

Charting new territory

Two shows at Gallery 400 have boundary issues.

By **Ruth Lopez**

The maps in "An Atlas" at Gallery 400 won't tell you how to get anywhere, but they may help you arrive at conclusions. Organized by Lize Mogel and Alexis Bhagat (authors of *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*), this traveling exhibition includes projects by designers and artists who use mapping as a way to examine social geography. Ashley Hunt, an SAIC alum working in Los Angeles, investigates power structures with his art practice. For this show, Hunt navigates "the crisis in capitalism" in *A World Map in Which We See...* with electric blue, orange and purple info boxes connected by a network of lines on a sea of pea-green.

Mogel's contribution, *From South to North*, maps, in part, oceanic routes. The portion here, an elegant black-and-white map of an indeterminable place is, we later learn, San Francisco. The artist created it by putting an arm down on paper and tracing around the edges "letting a fist form a peninsula." It's accompanied by an essay, a typographic illustration where the lines, through spacing and manipulation of text, echo the map. The essay deals with the "mothball fleet"—96 inactive military ships kept afloat in various harbors. While the relationship between the two is not clear, Mogel's illustration inspired a meditation on how land has been divvied up, either arbitrarily or by, shall we say, strong-arm methods.

Boundaries that delineate our space in the world are personal.

Chicago-based collective AREA presents selections from its "Notes for a People's Atlas of Chicago" archive. AREA passed out sheets of paper with the outline of Chicago (along with an empty notes field and legends box) and made the template available on its website. Only 20 completed pieces are shown here, including *My hangouts*, which locates a laundromat and an alley near 85th Street. Another map with eight purple boxes scattered on it (representing members of the Iraq Veterans Against the War) comes with



Pedro Lasch, *Guías de Ruta / Route Guides* (detail), 2003/2006, shown in "An Atlas."

a note that begins: "Dear FBI, in order to save you the hard work of finding us..." It's a low-tech version of a project by Hasan Elahi who, after being detained by the FBI at an airport, created a website where he updates his location daily—turning his problem with the Patriot Act into an art project. Mostly, the pieces are touching. *Gangs in Chicago* has a note that says: "I can't go anywhere without having to watch my back." This hodgepodge of crudely drawn maps conveys how the boundaries that delineate our space in the world are deeply personal.

"An Atlas," however, is not the first thing that grabs your attention at Gallery 400. On the back wall directly facing the entrance hang two white flags with orange lines that look snipped from an EKG. It's part of the "Inauguration of the Consulate General of the Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland," a faux waiting room by Swedish conceptual artists Leif Elggren and Carl Michael von Hausswloff. Their project, which began in 1992, examines how land is annexed. It's a gag, albeit one that has

lasted years. The flags flank a desk holding a stack of passport applications. Take a seat and fill out the form—it could take months but the artists, self-anointed "benevolent kings," will respond. On a turntable nearby, a scratchy 45 emits their national anthem, performed by Mariachi Azteca and recorded when the duo opened an "embassy" in Mexico City. Along one wall are maps of claimed territories—the most recent being a cemetery outside of Venice, since Elggren and von Hausswloff consider the dead to be their subjects. (They also hired a ghostbuster from Indiana to record dead voices in the gallery; he claimed there were several spirits hanging out). Maybe we had to be there. We may not have been in a jokey mood, but the installation put us in the zone for pondering unfunny issues of territory and identity.

"Inauguration of the Consulate General of the Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland" and "An Atlas" are at Gallery 400 through January 19. See Museums & Institutions.