

Matthew Picton @ Nancy Toomey

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

by Mark Van Proyen



The City of London (1700 to 1900), 2020, archival photographs, cut paper, pins, foam board, 72 x 137 x 3 inches

Traditionally, art has commemorated people, places and events, lest they be lost to the sands of time. But what happens when those shifting sands are the things being commemorated? Matthew Picton's exhibition of ten recent works provides fascinating answers. The dates of these works range from 2016 to 2023, pointing to the labor-intensive nature of the artist's process. Using archival pigment, he prints digital photo collages onto archival paper of varying thicknesses. He then undertakes the painstaking process of cutting elaborate perforations into the printed material before reassembling the pieces in two or three layers suspended atop one another with about an inch between them. When you walk past these works, the perspective shifts subtly, creating an enlivening animated effect.

The net results of this process are very similar to those seen in diachronic maps, used by archeologists use to display layers of an excavated site to show how it evolved from one phase to the next over time. In Picton's work, this representation of time is signaled by layering and his presentation of cities (or city maps) from high altitudes.



Venice, 'Casanova,' 2016, archival boards, inks, photographs and film posters, 54 x 81 x 5.5 inches

The City of London, 1700 to 1900 (2020), the largest work on view, is a good example. It consists of five adjacent vertical panels connected by the River Thames, which snakes horizontally through them from left to right. It is the darkest work in the exhibition, reflecting the Dickensian London of the 19th century. It bespeaks a dirty urban landscape covered in coal soot and drenched in desperate poverty, a fertile hunting ground for Bram Stoker's famous vampire, Arthur Conan Doyle's intrepid detective and Oscar Wilde's immortal dandy.

Venice, 'Casanova' (2016) looks down on the famous island city, revealing the winding canal and details of its labyrinthine street plan with cut paper perforations. In this instance, Picton employed posters from Federico Fellini's 1977 film *Casanova*, which he cut and reassembled to locate aspects of the film's story near the time and place of its

original 18th-century telling. At once opulent and decrepit, the Venice of Casanova's time, as Picton captures it, is a hive of historical ghosts that point to the story of its most famous citizen.

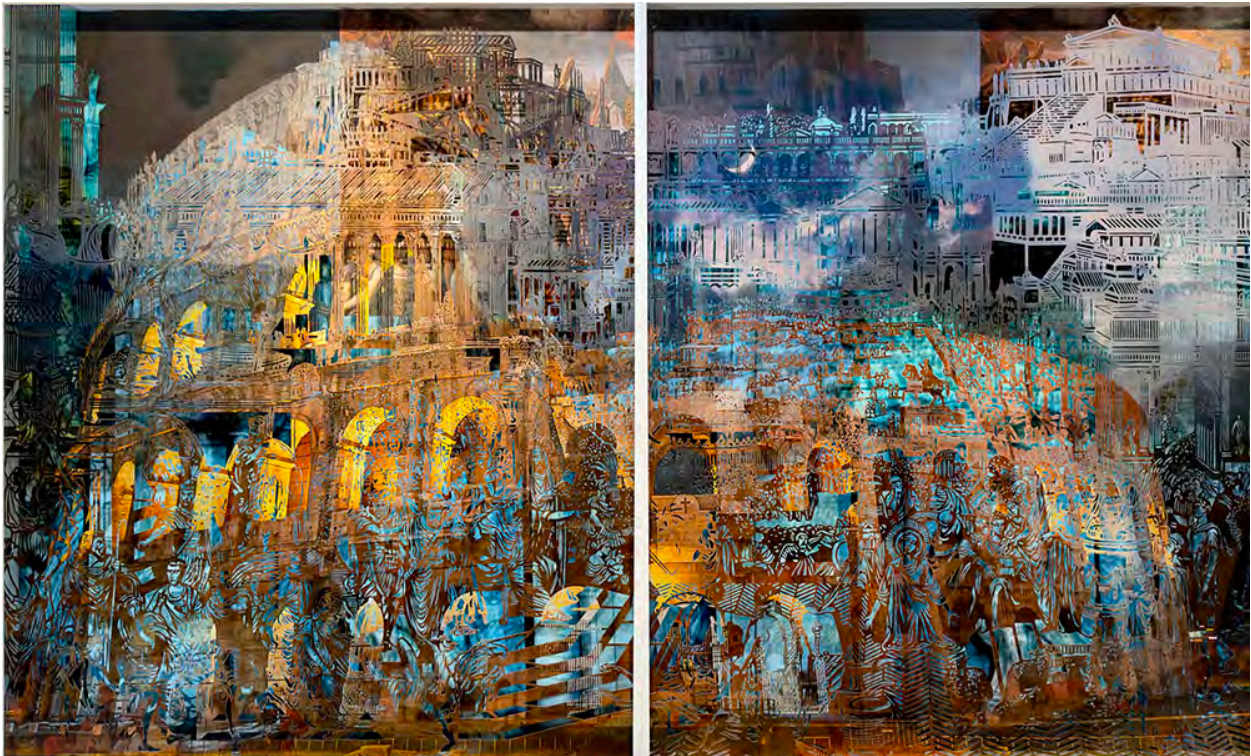


Rio de Janeiro, 'The City of God,' 2017, archival prints and photographs, pencils, film posters, pins, 53 x 53 x 4 inches

Rio De Janeiro and 'The City of God' (2017) differ in that they're done in a circular format. In these, Picton doesn't recapitulate the street plan of that famously chaotic Brazilian city; instead, he conveys it by bisecting the composition vertically. On the left side, we see the encroaching jungle, while the right shows an array of radiating red stripes that are less a representation of boulevards than they are a salute to the Apollonian stylistics of Brazilian Modernism, better realized in the famously sterile capital city of Brasilia than in Rio's outlying Dionysian jungle and interior favelas. The title *City of God* refers to a 2002 film directed by Fernando Meirelles, reflecting

hardscrabble lives in Rio, a subject to which Picton's piece seems only tangentially related.

Some of the works do not use overhead vantages. *Forum*, a two-panel work, looks at the Coliseum from ground level, alluding to when it was used to make popular spectacles of Christian persecution. The building is portrayed at night, bathed in the kind of light that we might associate with the premier of a major motion picture. Does the piece celebrate the anti-Christian legacy of the building, or does it make a more general comment on the use of Bread and Circuses to placate and manipulate the proverbial mob? Either way, it is a stunning piece that reflects on a historical quagmire central to Western civilization: the hidden mendacity memorialized by "heroic" monuments.



Forum, 2023, archival digital prints and photographs, 48 x 82 x 3 inches

All of the work Picton presents in this exhibition portrays places of historical centrality, but it does so by reflecting second-hand, quasi-fictionalized accounts of them, slyly destabilizing their implied triumphalism. The ornamentation of the layered cut-paper technique facilitates the visual transition from material site to connotative narration, showing how the latter supersedes and displaces the former in the realm of cultural

reflection, proving, among other things, that we no longer have to be there because there is less an actual place than it is a hall of oblique mirrors.

