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Alternate Routes

BY PETER FRANK

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Cartography constitutes an art form in its own right — even nowadays, when mapmakers no longer depict monsters swimming at the edges of the known world. Artists don't have to stretch their graphic sensibilities much to invest charts, routes and regions with universes of meaning — but in doing so, they stretch the meaning of mapmaking. Kim Abeles stakes out various portions of downtown for environmental transformation, employing three-dimensional devices that make maps into sculpture, or even miniature installations. Greg Colson mediates between urban mapping and cartooning with his droll arrangements of ciphers. Deborah Aschheim maps human interactions as flow charts so organic they transmute into plant forms. Similarly, Lynne Berman tracks an individual's movements in space, creating a map after the fact. For her part, Virginia Katz tracks the paths of heavenly bodies, rendering maps of time as cascades of shadows cast on the walls of her home. Philippa Blair gives mapping an expressionist twist by collaging, weaving and assembling materials onto and into maplike visual armatures. Eric Medine subjects the results of deliberately nebulous Google searches to three-dimensional design software and spits out the results using another digital tool meant for toy design, the whole string of operations resulting in weird crystalline structures. About the only artist here working with pre-extant maps is Carolie Parker-Lopez, who takes her source material apart and puts it back together all wrong — which is all right. *Sam Francis Gallery at Crossroads School, 1714 21st St., Santa Monica; Mon.-Fri., 1-3 p.m.; thru Nov. 21. (310) 829-7391, Ext. 425.*

—Peter Frank