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Map as Metaphor

Paper Abstract for 'Mercator Revisited: cartography in the age of discovery'

25-28 April 2012, Sint-Niklaas, Belgium,

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Inge Panneels is an artist and academic whose recent work, such as the Liverpool Map, has extensively utilised mapping processes. Inspired by the Mercator Museum Collection in Sint-Niklaas, a new body of work entitled Map-i will assimilate 500 years of map-making to coincide with the anniversary of the birth of Mercator.

"500 years of Mercator; a window on the world: the map as metaphor"

This paper will pay tribute to the 500th anniversary of the birth of Mercator and will discuss how his physical process of producing globes and global mapping has inspired the work of one artist and how his visual vocabulary has been used by other international artists as a global language.

Mercator considered his life's most significant work to be the publication of *Atlas sive Cosmographicae*, a synthesis of the history of heaven and earth, an issue of particular relevance to the museum's collection of terrestrial and celestial globes. Starting out as a skilled engraver, Mercator was able to transfer his two-dimensional drawing skills as cartographer to the production of three-dimensional globes and, in the process, was able to develop a more cost effective method of making globes thus encouraging their relative mass-production. Mercator would apply twelve segments of engraved and printed maps onto a moulded papier-maché globe. This relationship of the two-dimensional map and the three-dimensional globe is explored in *Map-i* whereby flat round maps are formed and slowly manipulated into a globe. This marriage of manual and mechanized process, used in Mercator's work, finds resonance in the development of *Map-i*. The Mercator Museum is currently developing a project called 'Mercator 2012' with the purpose of digitalizing the Mercator archive. An artist-in-residency scheme will allow this collaboration to develop. Using a combination of ancient engraving techniques, not dissimilar to those used by Mercator, artworks that take the form of glass globes will be made and inscribed, combining the ancient techniques with contemporary scribing and cutting techniques based on digital mapping files.

The proposal is that the choice of glass will be an apt metaphor as a window on the world. The re-consideration of the Mercator globes from the 16th century and their expanded

mechanistic worldview, critical in the Age of Discovery and informed by world exploration and early astronomical observations, will contrast the 21st century digital quantum worldview.

Maps have acted as a universal metaphor and have been used throughout cultures and time to visually organize information; a process that has traditionally been interpreted by artists, who were often employed as early cartographers. Artists have also, by extension, used map iconography to express their own ideas about the world. According to the Victoria and Albert Museum's 'Mapping the Imagination' exhibition guide in 2008, 'maps offer us a means of describing and understanding the intangible', but a map is never truly a objective instrument but rather one shaped by its time and coloured by political, social and cultural conditions. It will argue that artists have explored the potential to be subversive and create works using maps as metaphors rather than purely as measurements of high fidelity. The paper will also discuss the 'Liverpool Map'; a large three-dimensional glass sculpture that uses mapping to give both form and content to the work. In order to place this in context, case studies of the work of several international artists will be discussed and their ideas show-cased. The case studies will describe how artists have used maps as visual backdrops and assimilated maps into their works of art. They will demonstrate the use of both traditional hand-drawn and contemporary digital mapping techniques to gather and order complex data to create artworks. They will question maps as instruments of truth-telling. This is the notion of the map as metaphor.

Keywords: map, metaphor, map as art, Liverpool Map, Mercator, globes

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