



Fig.1
Detail and inset *Dresden 1945, 2010*.
47 x 47 x 2 in (119 x 119 x 5 cm).

WORTH A LOOK

Cartographic Sculpture

Matthew Picton

Matthew Picton's work investigates a city's narratives, its history and its literary heritage, using texts and materials evocative of the events that define it. He achieves by building cartographic representations from distinct periods in the city's history. The paper sculptures are all made by hand each piece cut and formed individually from folded archival papers. The pieces are then situated exactly upon a drawn template cut from enlarged maps.

There is an innate beauty in the pattern of cities and nature, something that is experienced in the view from above and by the mapped form. Cartography is something that I have always incorporated into my work in, one way or another. From the very first experiments in landscape painting to my current body of work, cartography has been a part of it, and clearly forms a way of seeing the world for me. I have for many years possessed an extensive collection of maps, and I think my interest in them developed initially from walking holidays in the British Isles. The attraction came from the imagination of place that maps create in the mind and from a long-term fascination with travel, landscape and geography. There is, in my estimation, some intrinsic quality to cartography that goes beyond the scientific document; maps have a beauty of form and detail, they are a record of past times and places. The map is a pathway for the imagination to wander and expand, for places to be re-imagined, the past to envisaged – a world to be re-made in the imagination.

Cartography has been present in the different incarnations my work. For example, it featured prominently in the earlier cracked parking lots sculptures and drawings and the cracked lakebed sculptures. While these works concentrated on organic forms found in nature, my more recent works have looked at the man-made world of the urban city. These earlier works were concerned with mapping the decay found in the natural world. I was documenting or mapping the existing networks of cracks and transforming them into drawings; these later became sculptures. Examples of these works can be seen on my website at www.matthewpicton.com. Of course these forms are mirrored in nature on a wider scale, some of the forms have the

appearance of river systems, the recognition of which led me to create Dura-Lar® (acetate plastic) sculptures of river systems. Whilst working on these I started to think about creating three-dimensional layered sculptures of the mapped forms of cities. The works were created on glass tables with the lines of the city infrastructure etched in clear plastic Dura-Lar®. After each layer was done, the roads, railways, rivers, subways, the transparent plastic was painted, stacked on top of each other and pinned together. The sculptures are typically two to four inches in height.

During this process my mind would enter an imagined entity of the city and start to reconstruct its history, so that in time I would start to layer the previous incarnations of a particular city. For example, *Berlin* includes the city's patterns of 1932, 1962 and 2007. I usually used maps of the periods in question, finding them in university archives.

It was while making these works that I realised that I was interested in creating sculptures that were time-dimensional maps. A city is, in a sense, an organism that has been built in layers over time, and those layers are not just geographic but social and cultural also. It has layers of history that inform our understanding of the visible form. But there are the invisible layers too that exist in observation and literature. They are part of the imaginary sphere that gives life and resonance to a city. Many cities will have undergone their greatest transformation during calamitous events, events ordained sometimes by nature and other times by political upheaval. Some of the most significant cultural achievements are born from such times and locations.

The sculpture of *Dresden 1945* is one such sculpture; it incorporates a major work of art that has a very specific relationship with the city. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was conceived in Dresden by Richard Wagner during the revolution of 1848 in which he played an active part and which led to his exile. The work was inspired by the revolution and influenced by ideological and destructive fantasies. My sculpture *Dresden 1945* is created from the music score of the Ring and has been partially burnt, alluding to the inferno that engulfed Dresden in World War II, and to the subsequent destruction of culture and property. (Figs. 1 & 1a)

Fig. 2
St Petersburg 1703–1964, 2013.
49 x 72 x 2 in (124 x 182 x 5 cm).



Fig.3
Detail and inset *Dublin 16 June 1904*, 2011.
64 x 49 x 2 in (162 x 124 x 5 cm).



St Petersburg has a unique literary history in which it appears as the primary subject matter. My sculpture *St Petersburg* maps the literary trajectory of the city's history and the Petersburg mythos. The sculpture is based on an 1824 map in which the disastrous flood of that year is coloured according to the flood lines reached by the River Neva. Pushkin's famous poem *The Bronze Horseman* is influenced by the flood and takes as its starting point the creation of St Petersburg by Peter the Great in 1703. The sculpture includes sections of this poem and one also by Anna Akhmatova – *Poem without a Hero*. Akhmatova's poem looks back to Pushkin's masterpiece and references and alludes to many Russian writers, who came after him. *Poem without a Hero* reflects the fate of the city in the twentieth century: 'Just as the future ripens in the past, / so the past rots in the future'. The sculpture includes the score to Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, which was written and performed in St Petersburg during the 900-day siege between 1941 and 1944. Joseph Brodsky's essay about Leningrad in the 1950s and '60s, *A Guide to a Renamed City*, and written from his place of exile in the United States is included in the sculpture St Petersburg. (Fig. 2)

One of the most famous novels to be associated with a city is James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is set in Dublin. The novel chronicles the wanderings of the protagonist through the city on 16 June 1904 and this one day, in some senses maps the human life cycle. In *Dublin 1904*, the text printed in red that surrounds the city, combines the narratives of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom and relates to the circularity of life. The novel creates an interior landscape of Dublin, a landscape of thought, voice and conversation. These narratives are situated within the cartographic framework of Dublin at the time when the book is set. A map from 1904 was used to create the sculpture. Using words and fragments from *Ulysses*, the sculpture allows for a continuous re-contextualisation between city and novel. (Figs. 3 & 3a)

There are four panels in the *London 1940* series. Depicted here is the panel *London 1940, Waterloo "Full Dark House"* by Christopher Fowler. They were made using original colour-coded bomb-damage maps that had been printed in London during the war. The maps provide a meticulous record of the destruction wrought upon the city. The sculptures recreate this destruction by carefully burning the walls to approximately the same levels of damage as shown in the colour coded bomb-damage maps. Each panel is created from selected texts from a novel set in wartime

London. Rosie Alison's novel *The Very Thought of You* explores the effects of familial and romantic relations as a result of the evacuations, while works by Graham Greene (*The Ministry of Fear*), Christopher Fowler and Elizabeth Bowen (*The Heat of the Day*) look at the crime and the underworld that flourished in London during WWII. (Fig. 4)

Fuller descriptions of the individual pieces mentioned and the full body of my work can be accessed on my website at www.matthewpicton.com

Matthew Picton was born in London and studied Politics at the London School of Economics. Now living in Oregon, Matthew has been exhibiting since 1998, with solo shows in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, New York and most recently at the Summaria Lunn Gallery in London. His works can be seen in the collections of De Young Museum, San Francisco, The Herbert Museum of Art, Coventry, UK and The Dresden Museum, Germany. Prints of his works and copies his book *Urban Histories*, a comprehensive catalogue of all the paper sculptures and essays published in 2013 are available from his website www.matthewpicton.com



Fig. 4
London 1940, Waterloo, 2012. 37 x 30 x 2 in (14.5 x 12 x 5 cm).