

INTERVIEW WITH

Jeremy Wood



by **Jeremy Hight**, online via email correspondence, May 2011

Re-Drawing Boundaries, Leonardo Electronic Almanac New Media Exhibition

Curator: Jeremy Hight

Senior Curators: Lanfranco Aceti and Christiane Paul

What are you working on right now?

I am making lots of globes to create plausible worlds that I've never seen before. There are globes based on airline destination maps that present distorted geographies and fractured routes, and a series based upon the meridians and equators of the body. (<http://www.jeremywood.net/globes.html>)

I'm also preparing a piece for exhibition at Showroom MAMA in Rotterdam. It's called *The Permissible Edge* and is about the tolerated access to the Nieuwe Mass distributary that flows through the city. The map is composed of cycled GPS tracks with supporting documentary photographs that capture a heavily engineered route along public and private perimeters.

Who and what are some of your influences?

My influences tend to change with my moods and concerns. Right now and in no particular order I'd say primitive cartography, people, intricate clocks, walking and motorcycles.

Your work has had an interesting progression; where have you moved in exploring space, measure, form and other elements from your first GPS drawings?

Recently I seem to be absorbed with the less trampled public spaces that frame street furniture and buildings and offer no practical or emotional invitation. Not so much the inaccessible dead spaces, but the accessible lonely places. My work that somehow measures, such as the *Data Cloud* benches (www.gpsdrawing.com/projects/datacloud.html) or the *GPS Sleep* series (www.gpsdrawing.com/gallery/experiments/sleep.html) comes from an interest in inaccuracy and scale. I think the early GPS works were much more about exploring the principles of geodesic drawing by experimenting with both techniques of travel and the pictorial possibilities in the landscape.

GPS drawings are now a worldwide entity. Did you ever envision this when you first began playing with forms drawn as you moved through spaces?

Yes, I figured it out early on. Despite the chunky receivers at the time with their awkward buttons and menus, I saw the creative potential of GPS drawing and mapping as an accessible and valuable educational tool. Since 2001 I've conducted numerous workshops with universities, schools, and galleries to exploit GPS drawing and mapping and I'm continuously inspired by the results. Seeing similar work worldwide is a pleasant reminder of a good concept.

What labels are your works placed under? Is "locative media" ever a problematic term?

I don't know nor do I mind. I guess for a while there were no labels for what I was doing so perhaps being adopted by terminology is a sign of recognition.

Are your more recent works exploring not just film and photography but also compression, memory and how we travel great distances?

Yes, I find the incredible functions and failures

of memory, specifically topographic memory, absolutely fascinating. I think the skill of memory is like a deteriorating muscle that's getting flabby with cloud computing. And with what are we replacing our capacity to accurately recite information? Passwords?

However, I'm not so interested in the distances of our travels other than as an accessible contextual device. Otherwise it's an infinite comparison. I think the scale what is presented to be much more important to how the viewer relates to the work.

The plane thus is a pen and a pointer, so is it also an eraser/erasure in a sense as one travels in that transitory space of a plane sometimes to never return?

Airplanes are gems of travel for they allow time and distance to wander into poetry and abstraction. I don't consider the flight back as an act of erasing but as part of an ongoing narrative. Once I'm rigged up at my window seat and the plane pushed back from the gate it's like a new thread of my travels is being written.

What is happening with the now ubiquitous GPS and GIS at this moment that excites you or concerns you? Is this changing things in any potentially dystopic ways?

I don't think we would be evolving alongside GPS and GIS technologies so convincingly if it was causing more misery than functionality in our lives. I am excited about the general lack of concern amongst current users of ubiquitous geo-sensitive software because it is a clear gauge of how we are coping with technology. Big businesses are very clever about how they capture and use consumer data for marketing and evaluation, but at the moment there doesn't seem to be any accountability for breaches in the security of personally sensitive data. Although I offer a very personal cartography of my own, I have ultimate control over what I choose to present. It will be interesting to see in the future exactly how those who choose to opt-out of a geotagged life become socially excluded.

How do you see space and data in your work and process?

I see data is a tool that helps to present the fictions of space. The more I study maps and mapmaking the closer I come to the belief we actually have no idea where we are. With the cosmic factors that influence the reliability of even the finest of surveying equipment, and with land tides and the fluctuating ellipsoid shape of the Earth, I'm not even sure if we know with exactitude where anything is.



