

Art Review

Cartographic Imagery in Contemporary Art

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Art Review Editors

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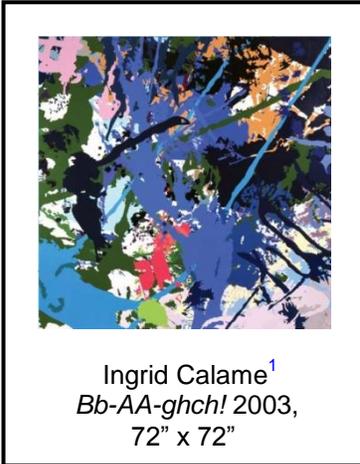
In October 2010 the Katonah Museum of Art, located 50 miles north of New York City, opened an exhibition entitled *Mapping: Memory and Motion in Contemporary Art*. Thirty-eight artists from the United States and other nations adopted, adapted, created, and manipulated two- and three-dimensional maps in unusual artistic expressions. The Guest Curator, Ms. Sarah Tanguy, organized an intellectually stimulating and thoughtful exhibition funded by Arts Westchester, Westchester County Government, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

Selected Artists and Works of Art

The participating artists were: Norman Akers, Jane Ingram Allen, Doug Beube, Marla Brill, Val Britton, Ingrid Calame, Russell Crotty, Matthew Cusick, Josh Dorman, Eric Finzi, Vernon Fisher, Dawn Gavin, Robert Green, David Hartwell, Robin Hewlett, Mike Iacovone, Kysa Johnson, Ken Kalman, Cindy Kane, Nina Katchadourian, Karey Ellen Kessler, Ben Kinsley, Joyce Kosloff, Pedro Lasch, John Mann, Meredith McNeal, Trevor Paglen, Lordy Rodriguez, John Ruppert, Soledad Salame, Lincoln Schatz, Paula Scher, Foon Sham, Scott Sherk, Susan Stockwell, Robert Van Vranken, Judi Werthein, and Jeremy Wineberg. Each artist gave a creative interpretation of the function and meaning of maps.

Cartography, from two Greek terms *chartis* (map) and *graphein* (write), is the study and technique of making maps. Maps usually provide precise spatial information about physical locations. Each artist selected a medium and reinterpreted map-making to express their political and social voices about memory and identity. They created maps using painting, printmaking, papermaking, collage, mixed media, photography, video installation, and multimedia sound installation. Curator Tanguy included many different styles of adapting and manipulating maps as artistic expression. Maps have been part of

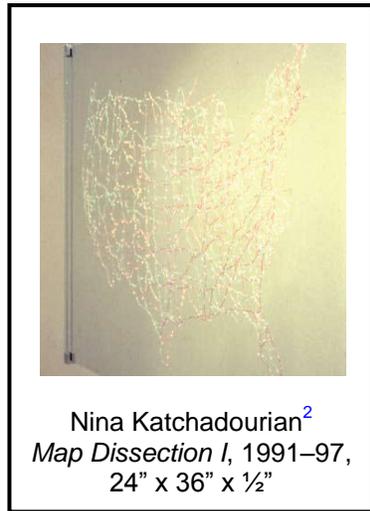
guiding human activity since 7,000 BCE. The value and function of maps are inseparable to daily life for humans and many animals. For example, trails to waterholes, feeding grounds, and seasonal migrations confirm the essential nature of maps. Maps reflect political, social, economic, religious, and historical events that resurface when arbitrarily drawn boundaries lead to conflicts. The 38 contemporary artists created new meanings and functions of maps in the exhibition. Even though every approach of map making was thoughtful, some artworks caught the eyes of the reviewers more than others.



