

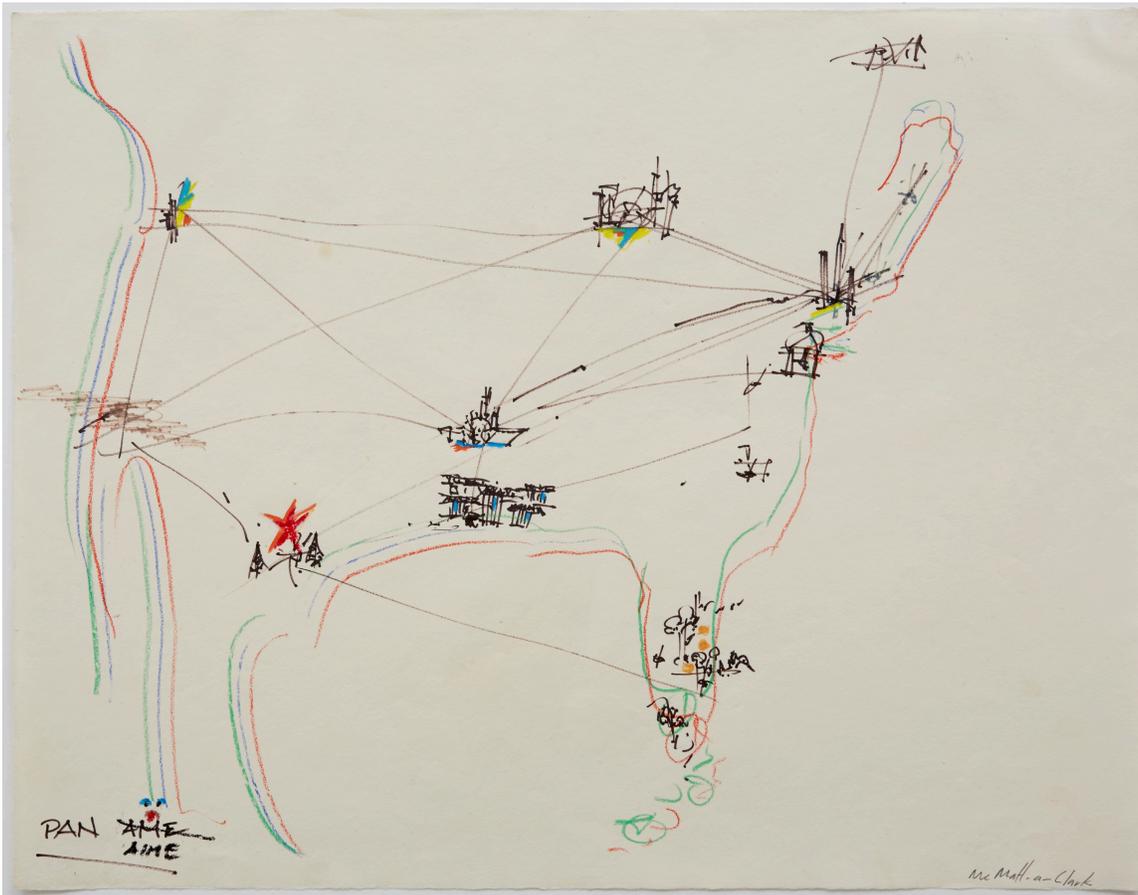
SEANKELLY

Jaffe, Eric. "The Ridiculous Mistakes Artists Make When They Try to Draw the U.S. From Memory,"
The Atlantic Cities, September 16, 2013.



The Ridiculous Mistakes Artists Make When They Try to Draw the U.S. From Memory

ERIC JAFFE SEP 16, 2013



Gordon Matta-Clark's drawing for "From Memory, Draw a Map of the United States", 1971-2. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.