Brighton Boat, 2001, Jeremy Wood. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

GPS Drawings

Inspired by a road that looked like the bow of a ship, she is 5km in length and rises 1.5km above the English Channel. Drawn over several weeks at leisure on a bicycle and completed after squeezing in the anchor into a small park.

www.gpsdrawing.com/gallery/land/bboat.htm



Traverse Me, 2010, Jeremy Wood. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

Traverse Me

Traverse Me is a map drawn by walking across The University of Warwick campus with a GPS device to invite the viewer to see a different landscape to that which surrounds them. It questions the possibilities of where they are and inspires a personal reading of their movements and explorations of the campus. It is composed of 238 miles of GPS tracks walked over 17 days and explores the idea of 1:1 scale mapping by incorporating a compass rose, scale, and cartouche.

www.gpsdrawing.com/maps/traverse-me.html



White Horse Hill, 2002, Jeremy Wood.. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

White Horse Hill

White Horse Hill in Uffington, Oxfordshire, is an intricate terrain formed from steep chalk downs with distinct features that have been shaped by man since the Bronze Age. A 1:1000 scale model created by Hugh Pryor and Jeremy Wood to capture 43 kilometres of systematic non-colliding walks recorded with GPS over four days.

www.gpsdrawing.com/gallery/maps/whh-model.htm

White Horse Hill video link

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LEAbroadcast?feature=mhee#p/c/272279007EEFA15E/5/xh1DES4zmjg>

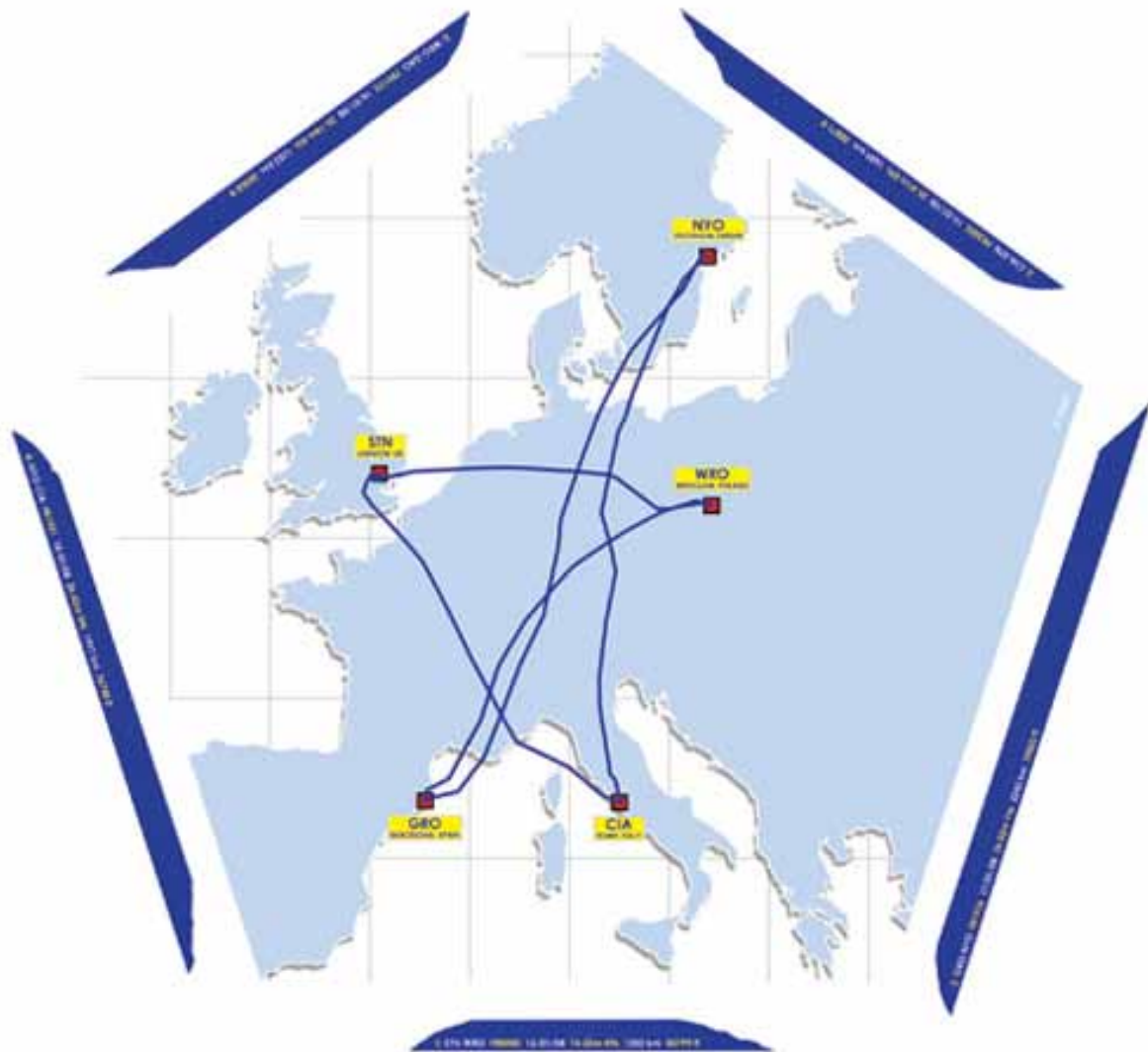


My Ghost, 2009, Jeremy Wood.. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