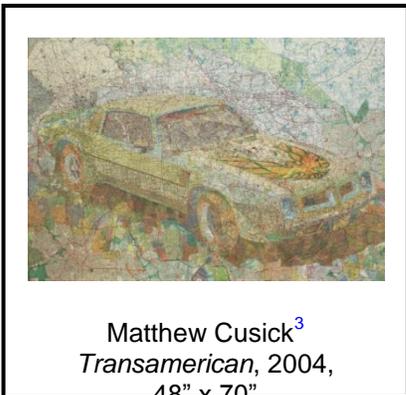
Ingrid Calame¹
Bb-AA-ghch! 2003,
72" x 72"

Ingrid Calame's large size painting (72" x 72"), entitled *Bb-AA-ghch!* (2003), appears to be an ordinary abstract painting until one discovers the artist's inspiration. Calame collected graffiti-like patterns, skid marks, spills, and stains from sidewalks, walls, and roads. She traced and transformed their irregular shapes into her works of art. By juxtaposing the overlaid patterns on a clear sheet of paper, she created a montage which became a transferred abstract painting in bright enamel colors including red, blue, and green. Her painting is a confluent map of lost representations released through vivid and intense colors.

Nina Katchadourian's work, entitled *Map Dissection I* (1991-97), displayed a delicate process of surgically dissecting maps. She used an AAA road map of the continental USA and tediously incised out all features except the major highways and transferred these spider web patterns between two piece of suspended glass (24" x 36" x 1/2"). The flat glass display gives an anatomical view of highways that resemble capillaries, veins, and arteries in a living American continent. Her title *Map Dissection I* gives currency to the term *traffic artery*.



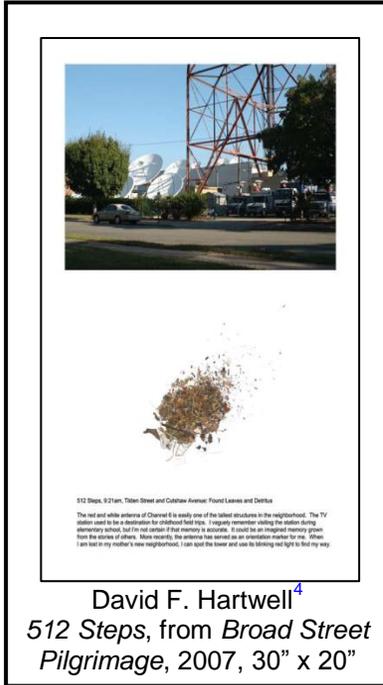
Nina Katchadourian²
Map Dissection I, 1991-97,
24" x 36" x 1/2"



Matthew Cusick³
Transamerican, 2004,
48" x 70"

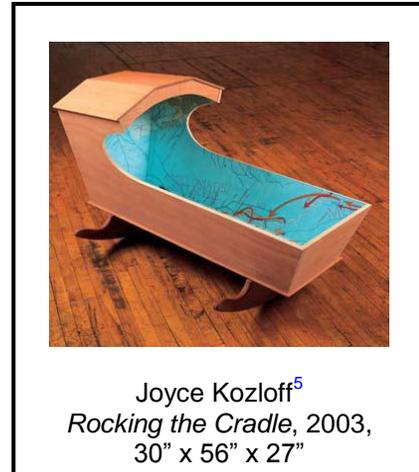
Matthew Cusick cut up maps and collaged them to create an image of a Pontiac Firebird automobile in his work *Transamerican*, (2004). The Pontiac Firebird was constructed from map fragments and inlaid maps on a large wood panel (48" x 70"). The maps were from the 1960s when the Pontiac Firebird was a popular muscle car with a 400 horsepower 6.6 liter engine. The Firebird competed with the Corvette, Camaro, and Cougar to rule America's highways. The firebird or

phoenix is a symbol of long life and rebirth in many cultures. Cusick infused his map of America with the perpetual rebirth of muscle cars.

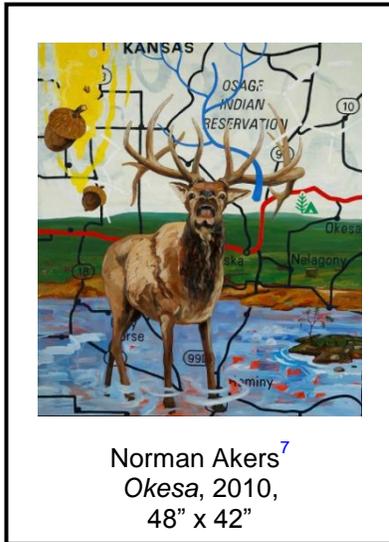


David Hartwell used photography to map the memories of his childhood visits to common places in an ordinary hometown. In his work, *Steps from Broad Street Pilgrimage, Richmond, VA* (2007), he reflected on his journey back to restaurants and side roads that are easily passed by, forgotten, and fade away from memory. In his photographic map journal he systematically retraced the locations of his experiences and reflections. Hartwell wrote, "I vaguely remember visiting the [TV] station during elementary school, but I'm not certain if that memory is accurate. It could be an imagined memory grown from the stories of others." His need to make the ordinary into a personalized extraordinary speaks to the human condition of attachment, like a homing pigeon, to a location one calls home.