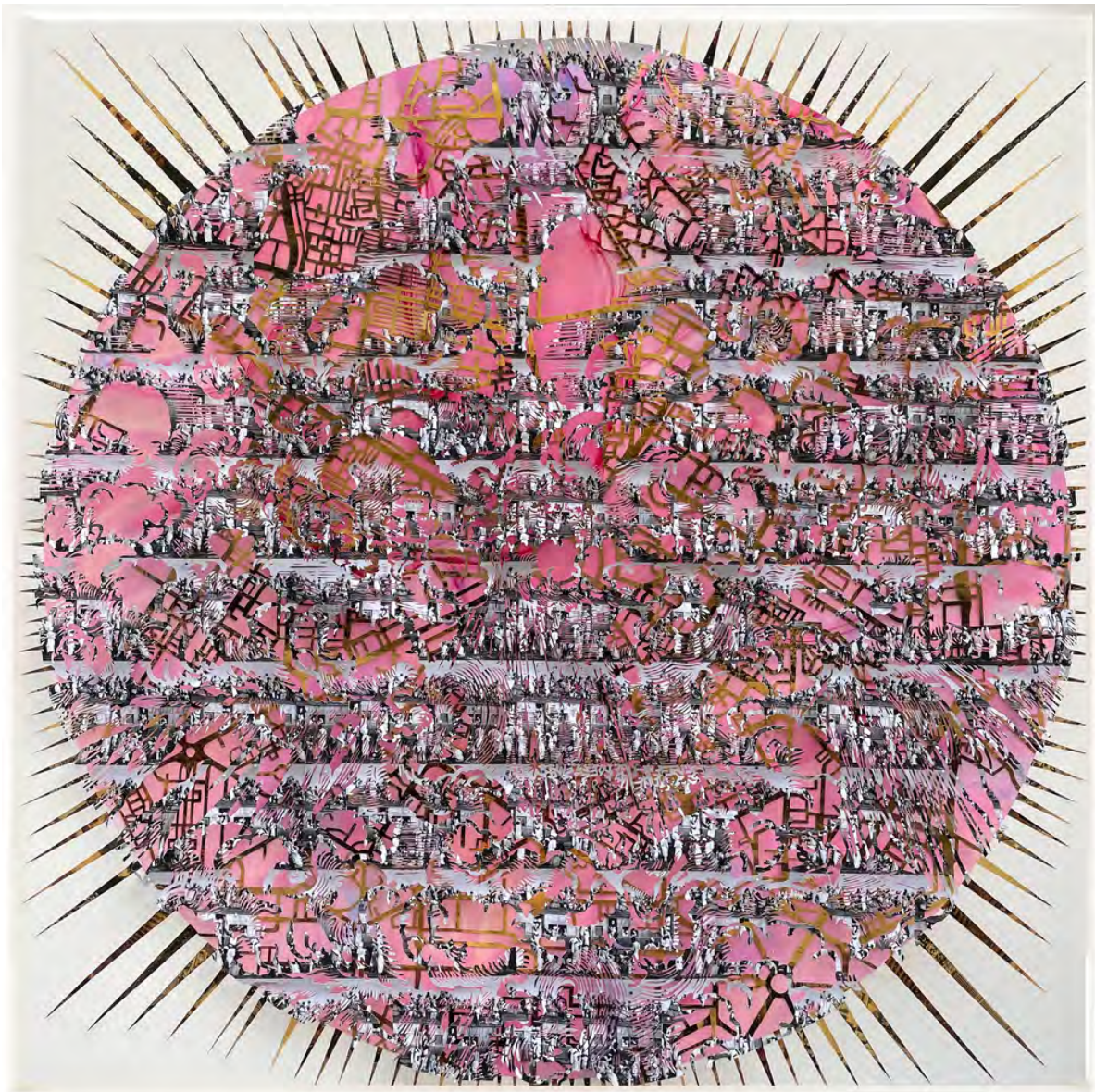
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Matthew Picton: "A Seeker's Paradise" @ [Nancy Toomey Fine Art](#) through March 15, 2024.

About the author: Mark Van Proyen's visual work and written commentaries emphasize the tragic consequences of blind faith in economies of narcissistic reward. Since 2003, he has been a corresponding editor for Art in America. His recent publications include *Facing Innocence: The Art of Gottfried Helnwein* (2011) and *Cirian Logic and the Painting of Preconstruction* (2010). To learn more about Mark Van Proyen, read [Alex Mak's interview](#) on Broke-Ass Stuart's website.

Matthew Picton @ Nancy Toomey

FEBRUARY 3, 2022
by [David M. Roth](#)



New Delhi #2, 1947, 2021, cut and altered photographs, Yupo paper, archival inks, 64 x 64 inches

Why, as of late, have so many artists taken up mapping as a means of representing the world? One apparent reason is that maps are prescriptive. They supply directions that can be reliably followed. Artist-made maps, by contrast, challenge consensus reality by subjecting “facts” to experience and imagination, depicting the character of that experience as something shaped not just by geography but by everything else that impacts human life: politics, war, natural disasters, race, religion and culture.

Drawing from literature, art and music, Matthew Picton extends and further complicates his longstanding practice of depicting pivotal historical events with multi-layered cityscapes built of cut paper. The Age of Kali, the artist’s current exhibition, doesn’t adhere to map-based constructions to the degree seen in earlier exhibitions. Even so, the artist continues to use vestiges of them to visually summon the overlapping (and often opaque) forces that have shaped civilization and repeatedly pushed it to the brink.

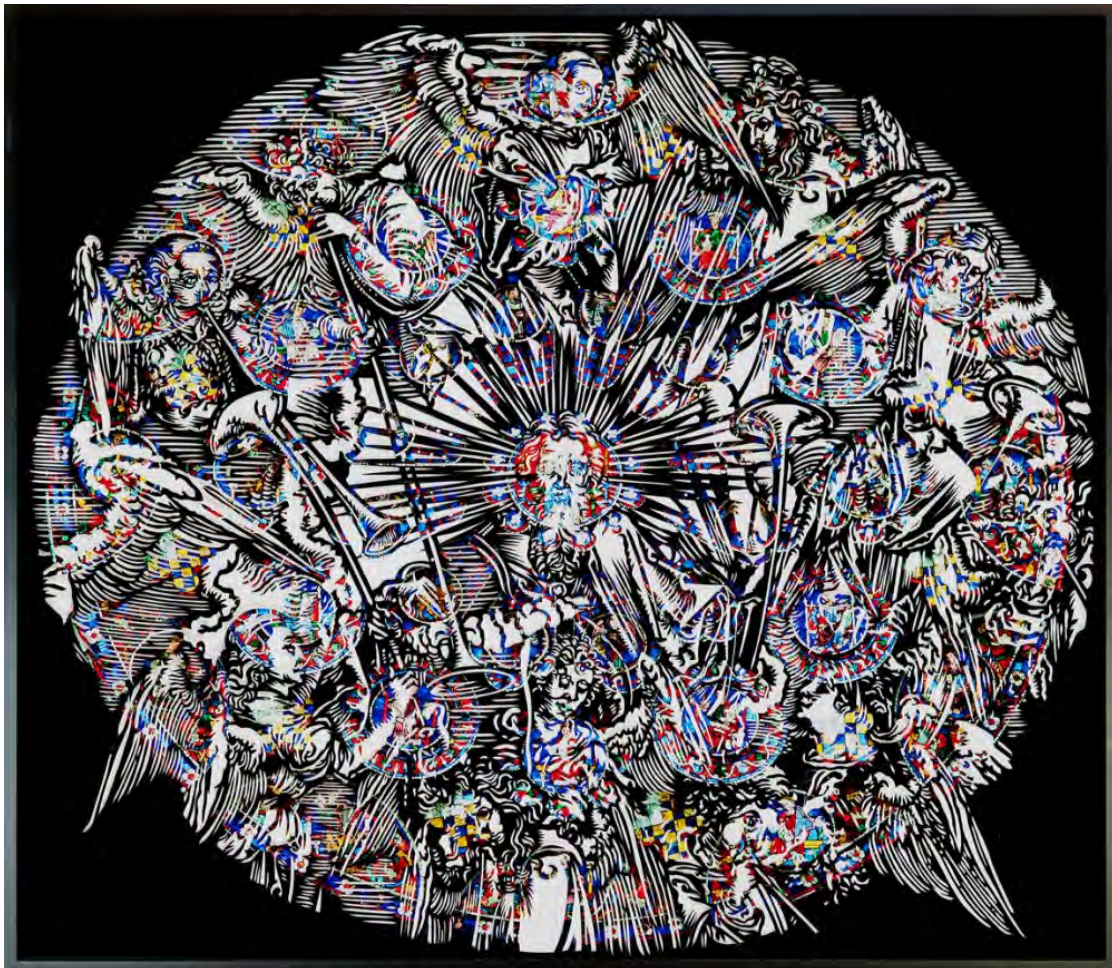


The Age of Kali, 2021, altered archival print, plexiglass, 52 1/4 x 38 1/2”

His primary tool in enacting these visions is the Exacto knife. He wields it with a virtuoso touch, turning visual source material into intricate, semi-transparent skeins held in place by plexiglass “sandwiches” through which photo-based backdrops can be glimpsed. To look is to engage in a mental two-step in which the eye constantly shifts between foreground and background. Given that a good bit of what’s pictured consists of cut-up reproductions of everything from Dürer woodcuts to the stained-glass windows of Chartres Cathedral, it’s not always easy to discern Picton’s intent. However, the preponderance of apocalyptic references, the conceptual linchpins of the series, does clarify one thing: the artist believes we’re on the eve of destruction.

His targets — colonialism, capitalism, tribalism and religious intolerance — come in for serious drubbing, and rightly so. Yet, there’s nothing manipulative or overly didactic about his treatment of these subjects; their shot-through, labyrinthine construction mirrors the murky imprint of the distant past and leaves much to the imagination. And where ambiguity threatens to overwhelm, Picton

supplies vital information as a kind of navigational legend. *New Delhi # 2, 1947*, the most easily apprehended of the 13 works on view, shows a spiky pink orb overlaid with horizontal photo strips. Each depicts the exodus, by train, of some 15 million people who became refugees after India was partitioned into two nations. What goes unpictured (but strongly) implied is the violence that claimed millions of lives in the wake of Britain's departure and the country's descent into chaos. Such upheavals, Picton reminds us, aren't modern phenomena. "Prior to the British," he writes, "there had been seven incarnations of Delhi. Scattered across the expanse of today's vast metropolis lie the ruined monuments, mosques, mausoleums of the ancient cities, witness to the rise and fall of past civilizations and empires." A similarly constructed companion piece, *New Delhi #1*, shows remnants of those cities (Mehrauli, Siri, Tughlakabad, Firoz Shah Kotla, Jahanpanah, Dinpanah, Shahjahanabad) superimposed across a concentric diagram of the British empire's imperial capital. Atop all this, Picton overlays what he calls an "amalgamated template," a finely cut paper lattice based on storm clouds taken from Dürer's woodcuts. The result is a visual maelstrom befitting those events.



