictive, modifications made to the sleeves and the ‘losing of the fashionable bustle and heavy material enabled women to move with relative ease in these forms of explorers dresses.

Scholars have argued that many histories of geography tell of a discipline that ‘what ever it was, was almost always done by men’. Many of the works in The Creative Compass form aesthetic responses to those arguments for the need to recognise the difference that gender makes to both the production of geographical knowledge and to the project of empire. Stockwell’s dress pieces, displayed alongside Empire Builders and the other pieces in the exhibition, serve as a reminder of the ‘complex locations’ of women within the spaces of empire and of geography.

They do more than simply add a category ‘women’ into existing stories, rather they also question what may be fixed ideas of the impact of gender on the development of geography as a discipline.

Constructing the clothed body from territorial representations Stockwell’s works recall discourses of feminised nature and territory, and evoke narratives of the ‘mother-land’. We are reminded here of the gendered power relations of the map and the gaze, worlds to be ‘conquered’ and to be ‘penetrated’, activities undertaken by men, lands often imagined and described as female. As the lord-of-all-he-surveyed ‘explorer-man paints/ possess newly unveiled landscape-women’. Equally however in the symbolic ‘giving over of territory’ to the female form Stockwell is inserting ‘women’ firmly into the imperial project as monarch and as explorer, recalling the empowering function of exploration for many 19th century women. Colonialism, as a power structure founded on race rather than sex, gave white women representational power, and being-away from home liberated many female explorers. Exploration practice became for some a form of personal empowerment, their exploration being less one of external geographies and more a discovery of self and a realisation of potential away from the restrictions of pre-suffrage Britain.

Stockwell’s favouring of dress forms and so called ‘female’ techniques and materials, working with ribbon, embroidery, folding and quilting, set geopolitical debates of colonial histories, projects of exploration and present day imperialism within a new landscape. Through her pieces these issues are worked across the ‘feminine’ terrain of the home and domestic sphere, reminding us of the spaces and places across which the impacts of such worldly debates are often played out.

If Stockwell’s ‘faceless’ dress forms suggested the collective experiences of women (albeit occupying different positions), Poitevin-Navarre’s piece Fellow Artists/ Fellow Muses (2010) explores individual lives, echoing the biographical practices of recent
feminist scholars of the history of geography.11 Fellow Artists was inspired by the Society’s medal tables, inscribed in gold paint in the building’s old entranceway.12 Musing around the word ‘Fellow’, referring to the Society’s membership, Postive-Nnavarre’s work continues her exploration of personal achievement, interweaving the marginal positions of female explorers with those of female artists.13 Using the coordinates of their exhibitions, she traces the ‘geoographies’ of herself and seven ‘fellow’ female artists whom she has worked with or who have inspired her.14 Their ‘embodied genealogies’ are implicated through a lock of their hair mounted on a paint brush handle, referencing both traditions of personal keepsakes as well as contemporary narratives of DNA testing in her other work. The ethnographical approach Potive-Nnavarre has adopted to this and previous works, echoes the ‘social exploration’ that is understood as central to specifically ‘women’s ways of knowing’ often associated with female explorers and travellers, as distinct from a masculine ‘scientific’ geography.15 Whilst in the 19th century the subjective forms of knowledge which women claimed as their contribution to geography was systematically excluded from the realm of a ‘scientific’ geography, today such ethnographic and participatory techniques are much prized by the discipline, as situated, responsive and personal accounts together with poetic observations become privileged ways of accessing and engaging with research subjects.16

CONCLUSION

The works in The Creative Compass speak eloquently of the relationship between art and geography both past and present. The exhibition develops the role of art as part of blended knowledge and points towards the potential of art to contribute to the contemporary geographical project of more personal and subjective ways of knowing intertwined selves and worlds. As site-specific works engaging with the Royal Geographical Society (with BGG) it is perhaps inevitable that Stockwell’s and Potive-Nnavarre’s pieces respond to the aesthetics of empire and exploration. Displaying the works at the Society situates them as an aesthetic complement to the feminist histories of geography and to the analysis of the ‘cultures of exploration’, those material, intellectual, discursive and embodied practices and experiences through which geographical knowledge is co-produced. More than then a recovery of the place of art within geography’s understandings of space, place and landscape, artistic practice provides a means through which to unsettle the basis upon which we know. In their contribution to such broader projects these works point towards the critical potential of artistic practice within geographical scholarship, a critical potential that serves to refocus attention on accepted practices and techniques and that reframes our ways of knowing and being. In short, mapping more intimate and proximate worlds to allow us to better connect with geographies that lie beyond ourselves.