There were strong political and historical voices in the exhibition. Joyce Kozloff's *Rocking the Cradle* (2003) is visual punch against President George W. Bush's 2001 invasion of Iraq, a nation known as the cradle of Western civilization. The interior of Kozloff's oversized wooden cradle, too large for a child and too small for an adult, is lined with maps and diagrams of the American battle plan to capture Baghdad. The gentle baby cradle maps out the colonialism of invading and occupying nations.



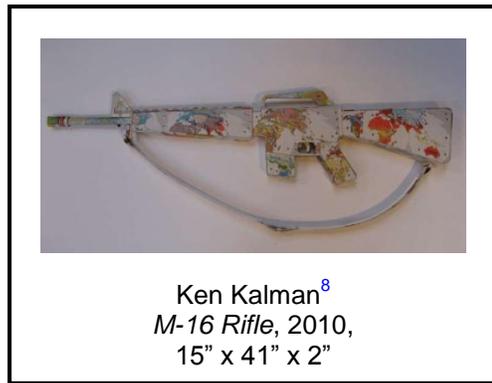
Susan Stockwell's *Highland Dress* (2009) is an empty life-sized female dress composed of ordinance survey maps of the Scottish Highlands glued together. Stockwell delivers a visual blow to English colonization and occupation of Scotland over 300 years. Using military maps to create a woman's dress sends a double message of war and politics being dominated by men in Western history. The strongly posed representation of feminism battles against male denial of power and suggests that men can only settle disputes through wars.



Norman Akers⁷
Okesa, 2010,
 48" x 42"

Norman Akers's oil painting on a wooden panel (48" x 42"), entitled *Okesa* (2010), deals with the survival of Osage tribal Americans on their reservation. Aker painted the map of the Osage reservation in Kansas as a background for a bellowing elk defiantly protecting the water and food supply of its prairie. The resplendent elk stands tall, firmly rooted to its reservation homeland. Throughout Colonial and US history, tribal Americans were ethnically removed and placed on reservations composed of small parcels of their original vast lands. The political message is that the Osage will never be moved again from the map of their reservation.

Ken Kalman's *M-16, Rifle* (2010) sends another powerful message about the clash of weapons and geography. His life-sized M-16 Rifle, the most common gun exported by the American military, is emblazoned with a map of the world. The M-16 is defending world peace by advancing American interests and the control of other nations. Kalman's rifle is a personal statement: The weapon lists his low lottery number during the Vietnam War making him eligible for the draft.



Ken Kalman⁸
M-16 Rifle, 2010,
 15" x 41" x 2"

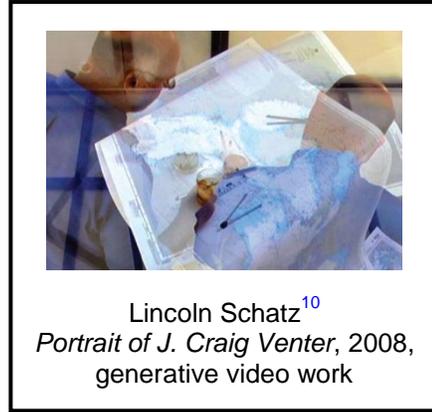


Pedro Lasch⁹
Route Guide, Mexico/NY,
 2003-2006,
 43" x 30"

Pedro Larsh's brownish borderless map, *Latino/a America* (2003-06), depicts a united North and South America named *Latinidad*, a continental homeland for Latinas and Latinos. Lasch distributed 40 identical maps to 20 people crossing the US-Mexican border. They could keep one and mail the other to Lasch with comments about their border crossing experiences. His large scale map (43" x 30") of a single America, without any national borders, cities, oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, or mountains, chronicles their journey to a new life.

