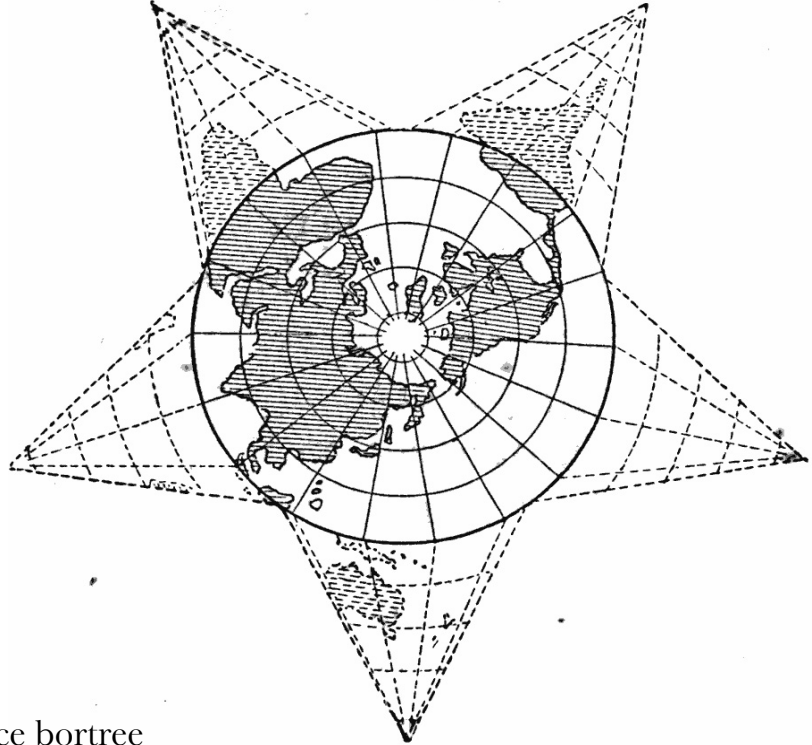


cartographies

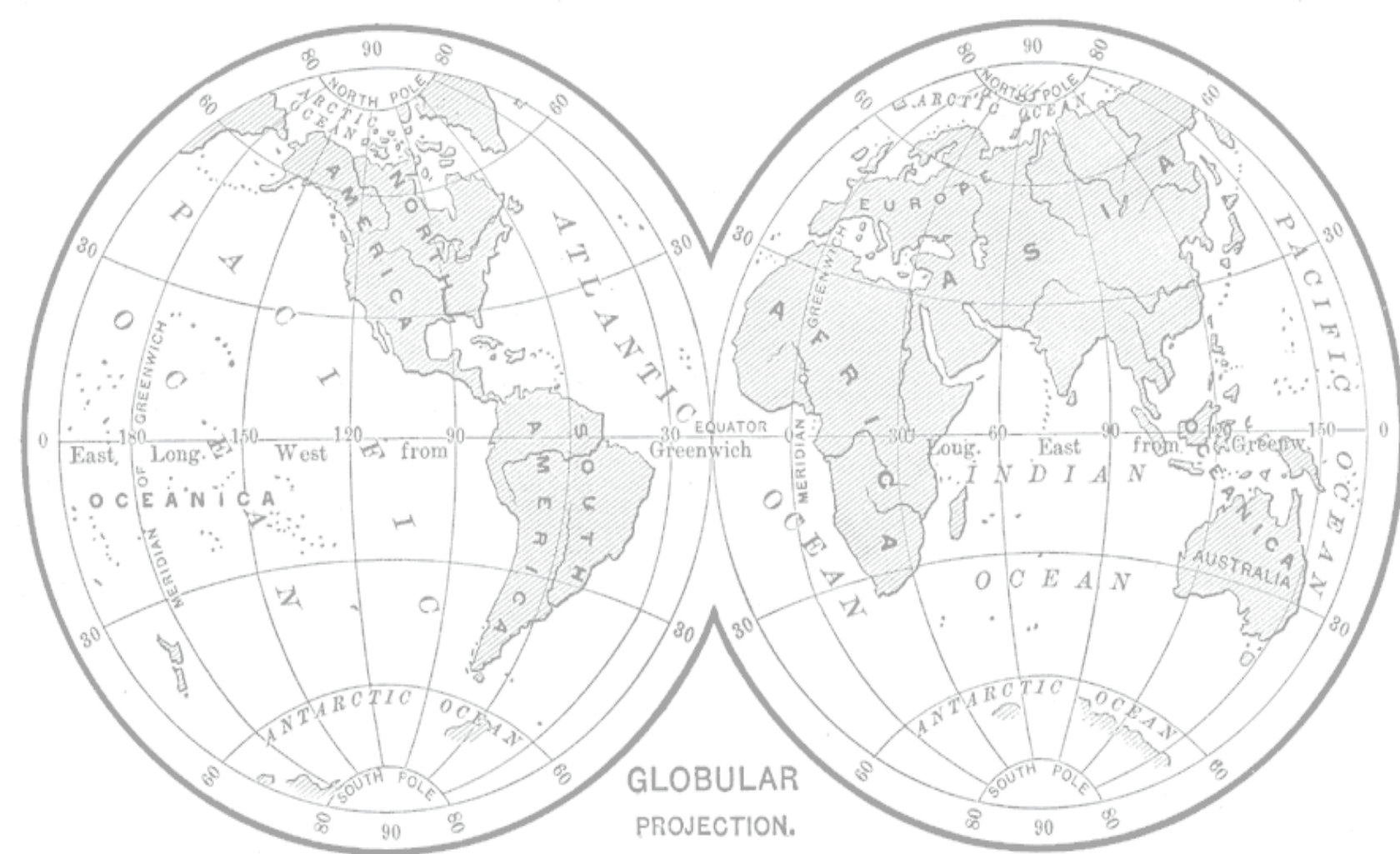


bryce bortree

*for those animal-headed wonders
& the woman who inked me in*

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Most poets should have been mapmakers,
but all of the maps have already been made!

Karyna McGlynn, *Real Art*

cartographers

carry horizons with them.
Are they wider, there? It depends
on the day, the coordinates caught,
the slow build of mountainous walls
around them, the failing of well-worn eyes.
The horizon falls in with age,
the map-maker can't shoulder so large
a sky. But here she is, centered and ringed
by all she trusts, reality snug around her,
and this is how she builds the world,
concentric rings hooped around herself –
the only measure of scale one person,
a telescope, these boots, the awe.

They find the new, break the unbroken ground.
They grind the rocks into footpaths into dust.
They adjust the scope, they make nestled
homes for the houses, they find what is yet
to be searched for. In this way, the electric
shoreline that recedes as a newer, a firing of
that explosion, that perfectly expelled reach
for the unattainable. And that which is suddenly
foundationed into necessity. They give us landscapes
and dream places and homes meant for a life
unfolded perfectly against plan.

My mother drew her landscape -
seas of despair, mountain ranges rocked me,
her borders defined and redefined.
Secondhandedly, defined, redefined.

cartographers

fall asleep in theaters at times.
Aren't always graph paper, fit to scale
and decided. They do not count their steps.
Lungs are often forgotten for feeling.
Life tramples their ink, tangles up
the courses and lines that were so
important. Life catches
the cartographer, draws geography
out of her eyes and her mouth, attempting
toward intersection. Perhaps that is the
personality becoming physical. Maybe that
is why we allow it: the drawn out drawls
of the future captured there.

Mappers hate photographs. Sure, the light
is good but where is the barn? Whose is it?
Do you know the path there, eyes shut?
Do you telescope it, tie it down,
flag the very dirt?

Then are you less of a liar
for the shutter shut eye? They frame my work,
too, you know. But there is nothing of the
mechanical blink, nothing but the paper