NOTES

3 See for example F. Driver, Geography Milked: Cultures of Exploration and Empire. Oxford, 2001; Driver and Jones, Hidden Histories: A Madrild, Complex Locations: Women’s Geographical Work in the UK, 1850-1970 (Oxon, 2000); J. Duncum and D. Gregory White of Passage, reading travel writing (London,1999); D. Livingstone, The Geographical Tradition, (Oxford, 1992). As these and other texts outline there are complex questions to be unpacked around geographical imperial legacies and how the contemporary discipline engages with these, as well as need to be sensitive to multiple narratives of travel expedition and to unpack these terms and practices.
4 For an indication of the RGS holdings and to investigate the collections online see http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Collections/Collec.html, last accessed 2004/10. For a discussion of the breadth of the holdings see F. Driver and L. Jones, Hidden Histories of Exploration (London, 2009).
5 For details and access to the RGS’ Unliking the Archives’ project see http://www.unlikingthearchive.org.uk/. Last accessed 26/04/10. The project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.
7 The questionnaire can be seen and filled in and further details of the project can be found at www.colourcoding.co.uk. Last accessed 26/04/10. Further details came through discussion with the artist 16/03/10 and personal communications with the artist 20/04/15 - 26/04/10.
8 Smith, European Vision, 3.
9 Ibid.
10 See Smith, European Vision and Smith, Imagining the Pacific, especially the first essay in the latter ‘Art in the Service of Travel and Science’ for an account of this relation between science, art, and travel.
11 Bernard Smith, European Vision; see also Martins, Navigating in Tropical Waters.
12 Martins, Navigating in Tropical Waters, 145. See also K. Yusoff ‘Climate
13 The continued value of sketching as a process was observed by Thomas Williams a naval officer addressing the Royal Geographical Society in the 1880s quoted in Martins, Navigating in Tropical Waters, 146.
14 Smith, European Vision, 108. As Smith notes visual records had been called for before this time, in 1685 soon after its foundation the Royal Society issued instructions for seamen requiring them to make ‘Plotts (sic) and Draughts (sic) of prospects of coasts, properties, islands and ports’ quoted in Smith, Imagining the Pacific; 52. See also discussion in C. Geary, ‘On the Spot’, Travelling Art and the Iconographic Narrative of the World, 1789-1889, in Driver and Martins, Tropical Visions 23-42.
15 Smith, Imagining the Pacific, 52.
18 As Martins Tropical Visions notes sketching from ‘memory’ was not good enough, see also Grepi, On the Spot
20 Smith’s two books European Visions and Imagining the Pacific provide accounts of the growth of this field, diagrams and two indicate the growing scope of interdisciplinary work in this field.
21 B. Douglas, Art as Ethno-Historical text: Science, Representation and Indigenous Presence in eighteenth and nineteenth century Oceanic Voyage Literature, in H. Thomas and D. Losche (eds) Double Visions, Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific (Cambridge, 1999), 65-98. These is a large theoretical and case-study literature on such ‘transculturalisation’, see for example Pratt, Imperial Eyes.

24. It is interesting to note the contemporary popularity of hybrid arts and science projects around issues such as climate change, see for example Cape Farewell, http://www.capefarewell.com/, last accessed 26/04/10, and the biopolitics of genetics and animal testing, see discussions by geographer D. Dison. ‘The Blade and the Class: Science, Art and the Lab-Borne Monster’ Social and Cultural Geography 9, (2008), 671-92.

25. This attention to the intimate and personal accords with the humanistic modes of emotional and affectual understandings that have recently come to the fore in geographical ways of knowing and engaging with the world.

26. Discussions with the artist informed these understandings of the work, 16/03/10 and email communications 20/04/10 – 27/04/10.

27. The Empire Marketing Board was established by the British Government 1925 as a form of empirical propaganda to encourage inter-empire trade through the support of scientific research, the promotion of economic analysis and publicity.


30. Personal communication with the artist.


32. Personal communications with the artists and discussion sessions during the development of the work, 16/02/10-26/04/10.