Lincoln Schatz developed a digital image map of human activity, *Portrait of J. Craig Venter* (2008), in a generative cube. His subjects entered a 10' x 10' translucent cube where they engaged in an activity of their choice for one hour. Their movements and sounds were captured by 24 video cameras, which streamed the images into 24 Macintosh mini computers. Software dynamically synthesized the streaming video and reordered the sequence of the images. Schatz's subject J. Craig

Venter is a renowned genomic mapper whose one hour of video involved charting the course of his next research trip to the Baltic Sea. Schatz's video is a dialectic of two theses, the first being the absolute stability of a map's images or content. The second is the random mixing of images of a journey on two levels. The map maker charts an exact route to the Baltic Sea while the streaming video is fed into mini computers that mix the output so the viewer never watches the same scene twice. The video represents a paradox of software technology generating random knowledge instead of aggregating map-making data like a global positioning system.



Lincoln Schatz¹⁰
Portrait of J. Craig Venter, 2008,
generative video work

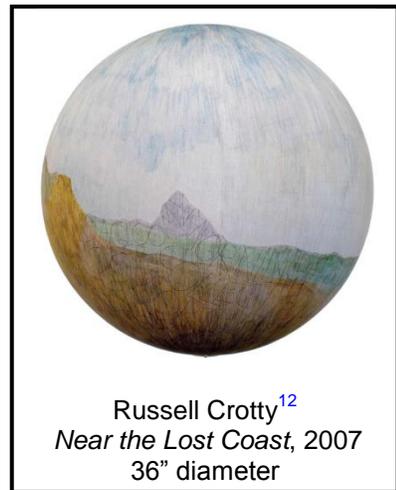


Jane Ingram Allen¹¹
Taiwan Site Map: Cash
Receipts, 2004,
70" x 36"

Jane Ingram Allen had a spiritual visit as a Fulbright artist to Taiwan. Her three double-sided site maps of Taiwan, *Floral Abundance*, *Cash Receipts*, and *Election Fervor* (2004), were inspired by her handmade papermaking experiences. Multiple pieces of themed handmade paper were interwoven using thin fibers forming a large elongated leaf (70" x 36") which coincidentally is the shape of Taiwan. The paper in her three site maps was made from local plants, mixed with a collage and covered with acrylic paint. Allen combined the natural elements of plant-based paper with common paper items to make corresponding map leaves. Her story is expressed in a time map chronicling her year of community involvement in Taiwan.

Some of the artists in the exhibition developed maps that transcended time and continue to evolve. Russell Crotty's three dimensional work, *Near the Lost Coast* (2007), is a 36"-diameter hollow fiberglass sphere wrapped in paper with ink notations and watercolor mimicking a global map devoted to a surfer's world. Crotty inscribed a detailed message about an isolated beach in Northern California known to surfers for its natural beauty. He sees a relationship between surfing and astronomy because the wave cycle is controlled by the influence of the moon on tides. His fantasy globe attends to discovering the lost coast.

Some of the artists in the exhibition developed maps that transcended time and continue to



Russell Crotty¹²
Near the Lost Coast, 2007
36" diameter

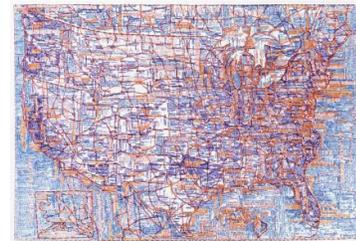


Dawn Gavin¹³
Atlas, 2005
 72" x 72" x 1 1/2"

Dawn Gavin's three dimensional wall-mounted artwork (72" x 72" x 1/2"), entitled *Atlas* (2005), demands that the viewer closely examine the tiny bits of dissected maps arranged in a circular mandala. Hundreds of tiny pins pierce the centers of circular map fragments to form a larger global atlas which resonates with a sense of meditation. Each fragment represents millions of natural and human elements that comprise a larger expanded world. People and nations are spiritual and physical entities individually; but, when combined, they form a united whole.

Paula Scher grew up surrounded with maps as her father worked for the U.S.