and the ink and the view that she swore
she got down just right.

cartographers

use words last. These words do last --
the carefully chosen proper nouns.
A cartographer considers line,
shape to image, to strangle.
Every letter an impression,
forest serifed among the trees.
Cartographers map carefully,
watch the love unfold before fold to love
before love is laid along her contours
before dredging the bed sheets for care.
It is not good as bad, the conclusion,
the drawn thought pattern to elevation.
She prefers precision, certainty.
She prefers the land laid whole,
every closeness anchored.

cartographers

are not God. Don't tell them I told you.
They do not build Earth first.
You can tell because the sky is not ink
and not everywhere for boots
and not every woods for tents.

The boundaries you draw don't form fences.
Although you've tried. We are not God.
Ask the poet who wrote her there:
smiling and speckled, brazen and freckled, alive.
The continents arched against longingly
and the drifting away in the after.

Instead, false maps sunk ships.
The first cartographers thought
they made the land. This Amerigo
was just drawing his wife and
she kept slipping away. He's a
seismograph, tried to get tectonic
plates to fall in love. They volcanoed –
a successful experiment,
none alive.

lovers

make a monopoly of silence
Leave out those mountain ranges and
the groves where the bees don't hardly sing.
Our man never wrote in his lover's town.
That exclusivity of knowing,
a moment of blur in his vision.
Does a cartographer owe honesty to us?
Who checks his steps, kisses his lips,
but the woman from nowhere he loves always?
He loves here nowhere, empty space
goes there and comes from.
And only the trace of his footsteps
lead to home.

cartographers

aren't doing this for people
all the time. They didn't intend to leave
impressions for the elses and the others.
They are not perfect, they are filled with
imperfect, they are filled with rot on the
inside, where the ladder should be.
They don't mean to fix your problems,
they just want you to see that they are not
rooted, grown, there are no mountains that
you have made. Your ranges are lovely.
Your rot is lovely. You are made of twenty
thousand cross outs and rethought and calculations
that should have been made better the first time.