33. Personal communication with the artist, 24/04/10.

34. Personal communication with the artist, 24/04/10. Much research on women explorers engages with these debates on dress and bodily dispositions. Mary Kingsley famously refused to compromise on her type of dress, whilst other explorers gladly changed long dresses for trousers. See for example A. Blunt, Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa. (New York, 1984) and more generally N. J. Thomas, ‘Embodying Empire: Dressing the Vicereine, Lady Curzon 1898-1905’ Cultural Geography 14 (2007) 369-400 for the role of dress in the formation of subjectivity and narration of biography.


36. See for example: Blunt, Travel, Gender and Imperialism; Blunt and Rose, Writing, Women and Space; M. Domosh, ‘Towards a feminist historiography of Geography’, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 16 (1991), 95-104; Rose, Feminism and Geography: Maddrell, Complex Locations

37. Maddrell, Complex Locations.

38. Blunt and Rose, Writing Women and Space.

39. Domosh, Towards a feminist historiography of Geography; Said, Orientalism.

40. Domosh, Towards a feminist historiography; Maddrell, Complex Locations

41. e.g. Maddrell, Complex Locations: Blunt, Travel, Gender and Imperialism. These accounts are more similar to what feminist scholar Braddock and following her Maddrell has termed the ‘embodied genealogies’ of women’s experiences, R. Braddock Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and sexual difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory. (New York, 1994).

42. Personal communication with artist, 23/04/10


45. Pratt, Imperial Eyes. For a range of discussions on ‘women’s’ ways of knowing see texts listed in note 32. What unites these texts is a sensibility towards the complexity of women’s ways of knowing, grappling with questions of how to stress diversity and difference amongst ‘women’ without undermining the feminist project through an obscurity of power relations. How in short, to attend to difference in all its complexity and to account of strategic gendered subjectivity. Whilst attending to the complexities of the categories ‘woman’ Pratt and others suggest that women/towards were ‘more self reflexive, prepared to subordinate themselves to local knowledge and tended to more ethnographic urban, cartographical forms of exploration’, Maddrell, Complex Locations 81.

46. See for example discussions in Domosh, Towards a feminist historiography, 488; Maddrell, Complex Locations; Rose, Feminism and Geography.

47. Driver, Geography Militant

Interview

Rhino
Susan Stockwell, 2000

The Creative Compass artists Agnès Poitevin-Navarre and Susan Stockwell in conversation with Paul Goodwin;

Paul Goodwin is a prolific, award winning and multifaceted artist who has worked on four continents (Goldsmiths College) and the moons of Titan. He helped to set up the theoretical infrastructure of Iniva’s Creative Mapping Project as a consultant cartographer and art educator.

PAUL: What was your knowledge and impressions of geography and maps before this project?

AGNÈS: For me maps encapsulate notions of identity, nationality, borderlines and order. I get great pleasure from looking at maps, from seeing how a cartographer has resolved the translation of a landscape, seascape, urbanscape into meaningful lines and symbols, pre-empting a physical journey. I am an artist who uses the vocabulary of map-making and whilst I find geography fascinating, I am not a geographer.

The first map exhibition I saw was at Iniva in the mid 1990s. At the time I was studying at the Slade and translated my ideas in the format of video. A few years later, after the birth of my children Julien and Jasper, I created a series of portraits entitled the Colour Coding series where the faces of the sitters became maps with a variation of black and white tones labelled with food terminology. In French, my mother tongue, a person of mixed black and white racial heritage is defined amongst other things as ‘café au lait’ (coffee with cream). That piece was my first work using topographic shorthand.

Also, in my mind at the time of creating the Colour Coding series, was a beautiful poem by Jackie Kay called Pride. One line particularly captured my imagination and resonates, even now: “(…) There was a moment when my whole face changed into a map, and the stranger on the train located even the name of my village in Nigeria in the lower part of my jaw. (…)”

SUSAN: The first map piece I made was in 1988 and it was a map of Brazil made from rubber inner-tubes. Then in the late 1990’s I made a series of photos of myself as different people/nationalities, called Who am I? accompanied by map pieces made from materials that I associated with that place; for example, a tea bag map of India, a coffee filter map of South America…The accompanying material maps took over;
they were more interesting and I am more comfortable with the language of materials than of photographs.

I found geography boring at school and mapping came across as such an exact science. But even as a child I wondered how this could be so? To be accurate a scaled map of the world would have to cover the entire surface of the earth! My real knowledge of geography came from extensive travel and from that I began to love maps.