Geological Survey. Her 2007 artwork, *The United States (White)*, is a hand-pulled screen-print (40" x 60") meticulously drawn copy of an American continental map. Scher filled the White (nation) with densely written descriptions of cities and natural sites which flow in all directions. The red colored lines indicate the roads and the blue lines list locations like states, towns, and natural sights. Upon closer inspection the viewer discovers much of her map is filled with incorrect information and emotional data that she inserted in her stylized continental map. Scher's map represents how she feels about America rather than a precise surveyor's grid based on latitude and longitude.



Paula Scher¹⁴
The United States (White) 2007,
 40" x 60"



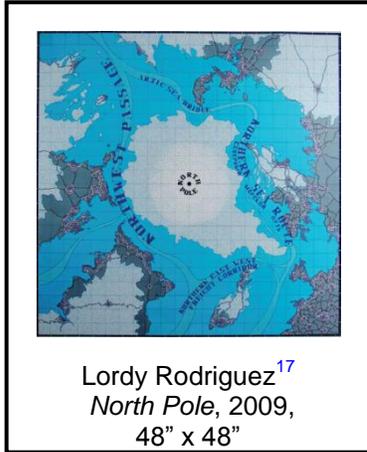
Doug Beube¹⁵
Crater, 2002/2009
 36" x 25 3/4" x 20 5/8"

Doug Beube approached the issue of combining topographic features with political and social implications by creating a three dimensional map in a glass-enclosed display table entitled *Crater* (2002/2009). His atlas is a maze-like series of reshaped cutout map layers in a box. It looks like paper-eating insects ate their way through an atlas. The naturally eroded hills and landscape between cities and the countryside meld together in an interwoven downward crater. It is impossible to



Doug Beube¹⁶
Crater, 2002/2009 (detail),
 36" x 25 3/4" x 20 5/8",

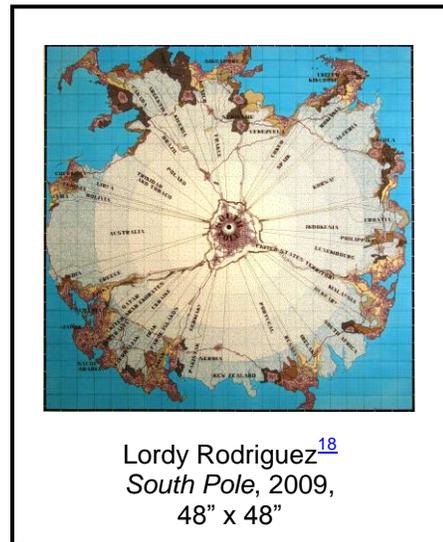
discern a border from natural physical geography. Beube believes nations were often constructed by political decisions which reorder borders and populations rather than evident physical geography.



Lordy Rodriguez¹⁷
North Pole, 2009,
48" x 48"

Lordy Rodriguez playfully deals with the familiar and unfamiliar by confusing the viewer with reality and fantasy about the South and North Poles. All the settlements on the Poles are the result of political claims and international agreements. The potential mineral wealth and huge deposits of frozen clean water make both Poles contested areas. His two ink on paper maps (48" x 48"), *North Pole* (2009) and *South Pole* (2009), at first glance are correct and exact maps of the two areas. Most people are familiar with the

general shape of the land and ice masses but not sure about their precise details. This confusion allows Rodriguez to manipulate and subdivide the areas into zones of influence based on his interpretations. In Antarctica he assigns vast slices of the continent to obscure nations like Trinidad and Tobago while giving Russia and India tiny slivers. Rodriguez designed a map that shows potential conflict and disputes between large and powerful nations and tiny countries. His passages and shipping lanes through the Arctic region are equally grossly distorted, ensuring conflict between the United States, Russia, and Canada. Rodriguez's subjective cartography conveys his wish to alter the world by confusing viewers with what appear to be official maps of two contested areas.



Lordy Rodriguez¹⁸
South Pole, 2009,
48" x 48"

Conclusion

The exhibition *Mapping: Memory and Motion in Contemporary Art* at the Katonah Museum of Art was very provocative and gave viewers a fresh perspective to contemplate the meaning of maps and the significance of cartography as part of personal experience and identity. The artists went beyond the art of personal expression; they illustrated the larger meaning of maps and their function. This exhibition expanded the territory of thinking by blurring the lines of fixed boundaries in the precise nature of making accurate maps. The artists used maps, real and imagined, to draw attention to the

political, social, economic, and cultural issues we face in a dynamic global environment.

