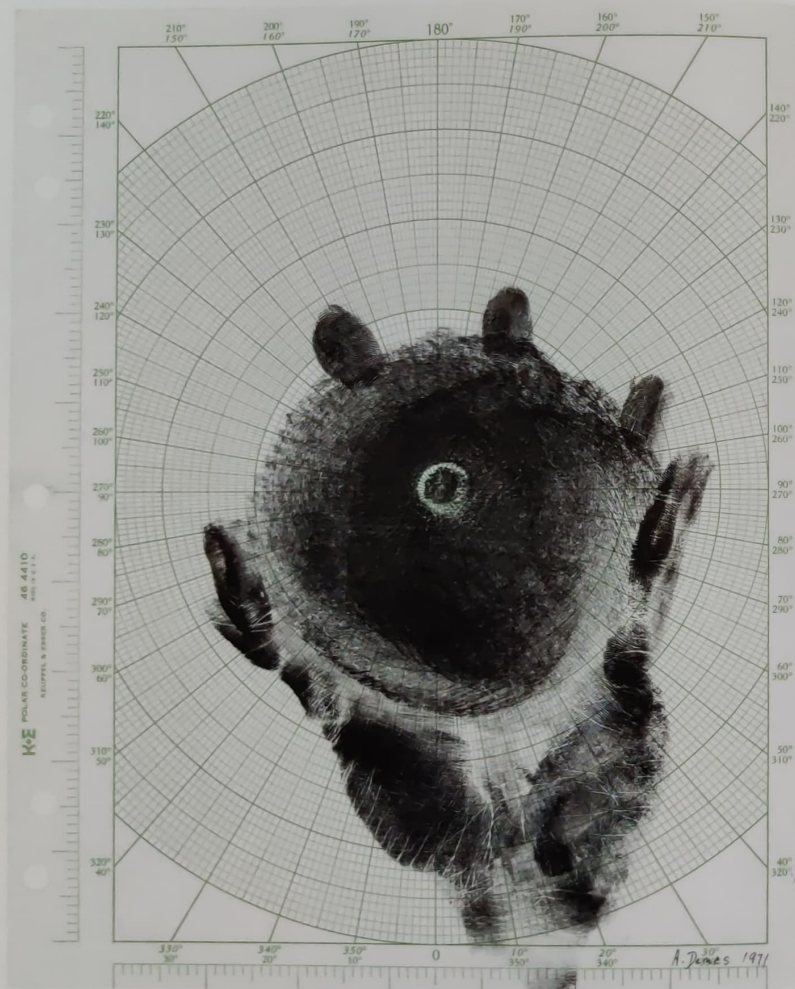




Held, 1971 [cat. no. 86]

THERE ARE NO MAPS
OF THE WORLD

—
Timothy Morton



[Fig. 48]

A map is a tool. For example, if you want to voyage round the Cape of Good Hope, because you've heard that there are these fabulous islands just east of Eden, the Spice Islands—you've heard of this medieval poem by these Benedictine monks called "The Land of Cockaigne," in which, on the Spice Islands, ready-made roast geese fly directly into your mouth; you invent point perspective and certain mapping techniques in order to see around the corner of the southern tip of Africa, so you can more easily get there. Once you get there, you find that the islands are just normal old islands, with people on them. So you colonize them and force the occupants to grow the fabulous spices you heard about in that song, which was a song about what monks think about how rich lazy people enjoy themselves.

Capitalism literally began as a fantasy, and that fantasy was pure unabashed consumerism. Everything makes sense as a way to justify and enact it: the invention of loans and venture capital and the birth of stock exchanges around Europe; the wars between England and the Netherlands; and the attempts to go in the other direction and this time, once more with feeling, really actually discover those spice islands (it's called America). The narrative of these physical places is like one-armed bandits in permanent jackpot potlatch mode. Inside every Puritan-work-ethic-driven human is a La-Z-Boy lounge glued to the television, like that prone fat white man, staring up at the sky, satiated-intoxicated out of his tiny mind in the Pieter Brueghel the Elder painting *The Land of Cockaigne* (1567). And so, about 800 years later, here we are, under the gigantic fat thumb of the monstrous hyperbolic Eden to the west, and its planet-destroying upgrade of "The Land of Cockaigne"—it's called McDonald's—incarnated (quite literally, as we are talking about meat

Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections:
The Egg, 1970
Lithograph on paper
37 x 29"
The JPMorgan Chase
Art Collection

here) in the fantasies realized (white working-class European fantasies this time, not those of medieval monks) on Main Street. Walking up Main Street, USA, is walking through the fantasy space of a starving 19th-century immigrant, escaping the potato famine in the 19th century. Just press this button, just swipe right, and all the spiced candies in the world will pour into your mouth. All the white bread and red meat that posh people eat will be available in this hyperbolic Eden.

In this sense, America, with its biggest shoe in the world by the highway, America itself is the biggest pile of Europe ever. "Great again," as in the catchphrase of the current white-supremacist president of the USA, doesn't just mean military or ideological might. "Great" also just means "a reliably huge pile of Europe" in just this way, a giant, gilded bowl of meat. Take another Vicodin and relax, anxious Land-of-Cockaigner. Normal ready-cooked-geese-flying will resume shortly. Relax in the La-Z-Boy. It's gonna be great.

To a hammer—a tool, for example a sardonic, compensatory fantasy in some medieval monk's head—everything looks like a nail. Be careful what you dream of. Be careful which maps you use. A map is a tool.

Map tools often project space as flat, because as we are not planet-size beings, the curvature of space-time doesn't matter very much. Until it does. The fantasy of being able to transport oneself everywhere—the Spice Islands were like medieval asteroids, they were floating and the original idea was to attach chains to them and pull them toward Europe by ship—resulted in mobile phones and the Internet, which necessitated Global Positioning Systems. Time aboard GPS satellites is moving faster than time on Earth's surface, so their clocks run a little faster than the ones in our phones to compensate for the curvature of the gravitational field. So it looks like even human maps need

to be curvy now, sometimes. But nice neat linear grids will do if you want to capture an asteroid or voyage around the Cape of Good Hope or discover a convenient Land of Cockaigne called the islands of the Caribbean, where you can make commodities called enslaved Africans fly toward plantations.

A thing may be a tool for another thing. This is the best, least ideologically cloudy definition of technology. To an ant, a leaf is part of a house. To a leaf, sunlight is food. To an ant and a leaf, Earth's magnetic field is a shield against solar rays. To a merchant adventurer, a captain of primitive accumulation, a map is a way to see around corners, project power into the future, gain time, minimize danger. To Agnes Denes, a map is a way to make art. For us, Denes's maps are ways to break up the conceptual monopoly on maps—who gets to make them, and why. The whole world looks like a nail. Then someone makes all kinds of hammers that don't bash in nails. Some of them are made of slime. Some of them are made of breakfast cereal. She hangs these hammers on the wall of an art gallery. People see them. They realize that the world doesn't just look like a nail. There are more things to do with the world than hammer away at it.

A thing is never an "object," a static inert solid blob (what an amazing fantasy that is). Object-oriented ontology (OOO) should really have a different name. We OOO philosophers should really have called it de-objectification-oriented ontology. But we ran out of ink. OOO brings out a primordial fantasy in the white Western imaginary about what an "object" is, a.k.a. something that has been hammered to death, that has experienced the worst possible thing that could happen to a subject. That's pretty telling. To an ideology about what white Western people are, everything else looks like that kind of object—to a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Just keep bashing

them in and maybe this thing will crack open and the potlatch inside the Easter egg will pour out into your mouth. When such people hear the word *object* they see as in a mirror the worst thing that could happen to them. Better perhaps to think that to be is to become. This is how what seems subversive can often join up with what is most oppressive. Exxon, Facebook, and Google are the ultimate realization of the ideology that things are processes, a meme that Denes asserts in a David Bohm-like manifesto statement: Bohm, writer of beautiful books about relativity and quantum theory, Krishnamurti disciple, suicidally depressed Manhattan Project scientist. Let no one stand in the way of the digging machinery of deterritorialization! We are but salt spray effervescing in the ocean of capitalism, where everything solid melts into air.