PAUL: In many ways, The Creative Compass is a site specific intervention. What kinds of research did you do for this project at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and what did you make of the building as a place, with a particular history and architecture?

SUSAN: I have been interested in the RGS-IBG building and what hidden treasures it may contain for years. I studied at the Royal College of Art next door and passed the Society often. I had an idea to make an intervention in the building with fruit and vegetable cardboard boxes from all over the world years ago but had no idea how to approach the Society. When we did the Iniva Creative Mapping project induction day there I saw an opportunity to realise this idea and also to make work in response to the building and archive. I was drawn to the sponsor’s boards in the old entrance area. It struck me that in times past, the sponsors and fellows would have been explorers and aristocrats, such as Livingstone, whereas now they are multinational corporations; companies such as Shell Oil. To me this reflects a change in culture and wealth, a shift in global power and the structure of that power.

The library archive fascinated me and I particularly enjoyed looking at the objects such as Livingstone’s compass and the photos of Mary Kingsley. I was curious to find slave trade route maps and map-like sketches made by various explorers. The glass cube gallery space is strangely neutral, very different to the club house but is an attractive space that suits my work. I like the light, ceiling height and sense of openness.

As well as researching in the archive, my own research has taken the form of hunting for materials online and all around, reading and experimenting in my studio. I see my studio as a research lab where endless research and tests are conducted and outcomes from that process feed into the art work.

AGNÉS: My art practice is very much research-based so this commission was a wonderful opportunity to explore the archives. I found a whole treasure trove of historical maps and a wealth of references that were vital to my research. I was particularly interested in the Map of London Shewing the Residencies of RGS members by James Wyld, 1843 where members dotted in the location of their gentleman’s club or house. It echoed the starting point of my anecdotal Proustian Map of London (Land of Achievement). The RGS-IBG symbolizes ideals of greatness, of dashing explorers surveying unknown territories, of a lost colonial past. Similarly and essentially, the Proustian Map of London records and anchors moments of personal greatness from the catalogue of the participants’ life.

Also, I discovered French cartographer Guillaume Delisle’s fascinating Map of Hemisphere Meridional and Septentrional of 1714; a map that informed the format of my DNA artwork, the X&Y floor piece. As Delisle was unsure of who had the correct coordinates of the Isles of Solomon, he recorded it in the two locations given by Fernand Gallego and Dudley! How daring it is to admit uncertainty on a map! It is also noticeable that the sketched coastlines are unfinished. However the breakthrough in resolving the X&Y floor piece came after seeing Philippe Buache’s Map of the globe centered on the North Pole and superimposed on the South Pole, Buache trained under Delisle, married his daughter and later succeeded him in his position as First Geographer to the King. On the RGS-IBG picture library website, that map is referred to in the following way:
not just in the sense of recycling but in a wider and more complex way. For example, a material such as rubber has its own ecological footprint. Rubber inner-tubes (from which I made work in the 1990’s) or tyres can be seen simply as a durable resource for high speed travel. However rubber has an important history and is a material that we use in a multitude of ways. Rubber makes electricity safe, creates seals, keeps us dry, provides effective contraception, and of course also enables high speed travel... My personal interests in rubber inner-tubes were initially because they contain a beautiful sculptural quality. I was also interested in them because they were free, recycled and originally from Brazil, a place close to my heart. As I began to work with the tubes and respond to what they do naturally I realised that the material was rich with meaning, history and association. I read about this history and discovered a fascinating story about the global journey of rubber extracted from the Brazilian rainforest, processed in Kew Gardens and then exported for profit to Malaysia and the East.

Similarly money, maps and sail cloth have their own meanings, histories and associations. Chosen for this exhibition at the Society, these particular materials are relevant to the space, place, its history and function. The materials have been manipulated and transformed to create sculptures, collages, cut-outs and prints that subtly discuss colonial history, present day imperialism and the shift in global power and wealth. I often choose to work with recycled materials because I like their layers of history, marks and stains from use. I am fascinated by the ways that people in developing countries recycle the materials we throw away. For example I recently saw boat sails made from lots of rice sacks stitched together in Nigeria. They were very beautiful in themselves and the fact that such an ordinary product had been transformed, through necessity, into a useful tool and a beautiful object, all at the same time, captivated me.