My Ghost

I collect all my journeys with GPS to map where I have been and how I got there. It is a form of personal cartography that documents my life as visual journal. My Ghost is a map of London as I've seen it and is a record of all my movements in the city from 2001-2009.

www.gpsdrawing.com/maps.html



Star Flights, 2008, Jeremy Wood.. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

Star Flights

A 5414 mile drawing over Europe in the shape of a star made with five consecutive commercial airline flights. From London Stansted airport and back via Wrocław, Barcelona, Stockholm, and Rome.

www.gpsdrawing.com/gallery/air/star.html

Star Flights video link

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LEAbroadcast?feature=mhee#p/c/272279007EEFA15E/6/PuHJvUjr8gQ>

Artist's statement

I like my job. I also find it difficult making artist's statements because sometimes it feels like contributing to one's own obituary. I think my interest in travel and cartography comes partly from being a product of a Pan Am airline pilot and an air hostess, and from growing up being of dual nationality and trying to locate a sense of my loyalties.

I was once referred to as the 'GPS-Guy' and more recently as the 'Sat-Nav-Man'. But that's not all that I am...even with my GPS receiver switched off I'm a fairly ordinary citizen that has predictable pursuits and a propensity to create ideas and things of personal interest. Then I share some of them in galleries, museums and online. My work with GPS is powered by a love of drawing that makes me explore conceptual and physical qualities of landscapes. What's more is that I am fascinated with engaging with issues of space and time to see how they relate to perception and experience.

Sometimes I teach and conduct exciting GPS drawing and mapmaking workshops, and sometimes I'm challenged with beautiful commissions. Other times I sit around thinking I'd like to earn more money for what I do. There we go. These statements are supposed to declare great claims and intentions, but in attempting to do so it makes me realise that I've still much work to do in order to make these words truer.

Bio

Jeremy Wood specializes in public artworks and commissions with an original approach to the reading and writing of places. His work is exhibited internationally and is in the permanent collection of the London Transport Museum, the V&A, and the University of the Arts in London. His art has also been featured in books such as *Else/Where Mapping*, and *Mapping London*, and in publications such as the *Cartographic Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Artforum*. He has conducted numerous GPS drawing and mapping lectures and workshops in schools, museums and galleries and continues to make drawings and maps of his daily travels with GPS.

His early drawings with cotton and silk threads that captured surfaces of the body and of the furniture that supports it, helped to formulate an ongoing interest in cartography. He has since created flexible maps that debated relationships like those between experimental arts and experimental sciences, and abstract maps such as *The Meaning of Physics* that represent key elements that lead to current metaphysical speculation in physics, or to the rejection of such. Wood started GPS drawing to explore the expressive qualities of digitally tracing his daily movements. For over ten years he has been exploring GPS satellite technology as a tool for digital mark making on water, over land, and in the air. His work binds the arts and sciences by using capabilities of drawing and technology to present a personal cartography. *The Meridians* from 2006 quotes a line from Melville's *Moby Dick* along two cartographic systems in London and reflects upon internationally agreed demarcations between eastern and western worlds. In his *Data Cloud* sculpture situated in Beatrixpark, Amsterdam, Wood created visual glitch that questioned the where we think we are by plotting the inaccuracy of GPS with twelve public benches. More recently he drew a map of the University of Warwick campus titled *Traverse Me* that included the cartouche and the scale amongst the intricate GPS tracks and gave a unique reading of the accessible landscape.

In London in 2008 he exhibited a collection of slit scan photographs inspired by perceptual distortions of travel. Long panoramic images depicted spans of travel and the morphing perspectives during take-offs and landings, whilst stretched views from moving trains presented scanned landscapes woven together by stretched railroad tracks. His works with film and video projects present aspects of time and identity through animation and portraiture. The *Signature Tune* series took the actions of signing one's name with a finger in the air facing the camera, and synchronised the actions with audio of the scribbles made on different surfaces. The amplified sounds and exaggerated actions of an intimately familiar act reveal an insight into the spirit and

rhythms of the participants.

Wood was born in San Francisco in 1976 and grew up in Berlin and England. He holds an MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martin's in London and a First Class Fine Art Degree from the University of Derby. He is currently based somewhere between his studios in Oxfordshire, England and Athens, Greece. ■