The fact that such assertions are made in art space, however, disarms them by displacing them, with or without the deliberate intent of a human author. And as Denes's diagrams and David Bohm's commitment to thinking in four dimensions silently indicate, a process becomes a static object when you view it from a high-enough dimension.

Do we really need to dissolve things in some kind of conceptual or economic acid in order to tolerate their thingness? Let's try another way. For a start, a hammer is never really (just) a hammer. A hammer is also a landing strip for a fly. A hammer is a piece of spider tech in an abandoned garden shed. A hammer is a shapely lump of bacterial poop from several billion years ago—most of the iron in Earth's crust just is that. A hammer is an example of object withdrawal in an essay about Agnes Denes. If I bash a nail with a hammer, I get a hammer bash. If I lick the hammer (I am a curious feline), I get a hammer lick. If I think about the hammer, I get a hammer thought. If the hammer was some kind of special

intelligent hammer and went on a chat show, what it said about itself would be hammer autobiography. At no point—not even from the smart hammer's point of view—would the hammer as such appear. But it's a hammer. It's not a cyclone. It's not an idea about colonialism. It's not a pile of hammers, drills, and monkey wrenches in a toolbox. It's a hammer.

It's a map. But it's not just a map. It's a piece of art. It's a gymnasium for a spider. It's an electrostatic surface for dust to be attracted to. It's an example of the genius of an artist in an essay by an object-oriented philosopher. It's a way to show how white Western violence carves up the world in the name of stupid fantasies about how other people enjoy themselves. But it's also a way to show how that world is never, ever fully encapsulated or shaped or appropriated by such a vision. Such a vision merely tries to shut down the futurity of the future, the possibility that things can be different. Ideology tries to automate what we do and think about maps. But it can't win, not really, not even if it's armed with night vision goggles and ballistic guidance systems. It can't win, because in order to be a thing at all, a thing withdraws from all its appropriations. If it was just an idea in someone's head, or a construct in a discursive archive, or just a pile of atoms that nanotechnology could rearrange into a ready-cooked goose flying straight into a monk's mouth, then sure, ideology wins. Objects are nothing. They are just manipulable lumps for achieving a certain end. There are no people. There are just manipulable objectified blobs: blobs of atoms of blobs of discourse.

But then you'd never be able to take the idea of maps and the technology of map projection and reappropriate them for artistic use. So (sigh of relief) that can't be true. So we can be grateful to Denes for proving that to us.

Map of the world: what does it even mean? A world is not something

you are extensionally "in." If humans ever decide to colonize Mars, because Earth is uninhabitable, they will still be "on Earth" in the better sense of world. World is everything that you're *into*, not something that you are in. The world of football is everything that football players and fans and media (and so on) are into. It's not a point on a map. So, fascinatingly, a map of the world is never just a set of extensional points. (As we have just seen, a set of extensional points are themselves never just a set of extensional points. They are for something and for someone.)

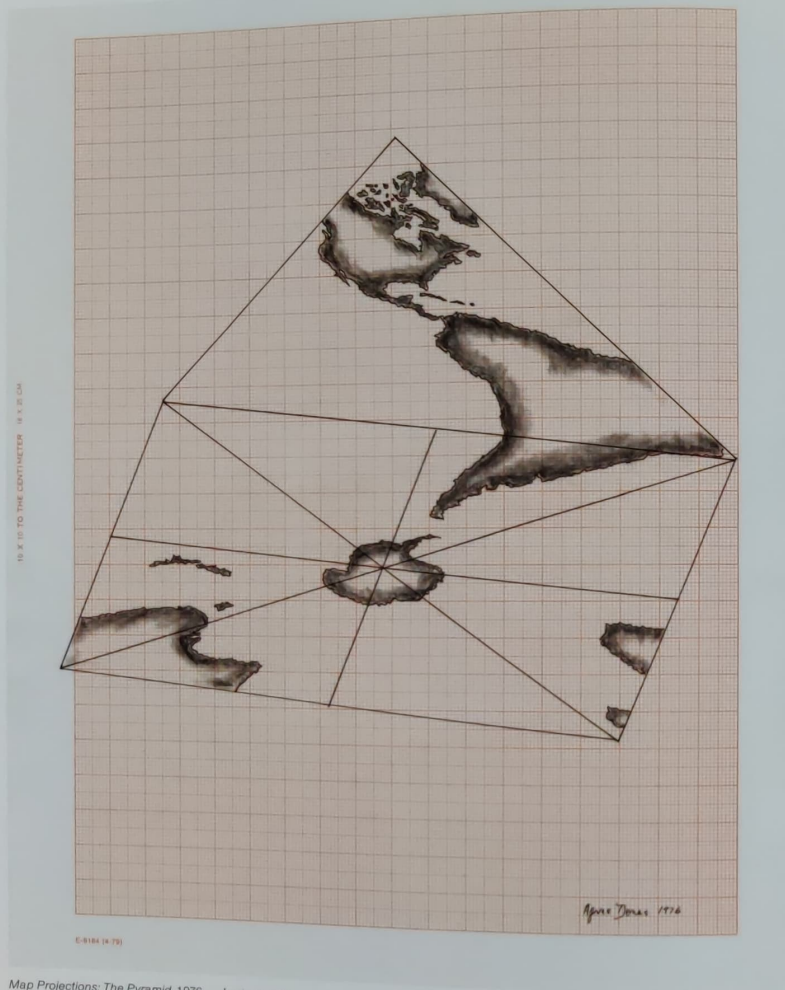
A map of the world is precisely a map designed for the development of a certain world, a certain set of projects that someone or some group is into. The ideological ruse of a map is that it's "just" a set of points, but I am sure the reader is familiar with how the standard Mercator (the clue is in the name) projection favors Europe and North America and, during the Cold War, made the Soviet Union look scarily huge. Africa is much smaller on this map, like a torso belonging to the head that is Europe. The Peters projection makes Africa look as vast as it should be, and cuts Europe and North America down to size. There are no maps of the world. Maps are for worlds.

Turning a global map into a doughnut, as Denes has done, is a very significant project. But imagine the reverse: one would have to squeeze a doughnut by hand to crush it into a sphere. In other words, to transform the globe of the Earth into a doughnut is a work of extreme force. What imaginary alien strength requires Earth to be a doughnut or a nautilus, and what kinds of immense violence would it entail? Such projections require that we reverse engineer the world it would support, and it's a world that would destroy the hopes and dreams of even the most powerful terrestrial humans. The view that sees Earth from space, as in the earthrise images from the Apollo

missions, is on the one hand a utopian hippie gaze from out of the first issue of the Whole Earth Catalog. On the other hand, the flip side of this distant gaze is evil incarnate. "He's got the whole world in his hands" (as the earthrise hymn puts it) implies that "he" is capable of crushing it like an unwanted Christmas ornament. Denes's work may appear mathematical and composed, but maybe that's the whole point. The power of art is to suspend the violence of social processes, literally (on the walls of art museums) and metaphorically. Better to suspend it there than to act it out, with logistics and mutually assured destruction.

The logical neatness, the scintillatingly perfect diagrams, the hymns to dialectical progress, are all suspended in the necessary finitude of things, because as someone who plants wheat in Manhattan knows only too well, true progress would mean getting over the very idea of progress, before it succeeds at the game of Planet Death for which it was unconsciously programmed. As Denes, channeling Kurt Gödel (the guiding spirit of OOO) puts it in *The Human Argument* (1969–70; p. 59), one must be able to speak nonsense in order to be true.

ISOMETRIC SYSTEMS



Map Projections: The Pyramid, 1976 [cat. no. 88]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Egg, 1974-76 [cat. no. 89]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: Pyramidal Projection, 1973 [cat. no. 90]

From the series STUDY OF DISTORTIONS - ISOMETRIC SYSTEMS IN ISOTROPIC SPACE, 1973 - 1974.

Map projection - deal with defined/undefined boundaries and space relations.

Six basic shapes were created in various mathematical projections. The cube, the pyramid, the dodecahedron (12 faceted polyhedron), a torus (helical toroid), a doughnut (tangent torus) and the egg.

There were 18 images printed in an edition of 25, which then were hand selected into 50 unique suites of 9. Each suite is designated with a roman numeral I through L. No two suites are alike. Taking into consideration this method of selection, there are 48,620 possible combinations before a repetition should occur, according to the theory of probability of chance occurrence.

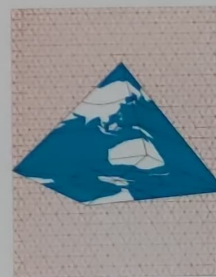
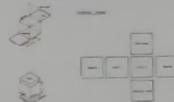
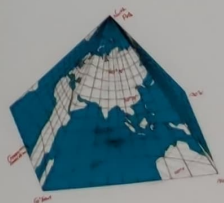
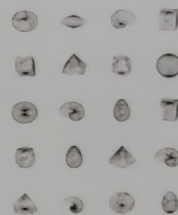
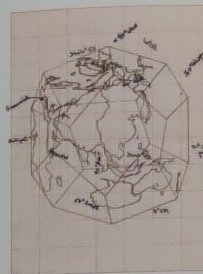
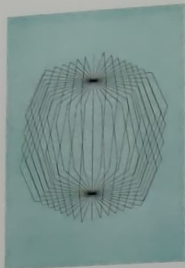
In addition to the roman numeral designating a unique suite, each print is individually numbered on 1/25, and is signed by the artist.

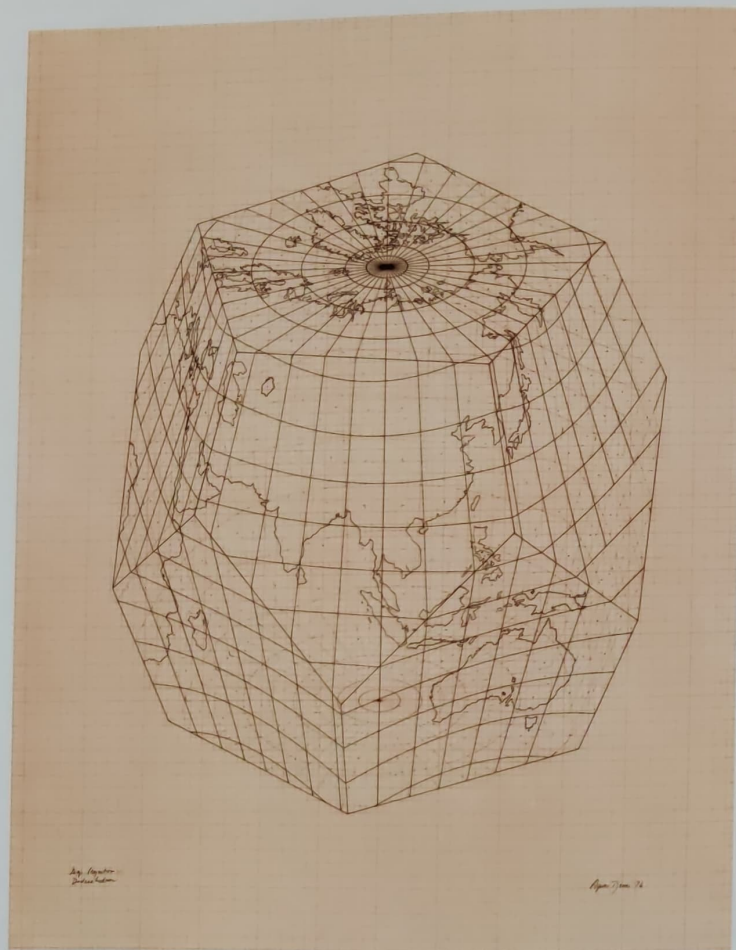
All impressions are on Arches paper, 13 3/4" x 9 3/4" with torn and deckle edges, printed at Nova Scotia College of Art & Design Litho Workshop by John Hutchinson between Dec 2 + Dec 19, 1974, and published by Editions 99 in New York.

Dec 31, 1974

Agnes Jones

Study of Distortions—Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space: Map Projections, 1973-74 [cat. no. 91]

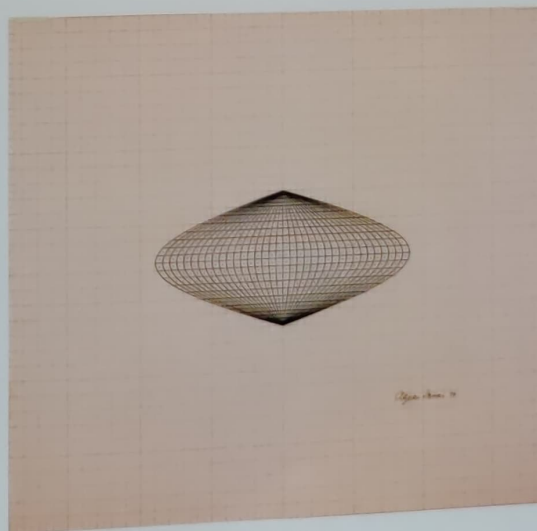




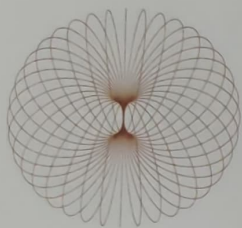
Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Dodecahedron, 1976 [cat. no. 92]



Study of Distortions; Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections:
The Cube, 1978 [cat. no. 93]

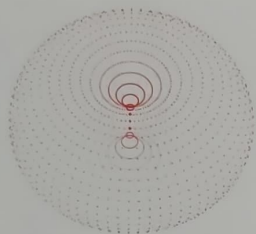


Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections:
The Lemon (prolate ovoid), 1974 [cat. no. 94]



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Agnes, Spain '98



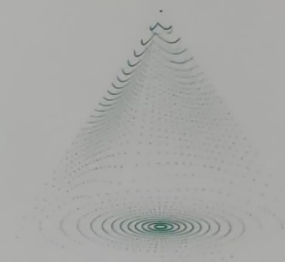
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Agnes, Spain '98



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Agnes, Spain '98



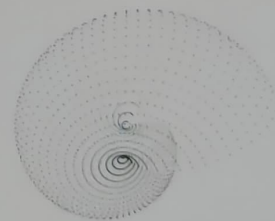
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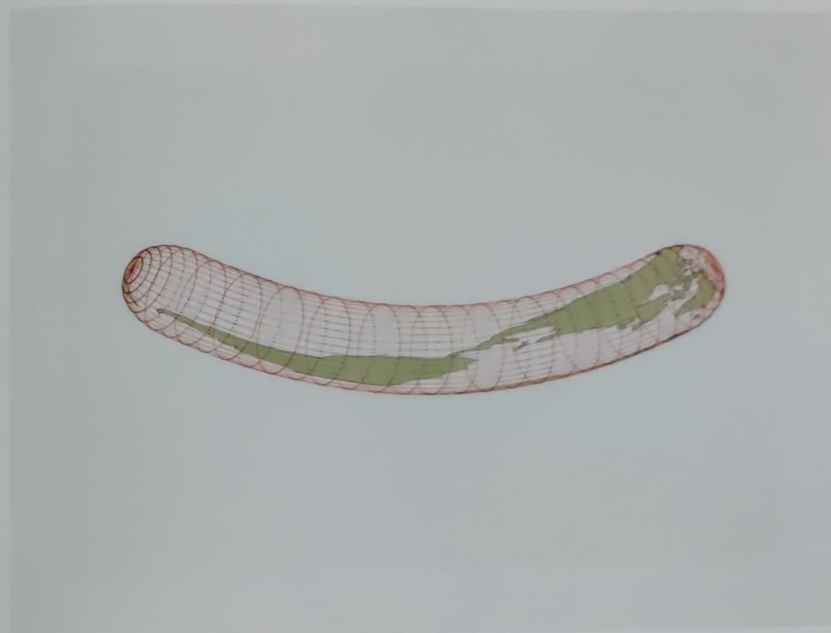




Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Doughnut, 1976 [cat. no. 97]



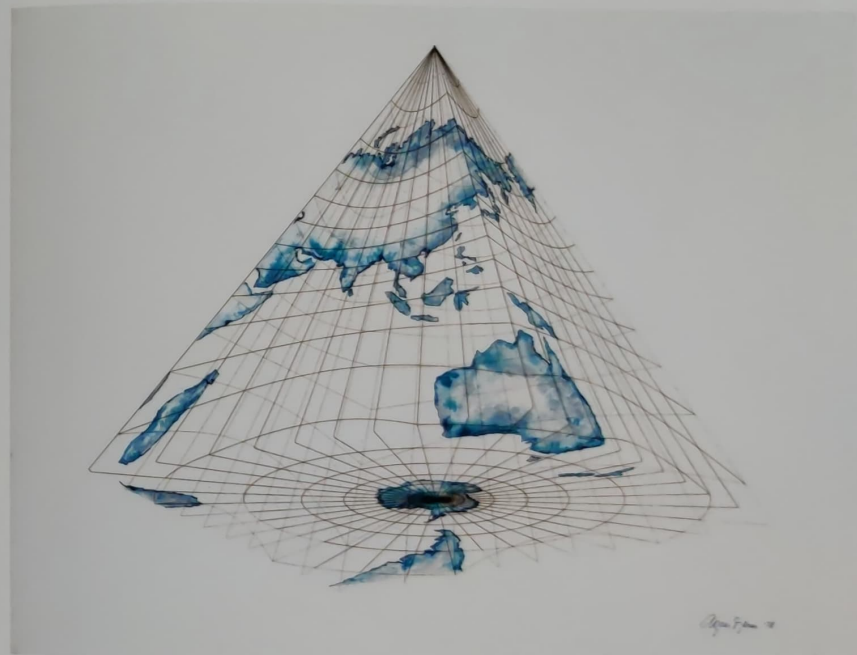
Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Snail, 1974 [cat. no. 98]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Hot Dog, 1976 [cat. no. 99]



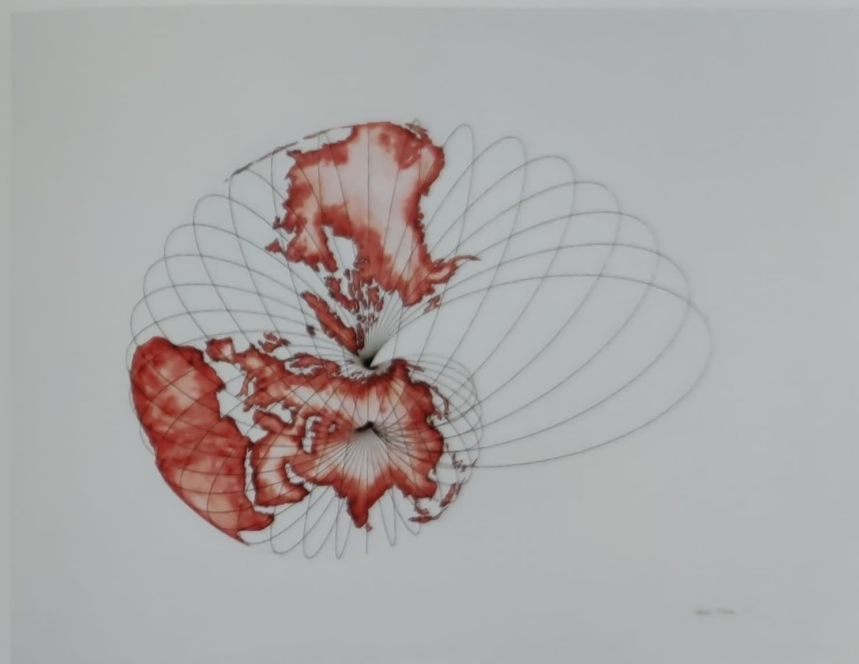
Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Egg, 1979 [cat. no. 100]



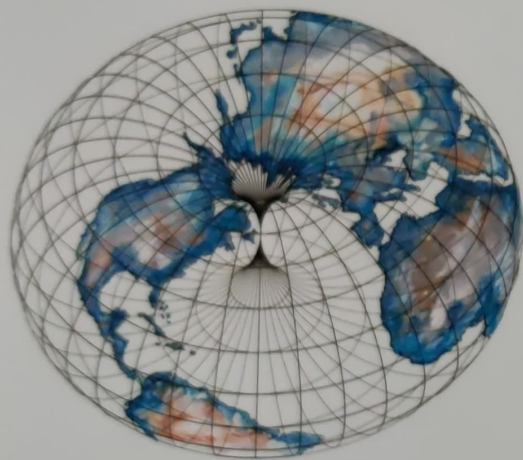
Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Pyramid (The World From Below), 1978 [cat. no. 101]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Egg, 1975 [cat. no. 102]