My aims are to make work that questions our society, our wars, the desire for power and the ownership of far flung territories. I want to highlight the importance of the ‘everyday’ and the products and materials that we take for granted, use and throw away without thought or consideration. I am interested in the ecology of our world, the materials within it and how our attitude towards them shapes our lives.

**A G N E S:** My core material is data, coded information. It takes the form of anecdotes in the Proustian Map, of artists CVs in Fellow Artists/Fellow Muses, of DNA results for X & Y. My use of wallpaper, binoculars, paintbrush has particular symbolic significance. The London boroughs of Westminster, Camden, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets were shown last year as Land of Achievement and Land of Wisdom at the Tenderpixel Gallery in framed one metre square prints. The RGS-IBG commis-
sion enabled me to print the magnificent diamond shape of London including the Greater London boroughs on a large scale. The use of wallpaper as a material provides great impact, covering the Pavilion wall from floor to ceiling. The Thames divides North and South London above eye level. The audience needs binoculars to see answers to my Proustian question in the Northern part of the city. It actually paces the reading and frames the meditative element. Binoculars were historically designed for military purposes or for the opera, bird watching, horse racing or star gazing. The wall then becomes a multi-purpose stage. My use of materials is informed by their symbolic essence.

For the Fellow Artists/Fellow Muses, I used the permanence of wood to engrave the legacy of my fellow contemporary women artists. The exhibition coordinates and locks of hair are both anchors and physical evidence that shows took place in many locations and that an artist is more than a figment of the virtual imagination. I was inspired by the work of the anthropologist Caroline Bond Day and in particular the hair samples chart that cover three pages of her book on American mixed race families in the 1930’s. I had requested from each artist, rather formally, a lock of hair and a copy of their CV’s. By accepting my invitation, these seven artists validated my practice. The piece evolved from the original idea of a ticking box, of the iconic paint box for painting, printmaking, sculpture and mixed media sub-categories. To be part of their sym­bolic essence.

Richard Lewellyn from Winsor & Newton (the art materials manufacturer who very kindly allowed me to use their beautiful brushes for this piece) shared fantastic anecdotes with me. In Victorian times, public figures used to give a small lock of hair rather than a written autograph. He informed me that in China, traditional brush makers create memento brushes from the first lock of their children’s hair. For me the eight subverted hair/paint brushes speak of the presence of these artists in the current art world.

PAUL: Susan, your work deals with big questions of trade and commerce, globalisation, colonialism and ecology, often using everyday materials and objects such as paper or tea bags to reveal the ‘stains of existence’. Gender is another big theme that you often tackle in your work, creating dresses, adornments and quilts that seductively deconstruct the gender relations of geopolitics. How has this been approached in your work for this exhibition?

SUSAN: I use a combination of materials and subvert the meaning. For example the map dresses ‘feminise’ the map by giving the territory over to the female body. I am looking at materials that appear to have a male language or are perhaps unconsciously associated with male power and then turn them into female forms. The humble quilt (A Chinese Dream currently on show at the V&A in the Quilts exhibition) becomes a critique of banking, power and shifting global politics. For this exhibition I have made a dress out of recycled money (from all over the world) in the style that British female explorers in the 1870’s wore. These appear to be very elaborate to us now but this dress was seen as practical at the time. By loosening the fashionable bustle and heavy material it enabled women to move with relative ease!

Processes play an important role, especially repetitive processes such as sewing, embroidery, quilting and binding often associated with domesticity and traditionally seen as female territory. I’m interested in geo-politics, in highlighting the futility of wars - generally considered to be a male domain - and in inequality in general. I do not want to be categorised as a ‘Feminist’ artist or a ‘Mapping’ artist or a ‘Paper’ artist but ideally as a Good Artist! In essence my work is about ideas and making and transforming these ideas into art.

AGNÈS: An aspect of your work that intrigues me is your subtle and multi-dimensional investigation of the spatialisation of achievement, both personal and political. Your use and re-appropriation of old maps, measuring implements and methods of display subtly reveal the hidden geographies and histories of recognition, validation and success that characterise the often ephemeral careers of individuals and nations. How have you dealt with these themes in this exhibition and what role does gender play in the work?

PAUL: Susan, your work deals with big questions of trade and commerce, globalisation, colonialism and ecology, often using everyday materials and objects such as paper or tea bags to reveal the ‘stains of existence’. Gender is another big theme that you often tackle in your work, creating dresses, adornments and quilts that seductively deconstruct the gender relations of geopolitics. How has this been approached in your work for this exhibition?