Photo Credits

(Source: <http://www.katonahmuseum.org/>)

1. Ingrid Calame, *Bb-AA-ghch!* 2003, enamel on aluminum 72" x 72", collection of Greg S. Feldman and Melanie Shorin
2. Nina Katchadourian, *Map Dissection I*, 1991–97, cut paper map, glass, hardware 24" x 36" x ½", courtesy of Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
3. Matthew Cusick, *Transamerican*, 2004, inlaid maps & acrylic on wood panel 48" x 70", courtesy of Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY
4. David F. Hartwell, *512 Steps*, from *Broad Street Pilgrimage, Richmond, VA*, 2007, lightjet print 30" x 20", courtesy of the artist's family
5. Joyce Kozloff, *Rocking the Cradle*, 2003, acrylic on wood 30" x 56" x 27", courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York, NY
6. Susan Stockwell, *Highland Dress*, 2008, ordinance survey maps of the Highlands of Scotland, glue Life size, courtesy of the artist
7. Norman Akers, *Okesa*, 2010, oil on panel 48" x 42", courtesy of the artist
8. Ken Kalman, *M-16 Rifle*, 2010, aluminum sheet, rivets, paper 15" x 41" x 2", courtesy of the artist and OK Harris Works of Art, New York, NY
9. Pedro Lasch, *Route Guide, Mexico/NY, Sara Guerrero-Rippberger*, 2003–2006, archival digital print with accompanying text Map: 43" x 30", courtesy of the artist

10. Lincoln Schatz, *Portrait of J. Craig Venter*, from the series *Esquire's Portrait of the 21st Century*, 2008, generative video work; Mac minicomputer, custom software, display monitor, courtesy of Bitforms Gallery, New York, NY
11. Jane Ingram Allen, *Taiwan Site Map: Cash Receipts*, 2004, handmade paper from plants of Taiwan, collage, acrylic 70" x 36", courtesy of the artist
12. Russell Crotty, *Near the Lost Coast*, 2007, ink and watercolor on paper mounted on fiberglass sphere diameter 36", courtesy of the artist and Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
13. Dawn Gavin, *Atlas, 2005* (detail), paper, vinyl, acrylic, insect pins 72" x 72" x 1 1/2", courtesy of the artist
14. Paula Scher, *The United States (White)*, 2007, hand-pulled screenprint 40" x 60", courtesy of the artist
15. Doug Beube, *Crater*, 2002/2009, altered atlas, collage, wood stand 36" x 25 3/4" x 20 5/8", courtesy of the artist
16. Doug Beube *Crater*, 2002/2009 (detail), altered atlas, collage, wood stand 36" x 25 3/4" x 20 5/8", courtesy of the artist
17. Lordy Rodriguez, *North Pole*, 2009, ink on paper 48" x 48", courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA and New York, NY
18. Lordy Rodriguez, *South Pole*, 2009, ink on paper 48" x 48", courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA and New York, NY

Acknowledgment

Special thanks to Ms. Susan Hoffman, Katonah Art Museum Docent, for sharing her time so generously.

Grades K-12 Geographic Resources

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/>

Xpeditions provides geographic activities, lesson plans, and a range of atlas maps for grades K-12.

<http://www.geographic.org/countries/>

Countries of the World presents detailed information about 227 geographic areas/nations supported by twenty-one years of research and hundreds of maps.

<http://www.lizardpoint.com/fun/geoquiz/>

Test Your Geography Knowledge is one of the premier websites for learning geography through interactive games and simulations.

<http://www.internetgeographer.co.uk/>

The Internet Geographer lists hundreds of websites about human, physical, and environmental geography, atlases, maps, and global environments.

<http://www.yourchildlearns.com/geography.htm>

Owl & Mouse is a rich source of free maps, puzzles, games, and cartography for grades K-12.

<http://education.usgs.gov/>

The U.S. Geological Survey provides scientific information, K-12 lesson plans, and maps about natural resources, natural hazards, geospatial data, and issues that affect the environmental quality of life.