In the early 1970s, the Japanese artist Hisachika Takahashi asked 22 colleagues to draw a map of the United States. He wanted to know what other artists thought of the country he now called home, but he didn't speak very good English, so the drawings served as a form of universal expression. But the simple request also came with a catch: the artists had to do their drawings from memory.

Takahashi's little experiment has been resurrected as an exhibition called ["From Memory: Draw a Map of the United States"](#) that opened Friday at the Sean Kelly gallery in Manhattan.

As a studio assistant to Robert Rauschenberg, Takahashi received drawings from a number of big-name New York artists: Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, and James Rosenquist among them. The submissions range from the earnest (Mel Bochner drew state boundaries) to the humorous (Joseph Kosuth only drew New York and Los Angeles) to the unwitting anti-urbanist (Juan Downey indicate parts of the country that were "too densely populated").

And some artists didn't seem to need their cartographic memories at all: Dorothea Rockburne drew the country as a three-dimensional cube.

Takahashi took some time to answer a few questions for *Atlantic Cities* readers.

Is there a particular reason you've chosen to exhibit these maps now, after 40 years?

To me, anytime is good to exhibit these maps. The United States will always be there.

You collected these drawings to get a sense of the artists' idea of the United States. Why did you choose a map as the medium?

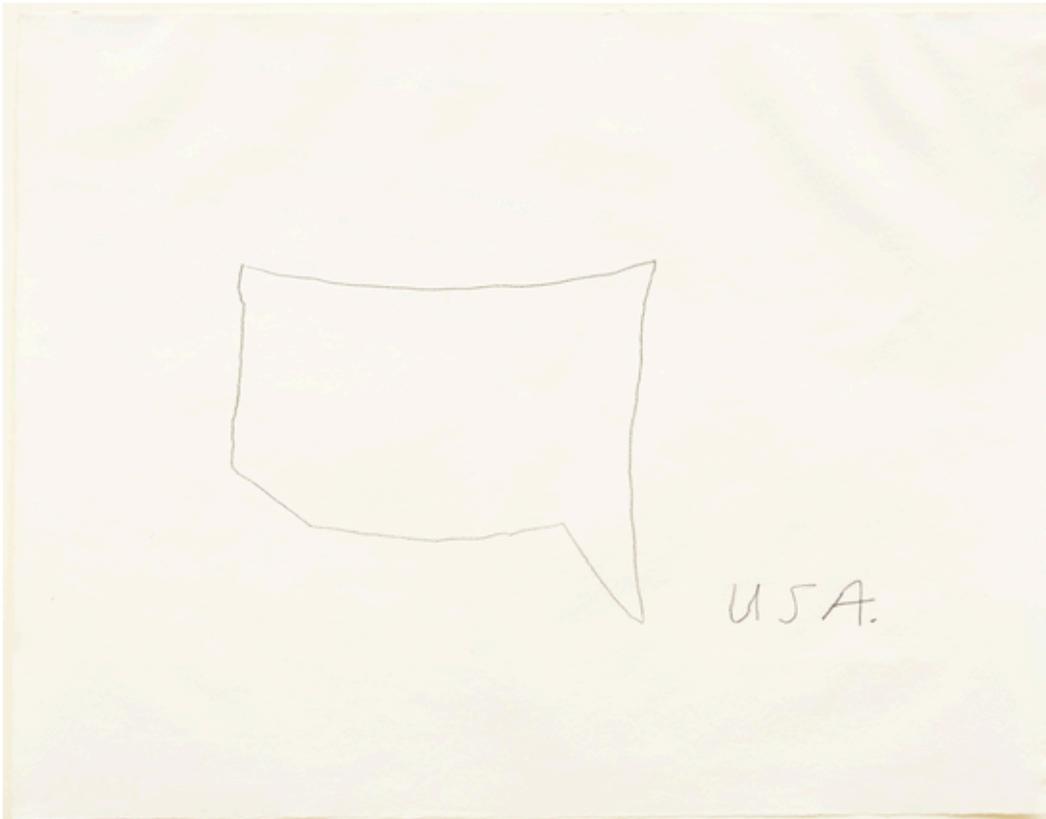
I had just arrived in New York and I thought the shape of the United States was beautiful. I wanted to explore these artists' ideas of history, fantasy, and imagination.



