

Hand-Drawn Reference Map



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Process

I decided to return to the roots of cartography with my hand-drawn pen and watercolor reference map. This map heavily contrasts my previous submissions, all of which rely on drawing software and Felt. The base for this map is a ADK map from the New York Historical Society that I own a print of (Bob gave it to me, what a stellar advisor!), which I hand traced and scaled down to a workable size. I then transferred this outline to my paper. I used a heavy picture-frame mat paper that I already had on hand. In retrospect, water color paper would have been better, but I like the base color of the mat. I started inking with micron pens, which worked wonderfully on the paper.

At this point, I had to pause in my artistic pursuits to look at references—I did not have this map planned out as well as my other ones. I spent some time with the readings from our cartographic language week, and looked at a wide range of hand-drawn map examples to determine which components I wanted to symbolize. Ultimately, my favorite reference maps are, of course, inspired by literature, fantasy, and artistic forms of cartography. These tend to focus on aesthetics and overall presentation rather than specific, accurate data. To this end, I kept my referents minimal: overall topography, major water bodies, park borders, general regions. I looked through many examples of how lakes and mountains have been illustrated in pen and paint, settling on simple designs to maximize readability. In this vein, I leave most things unlabeled, out of fear of cluttering the design.

Once I had laid down the major features in pencil, I inked them and then began the somewhat frustrating process of painting them. This is when I discovered that picture-frame mat paper is NOT good for moisture-based mediums, resulting in a map that is unfortunately wrinkly. I have aspirations to steam it flat soon, but need to do more research to avoid inflicting even more water damage upon it. Once the paint dried, I went over again with pen, creating a border, regional labels, additional shading, and a key. I considered (and am still considering) adding more referents, either for major towns, or places with personal

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relevance or poignant histories. At this point, however, I had well surpassed my five-hour work mark, and decided to leave it for now.

Course Connections

I will be the first to admit that this map is less theoretically engaged than my others, but I do see several valuable and relevant points for reflection. To begin with, hand-drawing a map forces a procedural slow down. I produced a map over a period of hours that is simpler and less accurate than one I could make in using a digital software in minutes. This allows for a level of introspection that feels akin to our work in reflexivity and “pressing pause” (Kelly and Bosse 2022).

Another impact of the hand-drawn process is that it requires manual interaction with every map element in a direct and deliberate manner. Every choice I made, every line I inked, every brushstroke I painted required close consideration. Each decision was final, as there is no undo button for this medium. The readings on cartographic language expanded my vocabulary for making these choices (White 2017) In a world without material or temporal restraints, I would expand on the visual variables and symbolizations in this map, creating a truly holistic representation. In the interim, I had to be strategic in my choice of referents. I weighed which conventions I would adhere, to, and which I would challenge (Muth 2020).

Evaluation

I can’t help but be excited by the result of this map. I love a piece of physical artwork, and feel as though the creative process was both rewarding and informative. I admit that the aesthetic appeal outweighs the cartographic and theoretical merit on this particular project, but that doesn’t lessen my enjoyment of the output. I plan to gift it to my mom for Mother’s Day—she has always been the biggest fan of my artwork, and the ADKs are as near and dear (Get it? Because Adirondacks? Hehe) to her heart as to mine. In terms of tangible output, I would absolutely evaluate this as a success.

Reflection

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As I mentioned before, I had to work much more deliberately in this project than in others—the stakes felt higher working on an analog map, and the material cost is greater. This made me reflect upon the areas of map-making that I like to rush through, and those I have more patience for. I surprise myself with my ability to be mindful in my choice of variables, creating a cohesive plan at the outset and sticking with it. I figure that work spent on the front end of the project almost always saves time at the other end. This, of course, leads me to my weakness. I do not have a lot of patience for the finishing process, a trend that shows up across all of my artwork: the cleanup on my metalwork is sloppy, my hems are lopsided, and the solder of my stained glass goes unpolished. Why should my maps be any different? Taking the time to finish a job completely with as much detail as I begin it with is a considerable obstacle for me, and this map in particular called my attention to this.

References

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