The Angels and the Horns, 2021, cut and altered photograph, Tru View optimum UV plexi, 35.375 x 41 inches

The exhibition's title piece, *The Age of Kali*, combines Christian and Hindu prophecy with repeated images of the Indian goddess interleaved with a shattered reproduction of Dürer's

archangel Michael. Both figures are protectors, but in Picton's handling, their powers appear to be waning. Indian cosmology, the artist informs, divides time into yugas, with our current "age of darkness," the age of Kali, ending 70 years from now, at which point the cycle of death and rebirth begins anew.

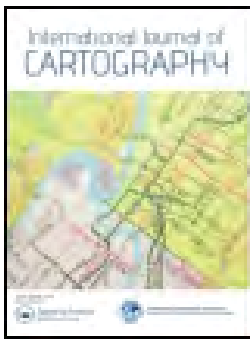
In two pieces based on stained-glass windows at Chartres — one depicting the Apocalypse, the other the Last Judgement — Picton again calls on Durer using imagery based on Revelations. Both convey, with equal force, the luminescent beauty of the cathedral and the specter of divine retribution. Elsewhere, Spain's disastrous incursion into the Americas, the firebombing of Dresden and the wildfires that recently consumed large tracts of the West get similar treatment.

The obvious point of this exercise is to induce consciousness. Because as Faulkner famously observed, the past, whether we realize it or not, remains ever-present: a warning to those who willfully obfuscate or unwittingly forget. The bigger question posed is whether remembrance alone can break the vicious cycles that have thus far defined the past.

Matthew Picton: "The Age of Kali" @ [Nancy Toomey Fine Art](#) through February 26, 2022.

About the author:

David M. Roth is the editor and publisher of Squarecylinder.



Matthew Picton's Urban Narratives. Or how a three-dimensional paper map can beam you into the London bombing nights of 1940

Thomas Streifeneder & Barbara Piatti

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Matthew Picton's Urban Narratives. Or how a three-dimensional paper map can beam you into the London bombing nights of 1940

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A curious look quickly drifting into imagination

The first impression is a delicate paper city with a river. Homes and blocks of houses formed from printed pages. The buildings are open at the top, the words and the text fragments unfold inside, in stylish typography, with some passages in capital letters, most of them clearly legible: 'Like lost souls leaking', 'Fear', 'Germany's full force', 'the last of sunset', 'safety curtain' ... But the most striking are its burnt, scorched parts. A paper city badly destroyed by fire: what a powerful image. If you have not already guessed, the title of the four-part work (4 panels) provides the information about the place and time: 'London 1940'. The dimensions: 37"×30".

Picton's sculptural maps are so fascinating and so convincingly prepared as allusive reliefs that one is literally sucked into them. Suddenly, you undertake a psychogeographical trip walking through dark, unlit street canyons with illuminated façades on both sides. The walls have become huge projection surfaces with man-sized letters telling place-based stories. The sentences drive you from house to house, street to street in a fantastic walkable narrated space.

Because written words don't tell everything

Matthew Picton, born in London in 1960, studied history and political science at the London School of Economics from which he graduated, before making a name for himself as a self-taught artist from 1998 onwards. This unusual shift away from an academic career to art took place because, according to his own statements, there were not enough opportunities to express himself in print, and the visual world seemed much more enticing. Today Matthew lives and works in Ashland, Oregon (USA), whereas his work is exhibited both in Europe and the USA, in renowned galleries and museums, is reviewed in leading art journals. His background, his interest in history, literature and politics lie very much at the core of his art – before he starts the actual artistic process on one of his city paper sculptures, there is a long research period. For Venice (2012), Thomas Mann's 'Death in Venice' formed the basis, as well as the scores of Benjamin Britten (Picton, 2012a). For Amsterdam (2012) Picton has chosen Albert Camus' novel 'The Fall' and Anne Frank's diary (Picton, 2012b). For Berlin (2015) Picton made

a collage, using a city plan of the interwar period and posters of three famous Berlin movies – Rainer Fassbinder’s ‘Berlin Alexanderplatz’, based on the novel of the same name by Alfred Döblin, Wim Wender’s ‘Wings of Desire’ and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s ‘The Lives of Others’ (Picton, 2015). What these stories have in common is that these are all canonical, famous works that are essential to the collective memory and to the image of the city. But to be able to perceive these cultural layers of meaning, complementing the material dimension of cities, one must already know about them: They are – needless to say – invisible, when you move around the city. It is Matthew Picton’s paper city map sculptures that make them visible in a very poetic, haunting way – his works make it obvious that history and fictions are inscribed, inseparably linked with the body of a city. A city consists of so much more than buildings, streets and infrastructure.

Meaningful paper collages for never-ending associative flows

Matthew Picton realises fictional cities by creating sculptural maps with paper. He assembles many hundred upright paper pieces and composes paper architectures, small-scale urban landscapes or paper cityscapes that seem to grow out of a classic city map, ‘[...] deconstructing the clean, uncompromising aesthetic of the cartographic city plan [...]’ (Picton, 2021a). The specific humanistic-artistic approach of Picton enables a profound confrontation with urban environments due to an innovative combination of place, text and history (or story). Based on long document research, he uses bits and pieces of literary texts that directly relate to distinct periods of the relative city’s history. Or he employs stories that are located in or thematically linked to the created urban cartographic landscape. Thus, the authenticity of his work is based on the geographic map-based representation and georeferenced texts creating place-based fictional relationships:

I also look for poetic descriptions that express the atmosphere or character of the place in a way that is compelling and evocative. I’m not looking for dry factual accounts of a place, instead, I aim to work with literature that creates a more visceral, lasting impression of a particular place and time. I also prefer to work with texts written by writers from that particular place so there is authenticity in the voice. (inthemake, 2013)

Picton’s Urban Narratives depict the ‘hard’ (geography) and ‘soft’ (history, fiction) information of places in one piece of artful mapping. In other words, Picton adds to 3-D-maps a fourth (history by means of charred paper buildings) and a fifth dimension (explanatory texts or background information by means of literary texts).

Emotive-visual reminders – the charred fictionscapes of London’s wartime

The Urban Narratives ‘London 1940’ are impressive sculptures ‘carefully burnt to recreate’ (Picton, 2021b) (Figure 1). They are strong emotional reminders of the painful past, and of the biographies and the lives that were erased. The paper buildings and quarters are scorched or burnt in whole or in part according to the historically recorded devastation by the bombs of the German air force in WW2. The charred paper houses work as a strong visual impact, as they make the extent of the destruction apparent. The four panels are a ‘visual history’ (mapsandcartography, 2017) based on original bomb damage maps (Bomb Sight, 2021). They create an effect comparable to the extraordinary



Figure 1. Matthew Picton – London 1940 – four panels (2012) depicting different wards of East London during WW2 (photo: Rob Jaffe, © Matthew Picton, used with permission).

experience in the current exhibition 'Dresden 1945' in the city's Panometer. From the 15 m high visitor's tower that simulates the panorama from the Dresden's Town Hall you have a breath-taking 360-degree view that takes you on a horrible journey back in time, namely to the immediate aftermath of the Allied bombing raids in 1945. A panorama that reveals the extent of devastation and a reminder of what occurred in many other German and European cities. In 'Dresden 1945' (2010), Picton himself thematized

the destruction of Dresden with a sculpted map as a 'silent testament to the former inhabitants of Dresden and the vanished life lived within it' (Picton, 2010).

