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Gallery star

Jeremy Stern

By Peter Thompson
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This article was published on [03.03.11](#).

Maps are certainly useful to help us locate place, measure distance from city to city, plan trips, and tell us just how lost we really are. But this regards maps only in the two or sometimes weak three-dimensional contour available in atlases and globes. These types of maps fail to consider the inconsiderable, not the least of which is the dimension of time and the cartographer who designed the map and his certain innermost prejudices. For example, many maps and globes depicting the world made in the Northern Hemisphere intentionally or unintentionally—that's not the point—distort the size of the world above the equator in comparison to the Southern Latitudes, often making a continent like Africa seem smaller than it really is in comparison.



Jeremy Stern works on his Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition, *Following*. PHOTO BY AMY BECK

In the short story "On Exactitude in Science," Jorge Luis Borges wrote about an empire where the art and science of map-making was at such a peak that the maps of the region were the size of the actual region itself, and matched size-for-size the specific localities and surfaces of reality. Later generations found the map useless, ridiculous and left it to wither away slowly in the desert.

Jeremy Stern's exhibition *Following* will be on display at Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery, University of Nevada, Reno, 1664 N. Virginia St., from March 7 to March 11. For more information, visit www.jeremysternart.com.

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The map is not the territory, but the territory can sometimes substitute for the map, at least in *Following*, a two-part MFA thesis exhibition by UNR graduate student Jeremy Stern at the Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery and the Stremmel Gallery.

From March 7-11, visitors to Stern's installation at Sheppard Gallery, "In Concert," will help create an interactive local Reno and Sparks soundscape map just by their random, and not so random, movements across the gallery's grid floor. The sound map is scaled up from a typical Rand McNally road map. The installation includes a complex system of passive infrared sensors (motion detectors), open-source micro-controllers and mp3 players. A second system uses the gallery's security system to register visitor movement and play back site-specific recordings. The movement of people traffic and their desire lines will then trigger familiar local sounds, from traffic noises to the frothy flow and havoc of the Truckee River. These sounds are meant to allow visitors to "see" familiar places in a new way, "while exploring first-hand with their full-body movements the distortions that all maps create," writes Stern in his thesis.

"The romance of all that we dream of achieving through the personal integration of technology with our perception of lived experience is mediated by the vast gaps in actual experience that integration creates," writes Stern. "Only by paying close attention to the full scope of our actions, embodied here in the acts of listening and moving slowly, will we achieve the technology-based, social and ecological balance that seems to be the democratized hope of the increased availability of information to a general public. The work here rides a delicate line of embodying these ideals and the clash of distortion that it might also create."

Also in the gallery, "Constellated Space," the second part of the exhibit, will turn the 51-year old history of the gallery's walls into star fields by making "stars" from the bumps and remnants left over on the walls from previous installations.

By painting white-spackle over the discarded matter made from the scars and gouges left behind from previous shows while painting the smooth parts with a semi-gloss "deep space" black-blue, Stern hopes to create a map to "evoke this normally invisible, or subdued history" of the gallery. Focusing the lights on the floor, the silhouettes of the visitors will reflect and evoke the Celestial Sphere, or star map of the sky that rests above us.

"The moving silhouettes are a reminder that this history is most connected by the continued involvement of a curious audience, who carries the narrative of the gallery space forward through their open spirit of participation and learning," writes Stern.

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