PREVIEW | Wayfinding: Contemporary Artists, Critical Dialogues, and the Sidney R. Knafel Map Collection

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• Contact the Addison’s Head of Education, Jamie Gibbons (jgibbons@andover.edu), with any questions or for support.
*Wayfinding* presents new work by six artists—Sonny Assu, Andrea Chung, Liz Collins, Spencer Finch, Josh T. Franco, and Heidi Whitman—made in response to a two-year engagement with Phillips Academy’s Sidney R. Knafel Map Collection. The collection, a unique holding of atlases, maps, and globes, documents European understanding of the world from 1434 through the 19th century. The objects in it are captivating for their aesthetic qualities, geographical speculations, and historical implications. Illuminating the history of scientific inquiry and the Age of Discovery, the Knafel maps are also revealing documents of the political and economic aspirations of their times.
Artists are unconstrained by the mapping conventions and largely standardized visual language of geographers. Approaching the Knafel Collection from the vantage point of the 21st century and through a variety of cultural perspectives, intellectual interests, and aesthetic approaches, the six artists in this exhibition explore the ways in which American spaces have been imagined, claimed, measured, circumscribed, and contested, in works that initiate provocative dialogues between past and present.
Drawing inspiration from Phillips Academy’s Sidney R. Knafel Map Collection

Row One:
John Foster, *A map of New-England, being the first that ever was here cut, and done by the best pattern that could be had, which being in some places defective, it made the other less exact; yet does it sufficiently shew the situtation of the country, and conveniently*, 1677, Woodcut, 11 13/16 x 15 3/8 inches, Sidney R Knafel Map Collection at Phillips Academy, Andover MA


Row Two:
Giacomo Gastaldi, *Carta marina nova tabula*, 1548, Map, 5 1/8 x 6 11/16 inches, Sidney R Knafel Map Collection at Phillips Academy, Andover MA

Hartmann Schedel, *Secunda etas mundi Secunda etas mundi*, 1493, Hand-colored woodcut, 16 15/16 x 22 1/16 inches, Sidney R Knafel Map Collection at Phillips Academy, Andover MA

Row Three:
Gerhard Mercator, *America*, 1628, Hand-colored map, 14 3/16 x 18 7/8 inches, Sidney R Knafel Map Collection at Phillips Academy, Andover MA

Theodor de Bry, *America sive novus orbis respectu Europaeorum inferior globi terrestris pars*, 1596, Copperplate engraving, 11 x 11 inches, Sidney R Knafel Map Collection at Phillips Academy, Andover MA
Sonny Assu

Sonny Assu, Wreck-Consiliation! and Broken Treaties, 2017 Maple, copper leaf, paint and video, Video: 10 second loop (Technical Assistance by Jerome Baco), Photo credit: Devon Lindsay, © Sonny Assu, Courtesy of the artist and the Equinox Gallery
Sonny Assu (b. 1975)

“They make magic lines that only they can see”: Sonny Assu attributes this observation to a man from the Hupacasath First Nation of Vancouver, British Columbia, responding to the practices of colonial surveyors who demarcated the boundaries of what became their reservation. This remark along with the fraught history of land theft and broken treaties across the Americas, particularly those in British Columbia, drives several of Assu’s creative investigations, including these new works from his Insert Coin series.

In Landback and Look at What I Columbused 2, Assu challenges settler cartographies and considers value—what was valued in the past and what is valued today—via a speculative time-traveling narrative about an ancestor plucked from the past and brought to the future of Assu’s childhood. Here, the artist imagines Kwakwaka’wakw ancestors observing their future descendants captivated by machines with flickering lights. Seemingly in a trance, the young artist’s movements might suggest communion with another realm to onlookers from the past.
Investigating value and materiality are central to Assu’s conceptual practice. Copper and maple are materials of value to the Kwakwaka’wakw. Assu highlights the cultural significance and economic value of copper and maple in the construction of his arcade cabinets, while also questioning the value of time. With bold graphic overlays of images of Knafel maps and their wood and copper consoles, these works simultaneously critique notions of American discovery through manifest destiny and contemporary tensions between the value of technology and time spent in front of screens.
Browse the artists's website to learn more: sonnyassu.com
Andrea Chung

Andrea Chung, sketch for The Westerlies: Prevailing the Winds (work in progress), 2020
Andrea Chung (b. 1978)

The fictitious animals and human beings with exaggerated attributes depicted on early maps reveal historic perceptions about the oceans, land, and their inhabitants and often served as cautions to European explorers and colonists. Inspired by star charts in the Knafel Collection, with their images of sea monsters and other chimerical beings, Andrea Chung inverts the assumptions of this type of map with *The Westerlies: Prevailing the Winds*, a work that speculates on navigation and forecasting techniques of indigenous people in zones of discovery.