Storytelling adds atmosphere

The letters covering Picton's buildings also remind you of all the burned libraries, books and diaries. From there, it is only a small step to Elias Canetti's novel 'Auto da Fé' (1935) and the mad doctor Peter Kien who burned his legendary library. These associations work through the effective use of the texts, the lettering of the paper urban landscapes, and the fact that the sculptural maps and 3-D models seemingly grown out of a city map are labeled. The language arising from the combination of fragmented texts and buildings makes the art work deeply human. The pages taken from novels, which thematize love and hope, fear and violence during the war, result in a moving symbiosis of topography, history, emotions, adding another atmospheric layer to Picton's map. In his 'London 1940' piece, Picton worked with extracts from four carefully chosen novels (each of them building the basis for one of his four panels), all of them dealing with the everyday life – and survival – during the tense phase of the bombing raids. Graham Greene's 'The Ministry of Fear' (1943) is set when the damages occurred during the Blitz with all the human tragedies linked to it. Elizabeth Bowen's 'The Heat of the Day' (1948) unfolds in the atmosphere of crime and espionage, telling a love story against the backdrop of the criminal underworld that flourished during the war. Both Greene and Bowen were eyewitnesses of the bombing nights, they lived in London during WW2 and hence first-hand experiences have been incorporated into their fictional accounts, which gives them a special stamp of authenticity (Greene even worked as an air raid warden at the time). The two other textual sources have been written by contemporary authors. Rosie Alison's 'The Very Thought of You' (2009) explores the effects on familial and romantic relations as a result of evacuation. And Christopher Fowler's 'Full Dark House' (2003) introduces two cranky elderly detectives who met decades ago as young men in wartime London. The flashbacks to the 1940s have been praised by reviewers as a riveting account of London during the Blitz. According to Picton himself, these texts combined 'present a portrait of social life in London during the 1940s' (Picton, 2021c). Since the artist includes just sentence fragments and individual words (again: very thoughtfully chosen), one wants to read the whole texts to put that particular fictional puzzle together. And maybe to compare the original sources with his or her own imaginative performance that completed the fictional gaps in the map.

Destroyed cities – mapped with paper or concrete

There are also a number of interesting parallels in both concept and content between the works of the British artist Matthew Picton and those of the Italian Alberto Burri (1915-1995). Burri's work 'Grande Cretto (Great Crack) Gibellina' is dedicated to devastation of the Sicilian town of Gibellina, which was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1968 (Cao, 2021). While preserving the former streetscape, Burri covered the entirety of the ruins in concrete. Despite diverging scale and material, his visual-emotional approach shows many similarities to that of Picton, especially because Cretto is also based on correct local-geographical reminiscences and evokes strong feelings towards a place

that once was full of life but has been catastrophically destroyed. And it is interesting to see, for instance in the 'Grande bianco plastica' ('Large White Plastic', 1964) composed by burned plastic on aluminum stretcher, that Burri also worked with fire and melted plastic sheets making allusions to skin and wounds, but in a purely abstract idiom.

The text inscriptions on Picton's urban paper walls also remind us of the inscriptions attached to historical buildings informing us about a personality or an event inextricably linked to a certain place but whose history remains invisible and thus, unreadable. Picton's works somehow continue this tradition, simultaneously transforming it by breathing (literary and historical) life into streets, neighborhoods, and entire cities. As with the help of inscriptions, Picton succeeds in making the literary inscription of urban environments visible and thus tangible. The houses, the neighborhoods and the whole city begin to speak and it seems as if a liberating ontological metamorphosis is taking place. A city and its history get a voice.

Towards an inspiring, aesthetically pleasing literary cartography?

Apart from all the associations already described, this is why we have chosen Matthew Picton's London city sculptures: We think they might act as powerful sources of inspiration, especially for the entire field of literary cartography. Mapping literature – this somewhat audacious combination of cartography and literary studies – looks back on a long tradition of over a hundred years, usually to be found under the umbrella term literary geography. Core questions were and still are where fiction is set and why precisely there, and how this interplay between 'real' space and narrated space can be presented and interpreted in such a way that we learn more both about the text and more about the place. Literary geography experienced a real take-off after Franco Moretti's epoch-making work 'Atlas of the European Novel' (1998). Since then, to put it briefly, literary geography and spatial literary studies have been booming. 'Mapping Literature' is the theme of research projects worldwide, of numerous dissertations and publications, of conferences, colloquia and seminars, and the approach has also been included in a variety of handbooks. Now more than ever, everything can be mapped, hence also literary content, and it is becoming increasingly possible to prepare, georeference and visualise large amounts of data on maps. However, here comes the big but. Although there is so much research going on in literary cartography, where are the ravishingly beautiful maps, the maps with aesthetic pretensions that inspire thought and imagination? In the course of researching this essay, we sifted through many, many literary maps of recent years – we had the impression (which now needs to be substantiated) that not much new has happened. Ambitious, experimental visualisations are missing. Literary maps would have to differ in some way from, say, maps for campsites, shopping centers, art galleries, bars or parks. But do they? Admittedly, the magic of literature connecting with a place is very difficult to depict, perhaps impossible with conventional means. Against this backdrop Matthew Picton's maps (perhaps precisely because they superficially have no scientific pretensions) are a true enlightenment. We read them as one adequate answer to the question of how literature can be translated into maps, visualising the interplay between fictional and real-referential spaces in a stimulating way. This is a plea that we – especially the community of literary cartographers – should deal much more intensively with artistic mapping. Perhaps new approaches will emerge here?

Sculptural writing – discovering literature through visual art

In conclusion, Matthew Picton's artistic cartographies are, as shown, very inspiring, since they trigger associations in many directions. One can hardly escape their pull. One wants to learn more about the artist, his intentions, his techniques (by the way, there are some thought-provoking essays by the artist and a series of interviews with himself in conversation with curators and art experts on video platforms). One wants to delve into the material he uses and definitely look for those historical bomb damage maps and of course read the four novels! One wants to study more of his works, on Venice, for instance. What an ingenious idea – the paper houses, this time formed from the book pages of Thomas Mann's novella 'Death in Venice' and Benjamin Britten's congenial score, submerged in the muddy waters of the lagoon in their lower part during the process of creation, so that their 'foundations' are already in a mode of dissolution. A uniquely material way of translating the history of a city into a cartographic object, and the damp counterpart to the burnt spots on the 'London 1940' map.

Undoubtedly, the current Corona pandemic will also provide a series of new and hopefully sophisticated literary testimonies (some texts have already been written and published, including a whole new genre under the name 'Corona Diaries'), which, among other things, capture in literary form how life and the rhythm of life in the cities has changed. The discourse is already in full swing that the inner cities will get new structures and thus new faces, that they will no longer be as they were before. A chance?! So will there perhaps one day be another Matthew Picton London map, after the cholera ('London 1666') and the bombings ('London 1940'), whose contents refer to the years 2020/21?

The transformed countryside – depicting the wounds and scars of vanished landscapes

Even here, the flow of thoughts does not stop. Until now, Picton has created an entire series of literary-cultural-historical cityscapes, urban narratives making invisible layers of meaning visible. But how about the numerous, equally rich literary landscapes in combination with the history of their transformation? We see a huge potential for innovative cartographic approaches and artistic mapping of rural transformations. We are thinking, for example, of the countless literary works from the mid-nineteenth century to contemporary periods dealing with impressive evocations of a rural life that has disappeared forever, in almost all regions of Europe and, of course, beyond. John Berger's farmers in the remote areas of the mountains in Savoy ('Pig Earth', 1979), Roy Jacobson's fishermen's family on the rocky shores of Barroy ('The Unseen', 2013), an Island at the coast of Norway, or Ignazio Silone's 'Fontamara' (1933), an unforgettable story about the political and economic fate of the mountain farmers in a fictitious village (which could exist or could have existed) in the middle of the barren landscape of Abruzzo. Would it not be exciting to have paper map sculptures of these vanished landscapes with their dense fabric of stories? We think so, but we have to stop here ... However, it has certainly become clear that we recommend the study of Matthew Picton's sculptural maps in many respects: They impressively show that multidisciplinary approaches can produce eye- and mind-opening results.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Artbeat: Sculptor says maps provide structural underpinning

[T ashlandtidings.com/lifestyle/artbeat-ashland-sculptor-says-maps-provide-structural-underpinning](https://www.ashlandtidings.com/lifestyle/artbeat-ashland-sculptor-says-maps-provide-structural-underpinning)



Matthew Picton is a preeminent London-born international artist who is represented by Toomey Tourell Gallery in San Francisco as well as by Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland.

His work has been featured and reviewed in ArtForum, Artnews, Art Ltd, Artweek and others, and he has been exhibited at the Portland Art Museum and at the De Young in San Francisco, as well as in various museums collections globally.

Picton lives and works in Ashland. I caught up with the artist last week.

JG: Matthew, what is the significance of maps as a format for expression in your work?

MP: I have long used maps in my work. I see them as providing a structural and locational underpinning for the subject matter these days.

The maps occupied a more prominent place in the work I was doing 12 or more years ago. At that time I saw the three-dimensional map sculptures I was making as being vehicles for an imagination of place and locale.

As time went on however I found that the maps brought to mind an awareness of history and events that had taken place within the spaces demarcated by them. My work took a shift and became much more concerned with history and in a sense the maps became a supporting structure/form.

JG: How did you end up in Oregon?

MP: My creative and artistic background did not in fact lead me to Oregon, it was more personal reasons that led me here. I first lived in Seattle after I left the [United Kingdom] and then went on to live in New York and San Francisco.

Oregon is a beautiful state to live and work in and here in Ashland you can find the space and time to fully concentrate.

JG: Tell us about your 2019 work, specifically the hand cut archival prints?

MP: The most recent body of work I am creating has been focused on embedding imagery from the 16th century with more contemporary material.

Specifically, I have been cutting archival photographs with enlarged woodcuts from Durer's 1498 series illustrating The Book of St. John at the end of the Bible. Ever since the New Testament humanity has been fixated upon the notion of the final judgment and the Apocalypse.

For most of the 16th century artists were particularly obsessed with the subject and this probably provides a view into the mindset of humanity on Europe at that time. It was also the period when Christopher Columbus opened up the Americas for exploration.

The film "The Aguirre Wrath of God," [Werner] Herzog's film of the delusional conquistador Aguirre Lopez's journey in to the Amazon basin, appears to embody the dark side of the spreading message of Christianity into the new world.

Klaus Kinski's mesmerizing portrayal of the psychopathic conquistador seems the very embodiment of "The Angel of The Apocalypse" and thus an eminently suitable subject to be combined with one of Durer's Angels heralding the apocalypse.

It could be argued that repercussions from the cycles of death and destruction, the greed, environmental destruction and genocides meted out upon the indigenous world by the Europeans which began in the 1500s are being experienced today.

JG: What projects and shows are you working on for 2020?

MP: I am working on a number of projects currently in this new year. I will be having a solo show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland in May ... and the work in the show will extend my explorations around the subject of the apocalypse that my show at the Schneider

Museum last April and May investigated.

I am also creating a sculpture for a new Google building in Sunnyvale investigating the history of Computing and the history of the South Bay. In addition to this I am creating a very large installation sculpture of almost the entirety of Seattle for the reception area of the new Facebook campus up there. This work will be a multilayered project looking at the cultural history of Seattle.

Sculptor creates works for cyber giants

by John Darling for the Tidings Monday, January 6th 2020



Andy Atkinson / Ashland Tidings Ashland sculptor Matthew Picton talks the pieces of art he's creating for Google and Facebook in his home studio.

Ashland sculptor Matthew Picton creates vast, complex works for corporate headquarters, galleries and hotels, not with a chisel, but with an X-Acto knife, painstakingly cutting and meshing paper images from medieval art, Google Earth and modern media to create impact.

Right now, Picton is focusing on two works to adorn cyber-headquarters — one for Google in Sunnyvale, California, and the other for Facebook in Seattle — both of them highlighting area history, geology, roadmaps and culture.

Google asked for a wall-mounted piece representing the whole South Bay around Silicon Valley, including its early years as orchard land and featuring the colorful settling ponds, still visible from the air, Picton said. It will be built on street maps and be 21 feet long, made of paper and Yupo (tree-free paper) ready for hanging in late March.

In Seattle, a giant sculpture for Facebook integrates history, street maps, grunge rock images, the 1889 Great Fire of Seattle, Japan Town before World War II, and the 1999 Battle of Seattle, where anarchists and others protested the World Trade Organization.

Cutting and organizing the hundreds of images in one 5-by-5-foot panel takes several months in his basement studio and sells for about \$20,000, he said.

<https://ashlandtidings.com/news/top-stories/ashland-culptor-creates-works-for-cyber-giants-google-and-facebook>



At a solo show coming up at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in northwest Portland, Picton will display an expansion of his “Apocalypse” works, featured last spring at Southern Oregon University’s Schneider Museum.

The stunning works integrate 16th century “fears, paranoia and obsessions,” as seen in woodcut images of Holbein and Durer mixed with the World War II firebombing of Dresden, Thomas Mann’s “Death in Venice,” the Mekong Delta of “Apocalypse Now,” the silent 1922 horror film “Nosferatu,” Wagner’s “Ring” opera, modern skylines, hurricane damage, insecurities about staying alive amid environmental instability, and newspaper headlines of the ’08 crash, so you get disturbing works titled “The Horsemen of the Apocalypse Trampling Manhattan,” “The Whore of Babylon” and “Seven Angels Wreaking Havoc on the World.”

You don’t just take his art in with a half-minute glance, but must submit to being drawn in and exploring it at length. Asked for a description of his art, Picton said there isn’t a name for it “and I don’t know of anyone else doing it.”

To create the art works, Picton said he did much research in museums and histories and was asked to create art that respects, explores and honors the Silicon Valley and Seattle regions before cyber-times and now.

Picton, 59, and his wife, artist Claire Bridge, are London natives who came to Ashland 20 years ago.

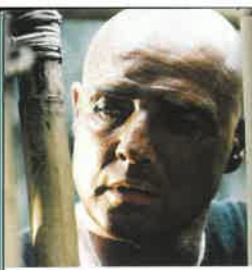
“It’s a beautiful place to live, and you have the time and the space to get work done,” he said.

<https://ashlandtidings.com/news/top-stories/ashland-culptor-creates-works-for-cyber-giants-google-and-facebook>

[i] ashland
independent
film festival

April 11-15, 2019

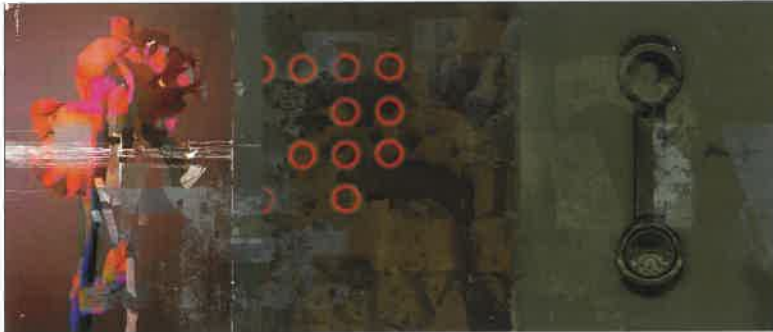




APOCALYPSES

A 40th Anniversary
Expanded Cinema Tribute
to *Apocalypse Now*, and Its
Inspirations & Legacies

Museum Exhibition



Apocalypse

April 10–May 25, 2019 | Schneider Museum of Art
Opening Reception: April 10, 5-7pm for general public

April 1–30, 2019 | Hanson Howard Gallery
Reception: April 11, 5:30-7pm, artist talk by Deborah Oropallo, 6pm

On the 40th anniversary of *Apocalypse Now*, Richard Herskowitz and Scott Malbourn have co-curated a multimedia art exhibition of works addressing themes of colonialism and apocalypse raised in Francis Ford Coppola's cinematic masterpiece.



ABOUT THE AIFF2019 ART

Art for this year's festival, including the cover image for this catalogue, was created by Ashland-based artist Matthew Picton, whose sculptures weave classic movie images into striking three-dimensional assemblages. Appreciate the original work yourself at the Schneider Museum of Art's exhibition, *Apocalypse*. You might discover imagery from Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*—is that Marlon Brando's head?—or references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Artists in the exhibition



Matthew Picton creates fine art sculptures from a variety of media, informed by his studies in Politics and History at the London School of Economics. Now based in Ashland, Oregon, his work can be found in galleries and locations worldwide, including the Portland Art Museum,

the De Young Museum, The Stadt Museum, and more.



Stephanie Syjuco creates large-scale spectacles of collected cultural objects, cumulative archives, and temporary vending installations, often with an active public component that invites viewers to directly participate as producers or distributors. Recent exhibitions include "Being: New Photography" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and "Public Knowledge," at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Bruce Bayard started a professional art career in 1988 with his move to southern Oregon. In his early career his mixed media paintings were exhibited in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. In 2000 he

eschewed paint and mixed media in favor of producing his work digitally. He currently produces video collage and improvisational electronic music performances.



Deborah Oropallo incorporates mixed media including photomontage, computer editing, print technique, and paint. Her composite works utilize layered visual sources to produce a dense

interplay between time, place, form, and content. Oropallo's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the de Young Museum, the Boise Art Museum, Montalvo Gallery, and the San Jose Museum of Art.



Morehshin Allahyari is an artist, activist, educator, and occasional curator. Her work deals with the political, social, and cultural contradictions we face every day. Morehshin is the co-author of *The 3D Additivist Cookbook*.

Her modeled, 3D-printed sculptural reconstructions of ancient artifacts destroyed by ISIS, titled *Material Speculation: ISIS*, have received widespread curatorial and press attention and have been exhibited worldwide.

Matthew Picton @ Toomey Tourell

Posted on 26 June 2013.



If you've ever used Google Earth to zoom from a bird's eye view of the planet down to a close-up look at rooftops, streets, backyards and rivers, Matthew Picton's wall-mounted sculptures of urban environments will seem instantly familiar. They reconstruct in paper and vellum the kinds of aerial views long used by urban planners. Unlike street maps, which show how things connect in a single dimension, Picton's representations are at once cartographic, topographical and cultural. Incorporating period-specific texts and musical scores, sometimes from different eras in a single work, they present multi-layered views of urban history at cataclysmic junctures: wars, political upheavals and natural disasters. They represent the urban experience as a physical place and a state of mind whose contours, physical and

mental, shift according to circumstance.

He calls the works on view *Fictional Perspectives*. Yet each is packed with historical facts. That, by itself, represents a departure from most contemporary map-based art, which replaces the consensus "reality" of conventional maps with artists' visions of how things should look. Picton has no such agenda; his maps are visual records of his research. The findings lean toward the apocalyptic.

Saint Petersburg, which the artist presents as a white washed labyrinth of interlocking boxes cleaved by a turquoise Neva River, is an excellent example of his craft and conceptual thinking. The first is plain to see. It consists of ribbons of vellum, arrayed into a twisting, irregular grid of open-air boxes of varying geometric shapes. The second aspect, evident in the micro view, is a literary exercise, incorporating snippets from Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*, Anna Akhmatova's *Poem Without a Hero* and Joseph Brodsky's *Guide to a Renamed City*. Also interwoven into the piece are bits of Shostakovich's score for *Symphony No. 7*. Each represents a particular period in the city's fraught history, which Picton, in a wall text, explains is "always a contradiction, at once both elegantly and stunningly beautiful, dark and terrible, rich and squalid; rationally conceived, yet the focus of irrational forces and events, subject to countless floods, fires, revolutions and wars. Not to mention pestilences and plagues."



Given the physical complexity of this work (and others like it) I doubt that without the accompanying wall text, that viewers would easily recognize or connect Shostakovich's score to Germany's 900-day siege of Leningrad (as it was known during WWII) or link Akhmatova's prophetic lines to Stalin's reign of terror in the 1950s or realize that Pushkin's poem embodies the city's creation myth. My point is that wall texts are often a crutch for work that is materially lacking. Not here. Picton, in the act of transcribing this material, has thoroughly absorbed it into his own psyche and reflected it back into the works in ways that are tangible.

His London quartet, which depicts bomb damage sustained in 1940 by Southwark, Bloomsbury, Clerkenwell and Waterloo, is a fine example. Working from color-coded maps which show, building by building, the precise the extent of the destruction, Picton re-creates it by meticulously burning portions of his own creations without incinerating them. Literary guides are employed here, too. They are, respectively, Rosie Alison (*The Very thought of You*), Elizabeth Bowen (*The Heat of The Day*), Graham Greene (*The Ministry of Fear*) and Christopher Fowler (*Full Dark House*).

Fire also figures prominently in Picton's depiction of Moscow in 1812, set ablaze by Napoleon's army. In it, a quote from *War and Peace* ("The comet which was said to portend all manner of horrors and the end of the world") appears prominently at the bottom, winding in red letters around the contours of a wide boulevard.

Picton, who was born in the U.K. and educated at the London School of Economics, seems to have a keener appreciation of European history than he does of more recent American events. Dallas, for example, is presented as a maze punctuated by a zig-zagging line of color photos of the Kennedy motorcade; they're arranged as miniature street-level billboards. Lower Manhattan, seen through the prism of 9/11, is comprised of tabloid headlines about terrorism. Granted, these are pivotal events in American history. Dallas may forever be defined by what happened on November 22, 1963, but New York by the attack on the World Trade Center? I don't think so. The city's literary past, its role in the American Revolution and its 20th-century status as a locus of literature, art, industry, pop culture, protest, fashion, finance and immigrant aspiration will overshadow 9/11 for a long time to come. All are rich lodes that could be profitably mined by someone like Picton.

Here's hoping he digs beneath the headlines the next time he takes on stateside subjects. Meantime, his contributions to our appreciation of urban history and its links to literature and music remain impressive.

—DAVID M. ROTH

Matthew Picton: "Fictional Perspectives" through July 15, 2013 @ Toomey Tourell.

2 Artists Who Work the World into Their Artworks

By Kenneth Baker, July 5, 2013



Matthew Picton's "London 1940-Clerkenwell" (2012)

Ambitious artists in every discipline face the difficulty of working something of the world into what they make. Some years ago, London-born Oregonian Matthew Picton resorted to maps as a solution.

His new work at Toomey Tourell continues to expand on the idea of a map as a footprint of history, not merely of a locale.

In recent years, as in the work on view, Picton has taken to rendering whole blocks or sections of city in aerial view. In "London 1940 - Clerkenwell" (2013) and other pieces here, he has formed upright paper shapes into equivalents of city blocks or standing structures.

In this piece, Picton has characteristically singed the paper cityscape, as a reminiscence of damage done to London during Hitler's yearlong blitzkrieg bombing campaign. A bomb census kept during the war recorded every air raid's effects.

He also pointedly chose not just any paper, but pages from Graham Greene's 1943 novel "The Ministry of Fear." Overlaying spy intrigue on his murderous main character's psychiatric history, Greene gave expression to his view of the modern age's peculiar corrosions of conscience. The scorched perforations of Picton's paper architecture allude to that theme also.

Additional pieces in the show map other cities at historic or literary moments of calamity, cannibalizing pertinent fictional or musical works for material: Amsterdam as the setting of Albert Camus' "The Fall," Moscow after the great fire that thwarted Napoleon's invasion, using the score of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, and so on.

Picton reminds us, as too few of his contemporaries do, that we can look to the arts to find sorrowful events transfigured into forms we can enjoy without amnesia or moral numbness.

Wozniak weather: Berkeley native Karla Wozniak moved from Brooklyn to Tennessee a couple of years ago and - to judge by the paintings at Gregory Lind - the relocation had a liberating effect.

The show's title - "This Weather Is Cosmic" - perfectly suits the vision put forward in it.

The skies in these landscapes serenade and shriek with lurid color, overwriting the painter's delight at recollected sunsets with anxiety at the accelerating drift of global climate change.

Wozniak (no relation to Steve) still takes inspiration from memories of roadside views, but anecdotal details, signage and bits of architecture that used to snag the eye in her pictures have begun to dwindle. None appears in the wonderful "Blue Mountain" (2013).

Read the title and, sure enough, a blue mountain suddenly meets the eye, its profile created by a translucent layer of bright orange, draped from the panel's top edge that also, paradoxically, describes the evening sky behind the mountain.

Streaming verticals layered in between suggest tall tree trunks, though only forking brushstrokes in greens at the left evoke vegetation. In the foreground - the word almost makes no sense in such a rambunctious composition - arcs and meanders hint at a road or a river or both.

Its bold color - which brings Howard Hodgkin to mind - can evoke the tinted shadows of day's end, but the picture generates an inner light all its own.

Trying to describe what goes on in "Blue Mountain" and other Wozniaks, such as "Kudzu (Chapman Highway)" (2013), you get into the sort of verbal snarl that anyone experiences trying to share the astonishment of a dream. This suggests to me that Wozniak has somehow opened a channel to her work's unconscious sources, an enviable stroke of freedom for any painter.

Matthew Picton: Fictional Perspectives: Paper sculpture. Through July 15. Toomey Tourell Fine Art, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 989-6444, www.toomey-tourell.com.

Gefaltete Zeit

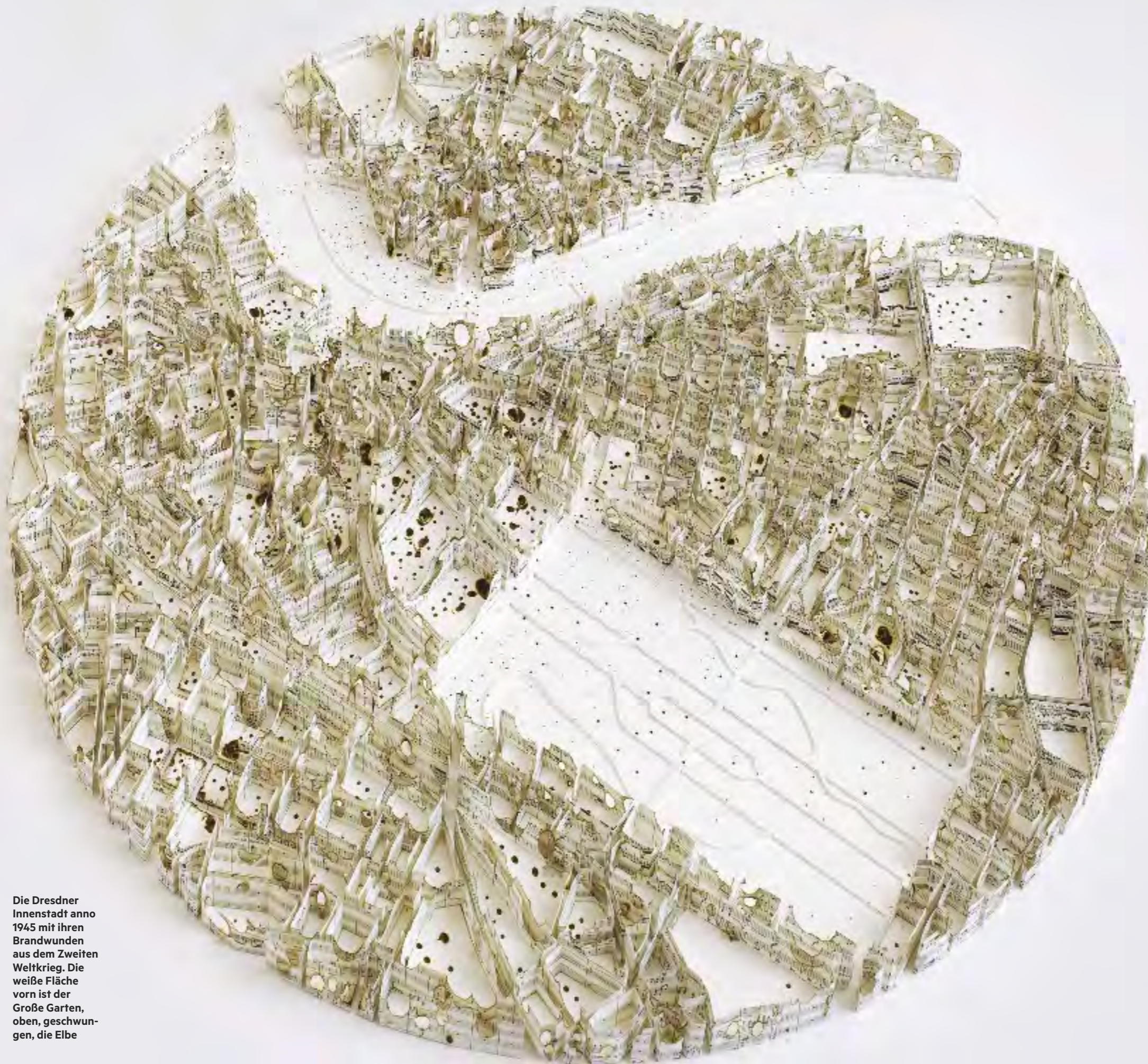
Matthew Picton baut filigrane Städte aus Papier – und zeigt ihre Zerbrechlichkeit

Die Semperoper? Folgen Sie dem Verlauf der Elbe, bis sie nach Norden dreht. Da, gleich bei der ersten Brücke, liegt das Musikhaus am südlichen Ufer.

Die Frauenkirche? Ein paar Esels-ohren weiter rechts. Das ist Dresden, eine Ansicht der Innenstadt. Doch die Faltpläne von Matthew Picton taugen nur sehr bedingt zur Orientierung. Sehenswürdigkeiten interessieren den englischen Künstler nicht. Es geht ihm um Leerstellen und Konturen, um den Raum zwischen den Gebäuden und Grundstücken, um die Stadt als lebendigen und zerbrechlichen Organismus. Daher baut er auch weder Dächer noch Kuppeln, Gebäude sind für ihn begrenzter Raum.

In Pictons dreidimensionalen Landkarten – es gibt sie unter anderem auch von Venedig, Jerusalem oder San Francisco – verbergen sich Zeitreisen. Sein Dresden-Kunstwerk bearbeitete er nach wochenlanger Klebearbeit mit einem Lötkolben, um an die Brandwunden des Zweiten Weltkriegs zu erinnern. Statt weißem Papier verwendet er Material, das mit dem jeweiligen Ort inhaltlich zusammenhängt – Ausrisse aus Büchern, Notenblättern oder Zeitungsartikeln. Für Dresden wählte er die Partitur von Richard Wagners „Ring“-Zyklus – der Komponist wirkte von 1843 bis 1849 als königlich-sächsischer Kapellmeister an der Hofoper. Die stand übrigens ganz in der Nähe der heutigen Semperoper. ✎

Matthew Picton, geboren 1960, studierte Politik und Geschichte an der London School of Economics. Als Künstler arbeitet er seit 1998



Die Dresdner Innenstadt anno 1945 mit ihren Brandwunden aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die weiße Fläche vorn ist der Große Garten, oben, geschwungen, die Elbe

FOTOS: MATTHEW PICTON



Pictons Papier-Skulpturen sind bis zum 7. Juli im englischen Coventry zu sehen. Ansonsten: www.matthwepicton.com

Art

Matthew Picton: Urban Narratives

*Summaria Lunn Gallery, Mayfair,
8th March-6th April*

For a craft whose origins lie in the practical science of navigation, the enduring appeal of cartography as art is remarkable. Most often appreciated as windows into the past or as exquisite works of craftsmanship, artist Matthew Picton expands mapping-as-art into the realm of political and cultural commentary.

Picton uses the pages of symbolically-charged books to construct three-dimensional cityscapes. The exhibition's most contemporary piece is a map of central Tehran constructed from the charred covers of titles from Iran's banned books list. There's also Old Jerusalem constructed from religious texts, Dresden made from Wagner manuscripts, and plenty more.

With these map-sculptures, Picton aims to create "something that lives as a world," and it is his attention to detail that draws you into the miniature streets. One work even precisely recreates London in 1666 (the year of the great fire) from the charred remains of Daniel Defoe's book *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Look closely and you'll see the half remaining section of London Bridge and the fire-ravaged shell of St Paul's Cathedral. ■

William Irwin

ART FORUM March 2012

Matthew Picton

Christopher Henry Gallery, New York

by Emily Hall

A map, reductive by definition, is full of ghosts. Matthew Picton engages these specters with paper sculptures that add a third dimension to the map and in various ways give form to imaginary cartographies of history. Indeed, he renders his maps four-dimensional by referring to the passage of time.

For his recent show at Christopher Henry, Picton presented a selection of these works. Some begin with a specific historical episode: A map of London comprises only the area of the city affected by the cholera outbreak of 1854. The map appears blank when looked at head-on, but from the side one sees red dots blooming here and there, marking buildings in which a fatality occurred, as if the city were a body riddled with disease. For a map of Lower Manhattan, headlines from the newspapers of September 12, 2001, among other items, are folded around each building, so that the words **ATTACK**, **TERROR**, and **BASTARDS** repeat here and there, like leitmotifs in the narrative that sprang up quickly in the aftermath of the disaster. Picton smoked the map with taper candles, turning it gray, with the site of the World Trade Center charred black. Few people can look at a map of Lower Manhattan without mentally conjuring this sort of symbolic overlay; but here it is made plain.

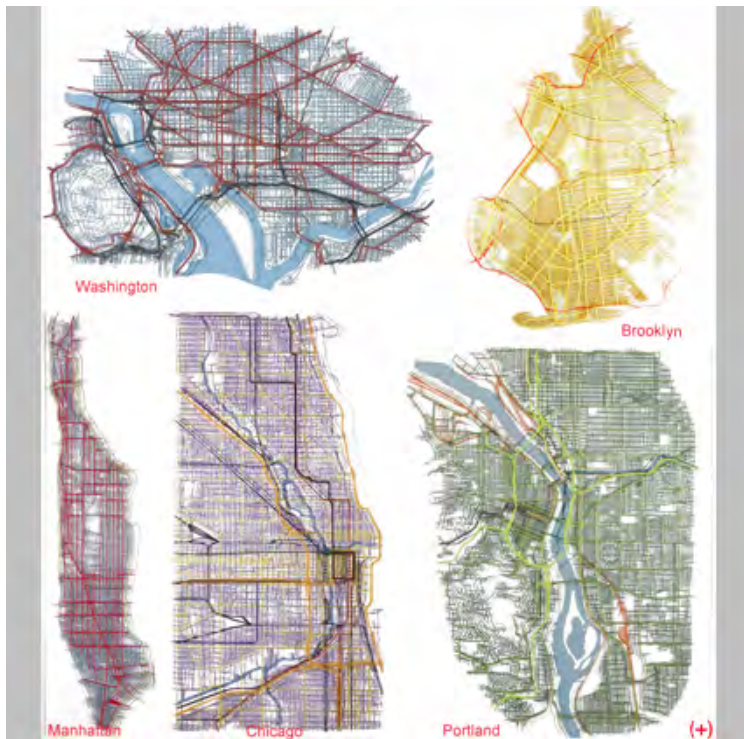
Other maps take as their starting point a general perception about a place, or fantasy. Picton's map of Hollywood, *Hollywood Crushed and Burnt*, 2010, is constructed from DVD covers for the sensational 1974 disaster movie "Earthquake" and the 1994 NOVA Documentary "Killer Quake." With a neat joke about the ways in which our perception of Hollywood is mediated by various types of cinematic representation, the work captures a certain unreality often associated with the city. The map appears trampled, devastated, itself a jittery victim of physical and metaphorical instability. A Dallas map, with images of John F. Kennedy's fatal procession pasted along its route—an oddly bright splash of colour on an otherwise pristine document—indicates that one historical event can colonize an urban environment. Florence, Italy, is rendered in spotless off-white archival paper, perhaps corresponding with a sense of the city as a relic preserved for study. At these crossings of culture and history, Picton's maps suggest a place's significance while at the same time emphasizing the constructed nature of that significance, a built idea in a built environment.