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the art world one has to be validated and the Fellow Artists who participated in the project did just that by giving me a lock of their hair. For this piece, I chose fellow women artists that are friends, people I have exhibited or worked with and whose work I find inspiring. I toyed with the idea of entitling the piece Fellow Artists – The One to Watch because curators, art critics and collectors should take notice of this asterism – i.e. personal constellation - of 8 women artists.

The artists and their birthplace are, in alphabetical order:

Agnès Poutine-Navarre [APN] Latitude 47° 54’ 21” N - Longitude 1° 53’ 53” E
Cleo Broda [CB] Latitude 55º 56’ 36” N - Longitude 3º 12’ 15” W
Gayle Chong Kwan [GCK] Latitude 55º 56’ 43” N - Longitude 3º 11’ 31” W
Nicholete Goff [NG] Latitude 53° 32’ 24” N - Longitude 2° 24’ 36” W
Nina Torp [NT] Latitude 59º 08’ 02” N - Longitude 10° 12’ 44” E
Rita Kregan [RK] Latitude 40º 50’ 10” N - Longitude 73º 55’ 9” W
Susan Stockwell [SS] Latitude 53º 25’ 38” N - Longitude 2º 14’ 52” W
Yara El-Sherbini [YES] Latitude 52º 54’ 37” N - Longitude 1º 30’ 50” W

Their art practices are varied including woodland based art, sculpture, printmaking, painting, video, map making, installation, photography and performance art. The fact that they are all women is a political gesture to address the difficulty of combining one’s art practice with other roles as a mother, teacher, etc. Success is relative. The most important factor is that all these Fellow Artists are practicing artists and this piece is there to celebrate them and to raise their profile.

In Greek mythology, there are nine muses so I very boldly requested a lock of hair from a few internationally renowned women artists. Cornelia Parker was away on the other side of the world on a residency. Sophie Calle, Adrian Piper and Rebecca Horn didn’t reply, nor did Brigit Riley. Janine Antoni’s gallerist explained: “Where Janine comes from, it is taboo to give away your hair… unfortunately she is not going to be able to work with you on this project, but she wishes you luck.”

PAUL: In much contemporary art, beauty seems to be a secondary consideration, if it is considered at all. Is beauty important in your work?

SUSAN: Yes, although beauty is important, I think the concept behind the work is of equal if not more importance. I see beauty as a tool to engage the audience, to draw people in to look at the work so that they can then see the deeper meanings; to see what the piece is made from. Beautiful work means audiences that aren’t art savvy can engage with the work and so if I’m working with kids or on a community project outside of the art world context they can get something from the work.

PAUL: As the first female artists to exhibit at the RGS-IBG, what do you think the significance of this exhibition will be?

SUSAN: In the bigger picture I think it’s very important - the fact that there is a cross over of disciplines. This is relevant to contemporary issues of global and feminist politics. Hopefully this opportunity will help to open up the RGS-IBG archive and knowledge to a broader audience. However the relevance to the art world, art and other artists will only have impact if artists, critics and curators go to see it. Then this will help to foster a broader interdisciplinary dialogue between geography, art and contemporary culture.

AGNES: I hope the show will surprise and inspire traditional geographers. I agree with Susan, the art world needs to take notice too. The RGS-IBG is demonstrating that they are moving in a new direction, that it is not just lip service. Dedicating the space for two months to two contemporary artists is a bold statement. That shatters any mistaken perception of the traditional old boys’ club. More than one thousand Londoners participated in the Proustian Map of London project so it would be good for them to walk through the doors and discover the space. Susan and I could be recorded as the precursors of a new era, where this magnificent pavilion becomes a more permanent art space!
Fellow Artists/Fellow Muses
Agnès Poitevin-Navarre, 2010

X&Y
Agnès Poitevin-Navarre, 2010

Proustian Map of London
(Land of Achievement)
Agnès Poitevin-Navarre, 2010

left: Exhibition Pavilion, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)
Agnès Poitevin-Navarre, 2010

Agnès Poitevin-Navarre
Susan Stockwell

Afghanistan-A Sorry State
Susan Stockwell, 2010

Empire Builders (detail)
Susan Stockwell, 2010

Colonial Dress
Susan Stockwell, 2010

left: Money Dress, Exhibition Pavilion, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)
Susan Stockwell, 2010
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