

Theatrum Orbis Terrarum is an ongoing photographic project initiated by Marjolijn Dijkman in 2005 that comprises more than 9,000 images. Its title refers to the first true modern atlas, the “Theater of the World,” published by Abraham Ortelius in 1570. Ortelius’s atlas, an early attempt at collecting the world in one volume of standardized maps, formed a summary of sixteenth-century cartography. At the time, it delimited an understanding of the known world, giving form and shape to distant countries, illustrating similarities in urban planning, and visualizing connections between places across land and water.

The impulse to map our world has existed since humans made images on the walls of caves, alongside the impulse to place ourselves at the center and to imagine the world as we want to see it, not perhaps as it actually exists. With



limited tools of travel and measurement available, early maps relied on equal parts fact and imagination; their subjectivity of inclusion and exclusion, and the choices of center and margin were not only practical, but also political, economic, and social as the boundaries of the “world” expanded based on these interests. Atlases often included supplementary information—illustrations of flora and fauna, local populations and customs, imports and exports, natural features, important buildings, etc. and photographic images of the same since the medium’s invention. These secondary aspects of cartography allowed for greater contextualization, but also point to the cognitive shift, historically, from the figure of the Explorer to the figure of the Collector in Enlightenment thinking, where the rational impulse to understand the world was attempted through copious accumulation and archiving of specimens, in the form of objects and images. In its form, Dijkman posits *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* not only as an atlas but as a collection and archive—through these images of places and situations in the built and natural

environments, Dijkman is evincing the same impulse to accumulate and catalogue, represent and understand, relate and individuate across the world. Photographs have a complicated relationship to these ideas, as they are the mode of representation most indexical to reality, as representations of it rather than descriptions or interpretations of it. They are a primary means through which we offer evidence and documentation, but of course those functions belie the reality of photography’s “truth value.” In practice, the act of photography is deeply subjective—framing includes and excludes aspects of reality and lighting affects the conveyed mood and emotion; manipulation is possible even in the absence of overt staging. But photography remains the most effective tool for constructing or reconstructing place—since the early twentieth century, as photography developed and cameras

became increasingly portable, images have, in many ways, supplanted maps as the primary means of transmitting visual information about place, for understanding the terrain of foreign lands and the layout of distant cities, for conveying cultural specificity. In our present moment, this is even more true, as the increased saturation of official/professional imagemaking and the ubiquity of personal photography have conspired to increase exponentially our access to photographs in digital space. Not unlike a Flickr user or tourist, Marjolijn Dijkman’s *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* began as an attempt to capture the places she had traveled, to collect the world as she had seen it, but evolved over time within an overarching framework of relationships between herself and the images; spaces and gestures; localities and displacements; and among past, present, and future. The impulse to share the collection, in exhibitions, print, and online, echoes these recent developments of Web 2.0 culture, but also bears the influence of earlier attempts to archive and organize the world. The Mundaneum, an early

twentieth-century archive initiated by Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine, had the grand aspiration to gather and classify all the world’s knowledge through an elaborate system of 12 million individual entries. Otlet’s 1934 book *Monde* theorized this system as a *réseau* or network, a “mechanical, collective” brain that would make all the world’s published knowledge available over a global telecommunications infrastructure. Otlet’s “city of knowledge” is a prescient conceptualization of information architecture that prefigures the World Wide Web—significant not only for its hubristic and ultimately impossible ambitions toward comprehensiveness, but for its proposition of new information relationships. A shift away from earlier archival and library organization that involved filing and singular categorization, the Mundaneum engendered more active and relational links between information,

linking multiple ideas to individual entries, an analog version of today’s logic of association through hyperlinking or tagging on the Web. Dijkman pairs text and image in the spirit of the Mundaneum, or much like photos are tagged in digital space, or how reference materials are now searchable by keyword rather than static author/title/subject heading designations. Each image carries multiple references, each reference a sub-archive of images. The relationships are not static—the archive continues to grow; new terms and their related images are reconsidered over time; and multiple iterations of the same content are offered in exhibition, print, and online. In this way, Dijkman generates an understanding of the world that is similarly open, mutable, yet specific. To this end, the online iteration of Dijkman’s archive is organized along three axes: *Gestures*, *References*, and *Speculations*. *Gestures* shows the traces and effects of human intervention into the built and natural environments, relating verbs of action (*Abandon*, *Botch*, *Camouflage*, *Declare*, *Embrace*, for example) to images of public

space. Clicking on any of the terms initiates a slideshow of related photographs culled from the archive, creating a multiplicity of overlapping semantic groupings. *References* engages notions of geographic and cultural displacement, depicting the ways in which architecture and urban planning often copy or co-opt foreign tropes. Points on a globe connect images to the geographical location insinuated by the photograph’s subject, not the location in which the photograph itself was taken. *Speculations* constructs an alternate timeline based on implied rather than actual chronology. Images are arrayed by the eras and time periods speculated upon in the images themselves, rather than being sequenced in the order of their making. Much as the notion of the relational database occasioned a seismic shift in the way we think—that facts, ideas, and documents are not isolated or static but are

