

Worldviews: Looking

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Overview

The way we view the world and ourselves takes on new dimensions with each emerging technology. Before 1950, a bird's-eye view of Earth was seen from an airplane. After Russia launched Sputnik, the concept of "worldview" was forever expanded, changing our relationship to the world and universe. Today, how we view and experience our world is directly related to those first signals that were transmitted back to Earth. Satellites and application software like GoogleEarth allow us to look down upon our planet from above, viewing it in incredible detail. This new "mapping" of Earth allows us to reinterpret ourselves through experiential processes, generating a heightened interest in our relationship to our environment that has not been seen since the days of Galileo.

My comfort zone is outside of silos. As a designer and artist, I stake a claim in between these constructs. Work and life is a mash-up of fascination: with the inside of a question, semiotics and message making, and the crafts associated with problem solving and making objects. The impetus for my art is to play with technologies, which has manifested in all seasons of my life so far and, most recently, in my work with satellite imagery.

My experience as a teacher of design and an owner and creative director of a professional design studio developed on the cusp of tumultuous disruptive change—from pen and marker to working through an interface, and within an interface.

The abstracts that follow are background into where my design practice intersects my art practice. They are the seeds of my interest in the use of satellite imagery.

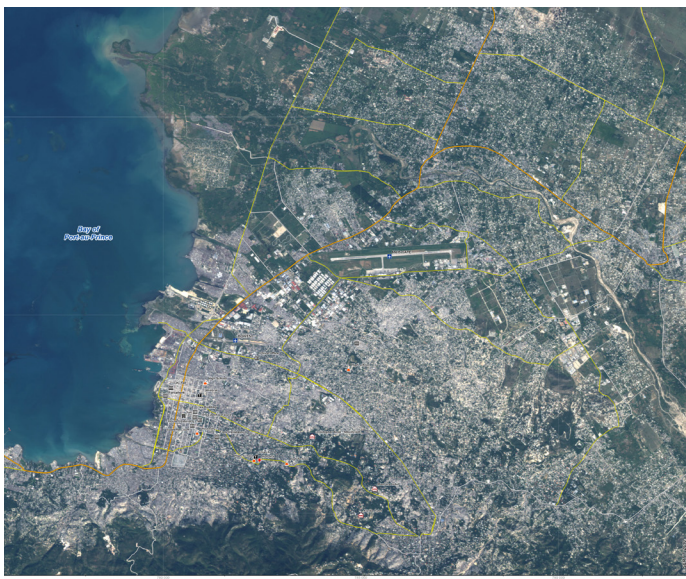
Worldview: Haiti Looking Up

In 2009, I responded to a call for the first Ghetto Biennale taking place in Haiti in 2010 with a proposal to create an art event during which high-resolution satellites, such as Digital Globe, GeoEye, and Geo Orbis, would be tasked to take “aerial” images of Port-au-Prince on a designated day and at a designated time. Groups of schoolchildren, dressed in their distinctively colored school uniforms, would be positioned on the ground near the area where Martissant Park was to become Haiti’s first public space. The park, a natural oasis and an object of civic pride, is located in one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods.

I had a question: What would an overhead view of Haiti’s children, looking up from their environment, attempt to reveal? I had two goals: to give Haitians the opportunity to see themselves through a new lens regarding their relative position in the global community; and to provide the rest of the world the opportunity to watch and hear young Haitians tell their stories about the realities of their country and their hopes for its future and their own. In late 2009, Haiti, whose history since the 1950s had been politically tumultuous and where substandard living conditions are prevalent, hope held fast for a brighter future. Positive change was building, and NGOs and Haiti’s government were moving forward.

All the collected documentation was to become part of an art installation consisting of projections that featured satellite images: still and video portraits of the participants as they discuss in question-and-answer format how they saw Haiti’s future. This “ground” imagery included documentation of the participants who “bore witness” to their positions in the satellite imagery. A book documenting the satellite photography and stills from the video portraits was to be published and available at the exhibition and on-line.

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti. This tragic event put the project on hold.



Satellite map over the Port-au-Prince area of Haiti acquired on 13 January 2010, following a 7.0 magnitude earthquake and several aftershocks that hit the Caribbean nation on 12 January. Processed by SERTIT

Satellite images, sometimes used for surveillance, control, and assessment, are perceived as disconcerting, but can be comforting at the same time. Before the earthquake, the satellite records of Haiti were years old. The approximately 42 square acre park where I proposed to task a satellite to image, is now home to a strolling memorial for the victims of the January 2010 earthquake.

Artists often present a point of view through the framework of perspective. Spatial and cultural perspectives provided the framework for this worldview of Haiti, its youth, and its physical aspects. By using the satellites' scale, range, and point of view, the form of the information itself shapes the images' content, context, and message. Through this project, Haiti's young people, who, in spite of Haiti's plight, are technologically aware and have access to computers with Internet through supporting cultural organizations, would see themselves anew and share ways to change a country where for so long so much hasn't changed.

This project was accepted into the 2010 Ghetto Biennale but was never realized due to the devastating earthquake that year. Reluctantly, I shifted my focus to developing other projects utilizing satellite imagery.

My inspiration for this proposal came from a book project I was commissioned to design by Ari Korpivaara for the Open Society Foundations in 2004. I often think about this proposal when I read about Haiti or see images of Haiti's children. It would stand as a touchstone for its participants.

Resources and References

Ari Korpivaara. *Beyond the Mountains: The Unfinished Business of Haiti*, Open Society Institute, 2004.
<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/beyond-mountains-unfinished-business-haiti>
DigitalGlobe <http://www.digitalglobe.com>
GeoEye <http://www.geoeye.com/Corpsite>
Geo Orbis <http://georbis.com>

Worldview: Satellite wraps

Self-similarity—the recursion of natural and man-made forms—is evident in satellite imagery at almost any scale or time of day.

Drawing upon the proliferation of satellite systems capturing and monitoring Earth, this series of works appropriates Landsat Program imagery and recombines it into new recursive forms and patterns. Generative design processes are employed to combine and create new global formations using scale, juxtaposition, and dimension.

The new virtual land patterns are then post-processed and applied to textiles using manufacturing facilities worldwide through on-demand service providers. Stories and provenance is provided with the fabricated textiles (scarves) about the workers and people who live in the communities in which they were manufactured.

Resources and References

<https://artmultiple.online>

Benoit Mandelbrot, “The Fractal Geometry of Nature,” W. H. Freeman and Company; 1st edition (1983)

<https://www.digitalglobe.com>