

## Not for Navigation – Hondartza Fraga

*Not for Navigation* brings together a number of works made during the past five years by Leeds-based Spanish artist Hondartza Fraga. The exhibition title comes from the disclaimer printed on maps that are unsuitable for course-plotting purposes, for example, being geometrically inaccurate or else lacking some crucial details that would be required to navigate the real world. Such maps serve different functions, perhaps simply visually decorative, or else representative of the aspirations of their owner – demonstrating worldly knowledge of a seasoned traveller. The phrase also connects with Fraga's ongoing interests in mapping, exploration, and remote and unknown environments, both on earth and in outer space.

The newest work in the exhibition *Blank Orrery* (2016) is a pencil drawing of a mechanical model of the solar system that illustrates the position and motions of the planets (and their moons) in relation to each other and the sun. Invented in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, long before space travel and photography enabled mankind to see actual images of the Earth from afar, in relation to its neighbours (the 'pale blue dot'), such objects are arguably now redundant, valued only by collectors as curiosities or antiques. Yet an orrery still serves as a powerful reminder of our home planet's diminutive position, just one in a network of rotating spheres suspended in a vastness of almost empty space.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is the project *365 Globes*, in which Fraga made a daily drawing of a different globe every day for one year, starting on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015. Sourcing images from the Internet, she posted a photograph of each drawing online as she made them, using the photo-sharing platform Instagram. Tagging them with hashtags such as #365drawings, #365challenge and #oneaday, she connected with an ever-growing international network of individuals who undertake a variety of durational, rule-bound projects. Despite this use of digital technology, the work is very much rooted in the analogue, both in terms how she made it (pencil on paper being among the most accessible and straightforward artistic mediums, and one that most viewers would have experience of using themselves) and also in the project's culmination in limited edition book, which reproduces all 365 drawings full size, along with a 366<sup>th</sup> drawing made for a leap year.

What is immediately noticeable in these drawings is that all of the orbs depicted in *365 Globes* are blank – devoid of the familiar landmasses or stellar constellations that one would expect to see on either a terrestrial or celestial globes. Fraga has commented that, '*On a blank map there are no marks, no boundaries, paths or points of reference: there can be no home in a white map.*' Living away from her native Spain, the inability to pinpoint home might echo feelings of displacement and loss, yet for Fraga, such dislocation has never been a negative experience and she can quickly feel at home wherever she is living.

Thoughts about home and belonging also come up in the 2011 video *Mars Was a Place*, in which Fraga at one point asks: '*Is it only other people that can make us feel at home?*' The question is part of a dialogue with Markus Lantto, whom she met on an artist residency in Norway in 2010. The pair later exchanged emails in preparation for a collaborative work,

before realizing that this actual communication was more engaging than any invented dialogue. In it they reflect philosophically on maps, on the impossibility of imagining the unknown, on distance and being lost, and on the parallels between the human body and the landscape. Their conversation accompanies a single-take video taken from a plane high above an anonymous flat vista of mottled fields.

The video opens with a quote from popular astronomer Carl Sagan (1934–96), who in 1980 wrote: *'I remember being transfixed by the first lander image to show the horizon of Mars. This was not an alien world, I thought. There were rocks and sand drifts and a distant eminence, as natural and unselfconscious as any landscape on Earth. Forever after, Mars would be a place.'* In the conversation that follows between Fraga and Lantto, Mars recurs as a subject. Fraga makes reference to the 'failed' maps made by Percival Lowell (1855–1916) at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, depicting what he believed to be canals on Mars. Reflecting on her own interest, she asks, *'Why am I always attracted to places that appear so remote, so distant?'* and this question has resonance in relation to much of her work. They also discuss images of clouds on Mars, remarking how 'normal' and similar to Earth's clouds these are, and how strange it might be to see something recognizable on another planet. At this moment, the camera on the plane turns upwards, away from the ground towards the clouds above, so that as it pans back down, the landscape takes on a new meaning. The viewer might imagine that the world below is actually Martian: unknown yet mundane.

Another moving-image work, *Dust* (2016), uses actual images from a distant planet. Created using raw footage released by NASA on its website from the Cassini mission to Saturn, which includes the visual 'dust' in the images that is later cleaned up. In Fraga's animation, these tiny specs of white against a black background appear like a constellation of stars through which a camera travels in a journey that echoes so many sci-fi films and television series. The work is at once both a fictional and literal depiction of outer space as well as a reminder of the stardust from which everything on Earth is ultimately made.

The final work in the exhibition, *Mappa* (2016) again draws on the viewer's tendency to seek the familiar in imagery. Two circular drawings are hemispheres viewed from above the two poles. Concentric patterns are broken by irregular forms, which appear as islands – blank territories that could be glacial landmasses at the northern and southern extremes of Earth. Yet the patterns in the 'oceans' reveal the true origin of the imagery as being much closer to home. These are in fact drawings of broken doilies, those ornamental mats much beloved by grandmothers and cafés serving afternoon tea. Loaded with gender connotations, they are the epitome of domesticity, and offer a neat way to bring together remote, unknown locations at the edges of our planet with the comforting familiarity and mundaneness of home.

### **Rebecca Morrill**

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