understood in multiple relations to one another—digital photography, in practice and distribution, has occasioned a shift in the way we see images. The single image has been supplanted by the stream of images, from the historical idea of a photographic print to the present-day reality of images viewed digitally in grids, arrays, slideshows, and feeds. The physical exhibition of *Theatrum* echoes this shift as well. One part involves a continuous panorama of hundreds of images, arrayed in an irregular grid, pasted directly to the wall. Although comprising photographs in the physical sense, the installation downplays their physicality to create an inhabitable feed with no beginning or end. This field of images is contrasted with an installation of thousands of projected images, organized as a rapid slideshow, each sequence of images introduced with a textual reference of action. Both create movements or chapters by linking individual images, the former by a relational visual logic and the latter through specific association of language and image. A printed dimension of the project will appear during the run of the MATRIX exhibition; of all the iterations

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|-------------|------------|-----------------|
| Abandon | Display | Neglect |
| Abuse | Divide | Obey |
| Accommodate | Drag | Occupy |
| Adapt | Dramatize | Open up |
| Adjust | Embrace | Order |
| Adopt | Encourage | Penetrate |
| Advise | Erase | Perforate |
| Announce | Exclude | Perform |
| Apologize | Explain | Profit |
| Appropriate | Fetishize | Prohibit |
| Assemble | Flatten | Propose |
| Avert | Freeze | Protect |
| Botch | Gather | Protest |
| Burst | Globalize | Provide |
| Camouflage | Glorify | Refer |
| Celebrate | Grasp | Refresh |
| Censor | Grieve | Refuse |
| Cheer up | Guide | Regenerate |
| Civilize | Hide | Release |
| Collect | Honor | Remain |
| Compose | Illuminate | Repel |
| Conceal | Imagine | Reveal |
| Confront | Imitate | Seduce |
| Confuse | Impress | Simulate |
| Connect | Indicate | Speculate |
| Conserve | Interrupt | Strike |
| Console | Intertwine | Struggle |
| Construct | Invade | Subdue |
| Contact | Invite | Suffocate |
| Control | Irritate | Support |
| Correct | Isolate | Surprise |
| Declare | Liberate | Surrender |
| Demarcate | Maintain | Torture |
| Demonstrate | Mark | Transgress |
| Depend | Measure | Turn inside out |
| Direct | Mirror | Turn pale |
| Disguise | Mobilize | Wait |
| Displace | Mock | Warn |

of the project, this will exist closest in form to an atlas, as a self-contained document. But it is modeled as a newspaper, suggesting the fluidity and openness even of the printed medium.

The conceptual power of the archive or atlas is the implication of unity and totality, a sum total of representation, but Dijkman's project suggests a cognitive dissonance with this notion of the archive. With any collection of information—be it an atlas, the Library of Congress, or Flickr—the more comprehensive a set of information is, the more it highlights what is missing; the more points of reference it offers for understanding its subject, the more it suggests the impossibility of such knowledge; the more global its scope, the more important local specificity becomes. Dijkman's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* project offers in aggregate an



Marjolijn Dijkman has exhibited her work at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Mercosur Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil; Arnolfini, Bristol; MACBA, Barcelona; MuHKA, Antwerp; Bloomberg SPACE, London; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn; De Appel, Amsterdam; Sharjah Biennial; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Upcoming exhibitions include Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria and a major presentation of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* at IKON Gallery, Birmingham. In 2005, with her partner Maarten Vanden Eynde, she founded the artist-run initiative, Enough Room for Space, which partners with sites and institutions around the world to initiate temporary projects that explore critical positions of art in society and create platforms for collaboration. They will be collaborating with a NASA scientist for a project exploring the aesthetic and political ramifications of dark matter in an upcoming exhibition at Smart Project Space in Amsterdam. Dijkman graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy; did post-graduate work at the Piet Zwart Institute; and was a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie. Born in 1978, she lives and works in Rotterdam and Brussels.

attempt to rethink existing representations of the world, to look for similarities in the way we use, adapt, and construct built and natural environments. But it offers no conclusive or singular proposition, in the process questioning the function of the archive, the atlas, the photograph, and the database and experimenting with the interrelationship of images and the relation of text and image. It visualizes the world, how landscape and architecture echo around the world, and how our behaviors in them rhyme with each other. It privileges the frame of the individual in doing so, while acknowledging the limits of such subjectivity in presenting or receiving any understanding of the world and our shared relationship to it.

Elizabeth Thomas
PHYLLIS WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR

CONVERSATION
Michael Dear and Marjolijn Dijkman
Sunday, September 26, 3 p.m.
Museum Theater

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IMAGES Marjolijn Dijkman: *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, ongoing photographic research 2005-2010; courtesy of the artist.

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MARJOLIJN DIJKMAN THEATRUM ORBIS TERRARUM

MATRIX 234 SEPTEMBER 26—NOVEMBER 28, 2010
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM AND PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE