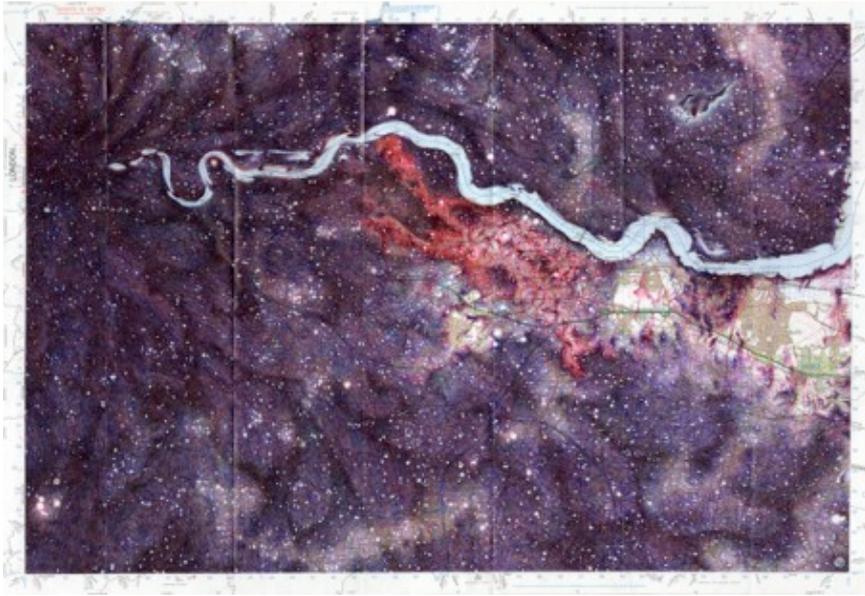


STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Into Ruins
Stellar Parallax North Kent by Paul McDevitt
05 March 2012
Claire Reddeman

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What has the artist selected / chosen to show in this artwork?

North Kent, of all places, is one of the subjects of this artwork, in the form of a cartographic representation of a rectangle-shaped part of the region, as seen from the cartographer's god's-eye-view, in the form of an Ordnance Survey map. I see the Thames as it stretches across the top half of the image, with the loop of the Isle of Dogs all the way to the estuary, but not all the way to the coast. I can't see a western route of the river, it tails off just to the west of Limehouse. A large area of dark indigo covers the map and crowds into the river, and the description on the Artlands website tells me this is biro. Towards the right of the image the underlying map can be seen in patches of white, green and beige, with a line of either a road or railway running in a jumpy parallel with the river. The indigo biro covering runs in darker and lighter patches, with white interruptions for stars.

The second map goes out west to the sea, it must be the neighbouring sheet. The top right corner of the image is light blue for what must be the North Sea by now, with a blue arm for the Thames reaching down into the top left, and another arm in the middle and a smaller one at the right reaching down to go around the Isles of Sheppey and Thanet. Planet Thanet, where the people of Kent laugh at the locals and say they have six fingers and are tantamount to aliens. The people of the Isle of Thanet are not represented in this image. In the Isles and the rest of the Part of England to the south-bottom and west-left great masses of red and indigo biro swirl in clouds of cosmic light and matter, with the white interruptions of the first map repeated here but larger now. At the bottom of the image a region of green is visible, crossed by roads (lines).

What is not shown is the rest of Kent, any people, everyday objects, food, vegetables, plants, animals, houses, buildings of any sort, computers. What happens further out in the North Sea. Everything in the world that isn't part of these two Ordnance Survey sheets and isn't an imagined cosmos.

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Where was / is it exhibited? How can one see it?

It can be seen online at www.artlandsnorthkent.org.uk/project/artlands-map-commission and it was originally produced in 2011 as an edition of 500 maps that were given away on a first come, first served basis. I would guess they would also have been given away at events and so on but the website is mute on that point.

What are the work's dimensions?

Yes, you'd think the website would say, wouldn't you? What are the dimensions of an OS sheet? I'll have to check. I've got one round here somewhere.

Does the viewer interact with the work in any way? eg. moving around it, listening to it, touching it...

I suppose it would be fair to say you unfold it and look at it like you would a map. It comes in a little cardboard wallet with both maps in and you unfold them as though you're about to try to plan a route to travel somewhere in the North Kent Artlands, seeking Art perhaps.

Is the work site-specific?

No, it's specifically not site-specific in that it's even more portable than most artworks. You don't get told off for touching it because it's yours.

Is there a feature that seems to be the most significant / important?

I think there's something quite important about the cosmos meeting the sea in the second image, these two categories of space that you can stare off into, that I think of as being, for all practical purposes, basically limitless, the scale of the sky and the sea being unmeasurable to my thoughts. And the effacing of the land, except in these small

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patches where it breaks through. Saying *breaks through* is on its head though, because it has *remained* and been *not drawn on*, it is original, it pre-existed this picture of endless sky. Sky meets water, or maybe *space* meets water and yet the coastline holds its shape, impossibly.

In the first image this feels more like a loss of solidity and certainty as the right side of the image shows the darkest region of space and even the river becomes lost. At the right is the glimpse of land and the largest part of the river, yet at the left the darkness has more of a hold and if I squint I can imagine a feeling of perspective, the river reaching back away from wherever I'm viewing from, making it farther away in time also.

Is anything being symbolized?

I'm not sure about symbols here. It doesn't particularly make me think about symbolic meaning. In some ways it feels more like it's anti-meaning or anti-symbolic meaning, with this fantastical overlaying of outer space onto the map space, the green and pleasant coded representations of farmland and motorways that form this (blighted) region. I suppose *space* (meaning *outer*, the sort with aliens, not the -and-place sort) is symbolized, or at least depicted, implying many light years, the absence of atmosphere, stars and suns and radio waves and telescopes, as the generators of the sort of imagery that the drawings reference, the artists' impressions of the newly-discovered galaxies noticed by Hubble.

Maybe the idea of distance or nothingness is depicted, but I don't want to conclude that there's some sort of snidey joke being made about Kent being like outer space or Kent being like a vacuum in which nothing happens in the cold oxygen-less reaches between London and the coast. I suppose that meaning is available but it seems a rather elaborate way to have a go at Kent. Plus that potential referend wouldn't exist for me if the map was of Lancashire or somewhere because I don't know any snidey jokes about Lancashire and the people who live there. This feels like a distraction.