Amerigo was trying to draw his wife while
Columbus was remembering the sea ahead before
Napoleon hadn't reached the end of the world, before
Washington was even being born.
Amerigo tried to draw his wife and
his wife tried to sleep in his cast lamp-light and
their unborn children drew tenuous to the surface,
with all the extra beds of their house left cold.
Amerigo had tried to draw his wife like
a murderer tried for petty robbery like
the continents had tried a shuddering waltz.

cartographers

are not sailors. Are not seafish. Cannot know
what lies below the sea, although they would.
Rather, they trace the shoreline, the waves
breaking back, they take steps back,
they stand on the shore and wish one of their own
had seen the high shelf, the mountains there.
They define the wreckage on the land
and ache to be octopi, eight legs to crawl
through the echoing ranges, inking every inch
of the landscape for the sea-faring, see-bearing
brethren. But they can't be there at the sea
as she is now, watching her daughter enter the
grand unseen wondering if this was her own fault,
having left only water for the girl's feet to find.

I am a cartographer. I come from a bird. The bird
was my mother. She had to tie herself to a tree
but still. We no longer speak the same language
but still. She taught me to be still, to observe
the motions of the ground. I can tell you why we chose
to nestle our home in the bosom of a hill that ached
to shake us off it: we ached.

cartogasana,

meaning map pose, is one of the greatest yogic achievements. The first step is to map the body. This takes fifty one years, until the traffic of blood is no longer surprising, and can be pushed upwards. The pose begins on a mountain. There is a handstand on the peak. There is the perfect peak and then the perfect handstand and the yogi has erected herself. Her feet form points. On the ground below, the day falls. Her friends scurry after her and her perfect toes. She is perfect all day. The day is necessarily perfect. This is the pinnacle.

At the end her daughter takes the land she has laid out.

How could one cartographer know so much about nesting? I have nested before. My mother is a bowerbird. I am an angel-girl. The wings are part of the deal. I made you this map and I understand you won't make homes there: I ache, you do, we all must.

cartographers

are all friends of my friends. I know, I'm bragging,
but it's true. I am so jealous of the friends of my
friends because they have good taste and because
they are making maps. Who will they sell maps to?
I will buy them, of course. My house will be the most
flammable. My house will burst at the seams.
Here all the continents are, they are no less
a grounded thing.

cartographers

fall asleep in beds and wake up to mansions.
All their land is eaten up entirely by the
humongous, the large, and the towns and roads.
What had been dot suddenly stars, has remained
elevated but become more heavy weight,
full of bustle and warranted interest. But the
people are further away than they had been
the sacred ground sunken into shallow furrows,
the new growth.

Thomas

They find him mapping Jesus's eighteen years gone. I want
to lean back and tell him – we all have times like that.

cartographers

hate Google maps. All those images as
photographs taken from the steady blink
of space, of a mechanical pupil. This is
an art precise only to people,
a thing that is more than just a synthetic blink
of a false eye. They nest into each other
formed felt, fled, the paper naked more truly.
It is more than a phantom of thought, intangible
everything together and true to the touch
to the feel of the existence. The pen is actually
drawn across the paper. The paper is there, a thin
membrane, a skin made from trees, the forests here.
A map exists.

Beautiful women can be mapped. Not in the sense of construction of but in the admiration in. Their skins are filled perfectly and sot. They discover with wonder with children or without, the woods equally accepting or the druids as the dryads. Every inch the scholar, she traces her own shoreline, she breaks as she swells, she finds her own buoys. This is the truth: she has her own honesties in secrets, and not all of her secrets are honest. But she knows this, and she would tell you if you could just find her here.

cartographers

try. They do. They trace the path, feet slow, and breaths measured and they are thoughtful there. But the map is always wrongly true: here there be edges, fought over, the no-man's-land, the last homely house before oblivion. Every inch is detailed, every elevation line one feather fallen. All cartographers are one cartographer, cold and counted, not trusting her own eyes at the beauty, tracing you almost-states and close-lakes. And everything is always shifting away. She looks back on a horizon leaving, their borders both wrong and true.





Bryce Bortree tries, she does.

This is copy of twenty handmade copies.