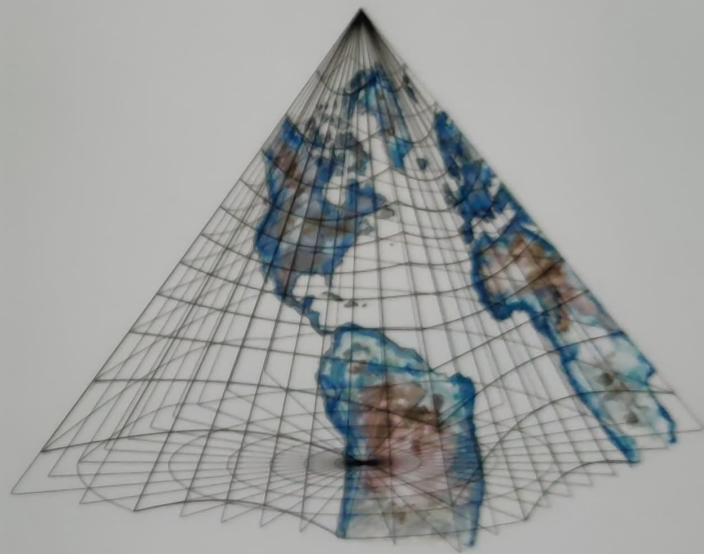


Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Snail, 1978 [cat. no. 103]



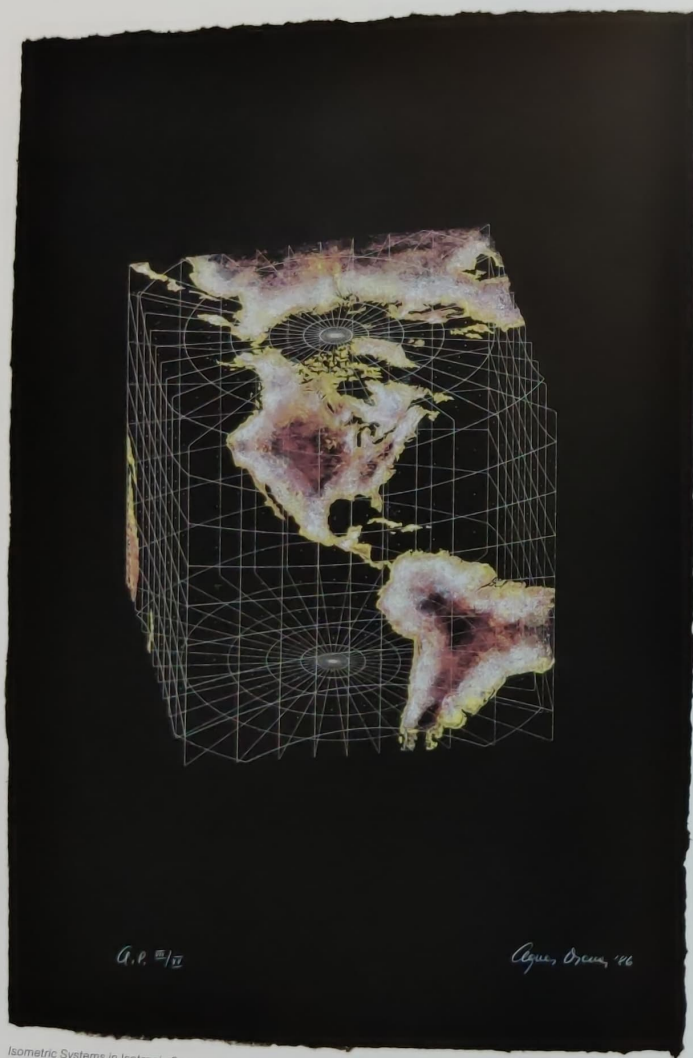
Algeo, 1980

Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Doughnut (tangent torus), 1980 [cat. no. 104]



Algeo, 1980

Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space—Map Projections: The Pyramid, 1980 [cat. no. 105]



Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space — Map Projections: The Cube, 1986 [cat. no. 106]

AGNES DENES: PROMETHEA OF PARADOX

—

Lucy R. Lippard