Building on a sustained and incisive focus on island nations in the Caribbean Sea and Indian Ocean, Chung imagines a context in which their people might receive warning from the sea and sky of imminent colonial danger. In *The Westerlies: Prevailing the Winds*, threats of violent invasion are written in fire and water. Immersed in a dome of aqueous blue light, viewers are invited to experience the ocean and heavens as expanse and enclosure, to feel themselves, like early seafarers, suspended between them, and indeed to mine both realms for omens.
Browse the artists’s website to learn more: andreachungart.com
Liz Collins


Addison Gallery of American Art
Liz Collins (b. 1968)

Similar to maps, which can be both beautiful and utilitarian, Liz Collins’s vibrant fabrics, wallpapers, carpets, stitched pieces, paintings, and immersive installations straddle the decorative and the functional, art and design. Their dynamic patterns and explosive colors engage our senses and convey her experience of the world as a place of wonder, emotion, and boundless energy. In responding to the Knafel Map Collection, Collins gravitated toward map keys, legends, and navigational grids—eye-catching, vibrantly colorful symbols and marks laden with compressed, coded information that, read correctly, expands our awareness of, familiarity with, and appreciation for the vast and variegated world around us.
Collins transforms the visual vocabulary of cartography into the abstract language of art in a range of media. A compass rose—a symbol conveying the orientation of the cardinal directions on a map—becomes an eye-popping starburst. Magnified and repeated, striped scale bars create what seem to be infinitely variable rhythmic patterns. Marine chart graticules—networks of parallels and meridians—are removed from the landmasses and waters they underlie to generate a series of printed geometric abstractions. A two-dimensional cartouche from a 17th-century atlas takes on three dimensions as a sculpture made of papier-mâché and tufted fabric, while coordinate points from a 19th-century survey map break free of their paper confines to exist freely in space as a large-scale mural outside the museum.
Row One:

Liz Collins, *Compass Rose*, 2020, Needlepoint with assorted yarns, © Liz Collins, Courtesy of the artist


Row Two:


Addison Gallery of American Art
Browse the artists's website to learn more: lizcollins.com

Liz Collins

Current & Upcoming
Home
Summit Suite
Wallpaper
2014-2018
Woven Walls
Knitting Nation
Optic Home
Fashion Archive
Publication
About
Spencer Finch, *Yellowstone Hike (Clear Lake Trail)*, 2018, 41 3/8 x 29 5/8 inches, Pantone swatches and pencil on paper, © Spencer Finch, Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery
Spencer Finch (b. 1962)

Methodically investigating the mysteries of perception and the natural world, Spencer Finch attempts to depict the most elusive, even invisible subjects: a breeze through a window, the flight of a bee, the color of fog. He uses precise instruments such as light meters, colorimeters, and anemometers as well as his own refracted perception to re-create these experiences in varied media. Ironically, this emphasis on accuracy does not reveal a single empirical truth, but rather underscores the ephemeral and temporal nature of the observed world, its “reality” and “truth” being necessarily filtered through idiosyncratic and particularizing perception. “Doing a scientific experiment over and over has an analog in the way artists work, which is seriality,” Finch says. “You try to do something again and again to get closer to the essence. Because the experimenter’s perception is a little off, the subjective comes into it, which is fascinating to me. It’s about the attempt to represent something—and in the attempt is where there’s the humanness or poetry.”
Intrigued by the early Knafel maps that are tinged with “humanness,” the ones that are somehow abstracted or distorted because of the limitations of technology and perception, Finch has created a series of drawings that explore the tension between methodical measurement and individual experience. Visual records of hikes, for which he matched various objects sighted along the trail—rocks, sky, moss, birds—to Pantone color chips, and landscapes similarly translated via a collection of carefully matched watercolor swatches elude detailed delineation but capture the essence of the artist’s encounter with nature. Pastel drawings that track the paths of a bee through a garden and map the artist’s movements through his studio similarly distill meticulously gathered data into coded abstractions of fleeting light and color.
Row One:
Spencer Finch, Maine
Landscape (Atlantic Ocean from Isle au Haut, low tide) afternoon effect, 2017 41 3/8 x 29 3/4 inches, Watercolor and pencil on paper, © Spencer Finch, Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery

Spencer Finch, Skagen
Landscape (Skagerrak and Kattegat from Grenen), 2018, 41 3/8 x 29 3/4 inches, Watercolor and pencil on paper, © Spencer Finch, Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery

Row Two:
Spencer Finch, Vermont
Landscape (Late summer), 2018 41 3/8 x 29 3/4 inches, Watercolor and pencil on paper, © Spencer Finch, Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery

Spencer Finch, Following a Bee (Zinnias), 2020 Pastel and pencil on paper, 40 1/2 x 60 inches, © Spencer Finch, Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery

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Spencer Finch, *Paths through the Studio*, 2020, Pastel on paper, © Spencer Finch, Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery
Browse the artists's website to learn more: spencerfinch.com
Josh T. Franco

Josh T. Franco, *Details from Snake Atlas*, 2020 (work in progress), Mixed media, © Josh T. Franco Courtesy of the artist
Josh T. Franco (b. 1985)

Cave paintings and rock art were critical to wayfinding for ancient cultures. In desert regions of the Americas, snake images often directed nomadic people to water. For west Texan artist Josh T. Franco, it seems likely that these motifs were inspired by the rattlesnakes native to the Cerrillos Hills mining district in New Mexico, where he finds his inspiration.

A response to Knafel maps depicting the area that we know as Texas, Franco’s immersive reading room is a place for critical inquiry and for exploring indigenous pictographic navigational aids. His *Snake Atlas*—comprising an unbound book of handmade paper, large text-filled glyphic paintings, ambient sound of percussion, and a stone-encrusted serpent in the center of the gallery—invites viewers to traverse the space using various modes of reading: visual, sonic, and spatiotemporal. Throughout the installation, imitating rupestrian art found near the west Texas and New Mexico border, Franco incorporates lightning-shaped serpents, handprints, and other motifs to help viewers make their way through the space and find meaning in it.
Josh T. Franco, *Details from Snake Atlas*, 2020 (work in progress), Mixed media, © Josh T. Franco Courtesy of the artist
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Addison Gallery of American Art
Josh T. Franco, Details from Snake Atlas, 2020 (work in progress), Mixed media, © Josh T. Franco Courtesy of the artist
Browse the artists’s website to learn more: joshtfranco.com
Heidi Whitman, *Details from The New World (Greed)*, 2019–2020 (work in progress), ink, acrylic, imitation gold leaf, gouache, canvas, cloth, gauze, paper, Cinefoil, string, rope, Duralar, wire, and plastic. © Heidi Whitman, Courtesy of the artist.
Heidi Whitman (b. 1949)

While most maps claim to be accurate and objective, they are colored by the agendas and assumptions of their creators and users. With this project, Heidi Whitman, whose drawings, paper constructions, and paintings often deal with mapping interior states of mind rather than the exterior world, considers the hidden motives of cartography. Reflecting the human desire to chart the unknown, contain chaos, control nature, and better understand the world, the Knafel maps also tell a more specific story of European conquest and empire building. Exposing ugly and unpleasant truths that are often masked by jewellike colors, decorative patterning, and fanciful marginalia, Whitman’s *New World* is a three-part narrative that imagines the fear, greed, and violence that lie beneath the “discovery” of the New World.
Conjuring the terror and anxiety that European mariners and, to a far greater and more horrific extent, enslaved peoples must have felt navigating unknown waters and the uncertainty of fate, the journey begins with a transatlantic crossing, the tumultuous ocean rendered in pieced canvas covered in a maelstrom of agitated lines. Knotted ropes suspended from the ceiling and extending out into the gallery obscure the view, adding to the sense of menace, while strips of coiled plastic hovering above suggest howling winds or twisting currents. Part two, a pyramidal accumulation of densely layered bits of canvas, paper, gauze, cheesecloth, foil, Styrofoam, and netting, takes on the conquest of the Americas. Oozing glittering gold, oily black, and blood red, this monstrous, murderous, gluttonous mound, gorged with plunder and human victims, seems to be on the verge of collapse. Connecting past to present, the third and final wall presents modern America out of balance and spiraling out of control. Hunks of coal, nuggets of gold, city grids, and urban skylines spew from this spinning ball of confusion alongside flocks of birds attempting to fly free of the polluting toxicity of avarice, waste, and corruption.
Heidi Whitman, *Details from The New World (Greed)*, 2019–2020 (work in progress), Ink, acrylic, imitation gold leaf, gouache, canvas, cloth, gauze, paper, Cinefoil, string, rope, Duralar, wire, and plastic, © Heidi Whitman Courtesy of the artist
Browse the artists's website to learn more: heidiwhitman.com