What animates these maps is not simply the inspired fusion of form and content but also their simultaneous engagement with order and chaos. A map is a diagram—an abstraction, a simplification of reality. Picton's maps struggle in the opposite direction: to tell us more, to remind us to provoke and contradict, with the result that they are both more and less than the thing they represent.

Mathew Picton: 'Paper Cities'

arquitecturaviva.com/en/Info/News/Details/3267

01/20/2012



Mathew Picton studied Political Science and History in London. Thus, his paper sculptures present an approach of superposition of layers that allows to appreciate the evolution of the contemporary city as an organism that embodies the previous stages of its historical process. The key periods in which the division gives way to change, as has happened in Warsaw, Berlin, Baghdad or Israel, are manifested in boundary lines that condense urban growth. Berlin illustrates the ideological division of the postwar period; the segmentation and the ghetto are shown in the underlying layer of Warsaw; and the fabric of present-day Baghdad reveals its ethnic, religious, military and political divisions. A series of sculptures represents the German city of Dresden, before and after the devastating fires of World War II. The pre-bomb sculpture has been made from a Richard Wagner score; The one that reflects Dresden after the bombings is composed of previously burned paper. In his latest work, currently exhibited at the Christopher Henry Gallery in New York, the 51-year-old London artist recreates cities with concrete documents, such as pages of novels or newspaper headlines. Thus, the sculpture of Lower Manhattan was built from newspaper headlines about the 9/11 attacks. such as pages of novels or newspaper headlines. Thus, the sculpture of Lower Manhattan was built from newspaper headlines about the 9/11 attacks. such as pages of novels or newspaper headlines. Thus, the sculpture of Lower Manhattan was built from newspaper headlines about the 9/11 attacks. [Matthew Picton](#)
[Gallery Christopher Henry](#)

Matthew Picton – Artillery

Published by news at 4:44 pm under press

Matthew Picton at SolwayJones

by [Tucker Neel](#)

Originally published in [Artillery Magazine](#) jul/aug 2009 vol. 3

Cities are living creatures, shifting and growing, contracting with time, but fragile too, subject to the forces of historical change and destructive powers both internal and external. This fact is no more evident than in Matthew Picton's recent exhibition "Postwar Landscapes" at SolwayJones. Here, Picton presents five works that deploy the formal tropes of mapping to speak to memories of space and time.

In one of the most alluring works, *Moscow 1808, 1905, 2007, 2008*, Picton traces Moscow city maps from these four years in white-painted Duralar and pins them, like preserved scientific specimens, atop each other against a black background. The ghostly sinewy lines of rambling city streets attest to a place that congeals and expands its borders and features. It is up to the viewer to give the work's four dates and the years in between a historical relevancy.

Hiroshima, 1930 consists of a massive 16×10ft. light box holding a 3D paper map of that city's buildings and streets, 15 years before they were devastated by the Little Boy nuclear bomb. The installation brings to mind the modular and rectilinear sculptures of LeWitt or Smithson, but it is more reminiscent of a war room, a literal stage where buildings and the humans they house are envisioned as targets for future destruction. Even with this theatrical set up, the work comes across as surprisingly restrained, and instead of banging the viewer over the head with a moralizing tale of war and death, the piece calmly acts as a jumping-off point for a discussion of Hiroshima, before and after World War II, as an important historical site.

In another more startling work, *Washington DC*, Picton uses the same folded paper technique on a smaller scale, blocking out sections of The Capitol Mall and surrounding environs in a way that makes the layout unmistakable to anyone who has ever lived in, or visited, the city. This approximately 4×3 ft. work hangs in a white frame on the wall and is pockmarked with hundreds of seemingly random brown and black miniature explosions, places where the artist burned holes into the white paper. During the war of 1812 the British did in fact burn the White House and parts of the Mall, and riots have certainly set sections of the city ablaze in the past. But this diorama reads as a quick model for a Hollywood set explosion, a view of DC ravaged by aerial bombardment. While the work causes an immediate reaction regarding the possibility of DC in ashes, its spectacle nature and lack of historical grounding set it apart from other works in the show. While the work could be interpreted as an imagined future, juvenile wishful thinking, or misplaced Cassandra-like prognosticating, it seems more than anything to address our familiarity with seeing famous cities reduced to ashes in mass media.

With this we see the strength of Picton's overarching project and the curious way he is able to incite viewers to plumb the feelings and associations that come with looking at a map, be it of the past or the possible future.

The Oregonian 10/07

An Art of Beautiful Fissures

by Victoria Blake

Matthew Picton has come a long way since his last solo show in Portland, in 2005. At the time, he was obsessed with the smallest, most inconsequential of things – the cracks in the sidewalk, for example. his work had a labor intensive “wow” factor but not much else.

Now, his obsession with cracks has developed into a series of delicately beautiful sculptures that have as much weight as pizzazz.

His new exhibit, “City Sculptures” at Pulliam Deffenbaugh Gallery, looks down on the mess of the human metropolis, showing the fissure lines of our economic, political and ethnic boundaries through a series of three-dimensional wall-hanging “maps” of several cities around the world, including Amsterdam, Madrid and Portland. Picton is still obsessed with cracks, but the cracks are of a meatier, more intellectual sort.

Take, for instance, Picton’s map of Baghdad. It has five layers, each held in place relative to the others by sewing pins. The bottom layer, a blue line indicating the Tigris river, provides the backbone of the pattern. Above the river floats the earliest roads, then the roads of Baghdad 1944, followed by the roads of today. Imagine colored spaghetti arranged three-dimensionally, one layer atop the other. Now imagine that each layer indicates a period of time in the city’s past. The result is a visually interesting juxtaposition of then and now, a combination art object and social document.

Picton develops the idea by color coding the levels of his Baghdad map to match the city’s disparate ethnic sections. The Sunni section is olive; the Shiite section is dark green. the two sections don’t mix. Purple indicates the Christian areas of town, and the Americans- we have a section of our own- are indicated by a bright and shining green. By following the lines, and by looking both up and down through the layers of time, the ethnic divisions in the city become clear, and the mess of the Iraq war perhaps becomes more understandable.

Picton’s materials are deceptively simple: Dura-Lar plastic, paint, pins and a white rectangular canvas. The Dura-Lar is hand cut – a doily of lines float in space, casting delicate shadows against one another. The pins lend an erie feel to the pieces, as if the maps were insects affixed in a taxidermist’s box. The process of assembling each piece, as well as the research involved, must take months.

The variety of results Picton achieves with such simple materials is impressive. The map of the Ganges Delta shows the tributary system of the great river, done in blue and red. the effect is distinctly organic, like a diagram of the human vascular system. Besides the cities already mentioned, “City Sculptures” includes maps of Stockholm, St. Petersberg, Caracas and others. Finding a particular neighborhood is as much fun as searching for home on Google Earth.

While some of the pieces hit the mark, others divert from the intellectual and social muscle that makes the Baghdad map so interesting. Finding home in Portland is entertaining, but it's not much more than that. Similarly, the map of Stockholm shines in silver, but the lines don't seem to mean anything past geography.

In his artist statement, Picton, a juror's prize winner in the 2006 Oregon Biennial writes that he is interested by both traditional cartography and by the "organism of the city." His maps, he writes, trace the "social, political, economic and topographic factors" that have shaped the cities he's chosen.

That ambitious scope is covered in some of the works but on the whole Picton hasn't gone far enough with his idea. Yet he clearly can. Picton's method of layering multiple maps on top of each other, tracing the lines of the city's developments, is inventive, even ingenious. Above all, Picton has the talent, intelligence and dedication to push himself. That map of Baghdad shows us that he can.

Maybe part of the problem with this show are the cities Picton has chosen – and the cities he's missed. In comparison to Baghdad, Stockholm and Portland seem like fluff. But what about the racial divisions in New York? What about religion in Jerusalem? What about economics in Hong Kong or imperialism in Lagos?

Picton has always been obsessed with the idea of cracks. Now he must find the courage to show us the cracks that matter.