Mel Bochner's drawing for "From Memory, Draw a Map of the United States", 1971-2. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.

I'm especially fond of the map that only includes two dots (one for New York, one for Los Angeles). Were you surprised the artists produced drawings as diverse — and, in some cases, humorous — as the ones you received?

Of course, I got a lot of surprises. Cy Twombly left out New Mexico "because otherwise the map would look like underpants," he said. Jim Rosenquist made a check payable to me via the "Fantastic National Bank." Jeffery Lew drew a lot of lines to make the USA in 3-D.



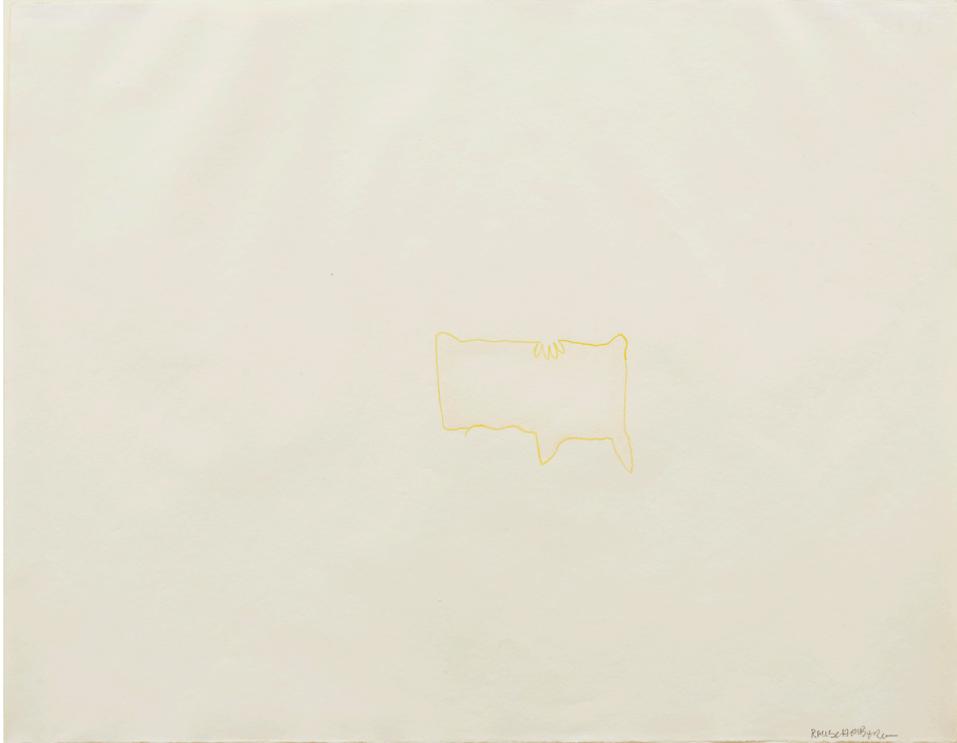
Cy Twombly's drawing for "From Memory, Draw a Map of the United States", 1971-2. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York.

Is there one you found most surprising?

The most surprising was Robert Rauschenberg's, because the USA was so small. To my question, "Why?," he answered, "Because America is shrinking."

Your own contribution is quite abstract. What did you mean by it?

Before I started my project I made a sketch projecting my vision. Here I was asking artists to draw a map of the United States. In it, I had envisioned different expressions: Conceptual, Pop, etc. And it came true.



Robert Rauschenberg's drawing for "From Memory, Draw a Map of the United States", 1971-2. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.



Hisachika Takahashi's drawing for "From Memory, Draw a Map of the United States", 1971-2. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.