

## Exhibit Statement: a word about the phrase Terra Incognita

**"Terra incognita**, Latin for "unknown land"; is a term used in cartography for regions that have not been mapped or documented. The expression is believed to be first seen in Ptolemy's *Geography* circa 150 CE.

The term was reintroduced in the fifteenth century from the rediscovery of Ptolemy's work during the Age of Discovery. Also, ancient cartographers did claim that fantastic beasts (including large serpents) existed in remote corners of the world and depicted such as decoration on their maps, only one known surviving map, the *Lenox Globe*, in the collection of the New York Public Library, actually says "Here be dragons" (using the Latin form "HIC SVNT DRACONES"). However, ancient Roman and Medieval cartographers did use the phrase *HIC SVNT LEONES* (literally, *Here are lions*) when denoting unknown territories on maps.

During the 19th century *terra incognita* disappeared from maps, since both the coastlines and the inner parts of the continents had been fully explored.

The phrase is now also used metaphorically by various researchers to describe any unexplored subject or field of research." – Wikipedia

The unknown as a place still holds powerful sway over the imagination, though we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are apt to think of sci-fi worlds in outer space instead of a place we can literally go to in a sail ship or caravan. However, it's funny how once I hear of a place unknown to me, such as the lost continent recently found under the Indian Ocean, the world changes and becomes a new place – it would seem the Terra Incognita reveals instead of hides. The medieval mapmakers who originally wrote this phrase as a warning and a statement of fact also fascinate me. How did the world seem to them when the world held vast and unknown continents populated by strange beings and beasts – Terra Incognita is the home of the Other and would seem to suggest that even strange beings deserve a home. But what about going there, is the land of incognito "a nice place to visit, but we wouldn't want to live there?" Viewing and making art invites the same responses, explore and possibly discover or stick to what is familiar. It is true that to go into the unknown is to risk it all, for, beyond it there be dragons.

In another sense we already live in the Terra Incognita, the world picture of increasingly strange digital simulations and virtual realities are being endlessly multiplied. So we must reverse the earlier statement and affirm that there are more Terra Incogniti today than ever before – simply click on someone's Pinterest to see the lands populated by beasts and beings, funny and sublime. The human mind seems to be a birther of places. Thanks to Robert Green for pointing out this cartographical phrase that sparked the curatorial idea for this exhibit.