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By Quentin Young

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Artist Rebecca DiDomenico displays one of her pieces in "Flatlander," which is on view through Sept. 13 at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art. The installation consists of maps that are cut out so that only the "pathways," like roads, remain. (*Quentin Young / Daily Camera*)

If you go

What: "Flatlander" exhibit

When: Through Sept. 13

Where: Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 1750 13th St., Boulder

Tickets: \$1

Info: 303-443-2122 or bmoqa.org

The world gains about 50 new smartphones every second. About half of the planet's adult population has one. And that's just smartphones — there are also laptops and TVs and iPads and other devices whose primary physical characteristic is the flat screen.

They're everywhere, and they're being used by people of every age from all walks of life. The world, in a sense, is flat.

An exhibition at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, "Flatlander," explores what this means for art and culture.

Guest curator Patty Ortiz — formerly executive director of the Museo de las Americas in Denver and now an independent curator based in San Antonio — believes the flatscreen and the instant global exchange of information it delivers via the Internet is changing culture in profound ways. It has led to a flattening of cultural language, as artists from disparate locations are

increasingly connected to far-off creative scenes, and a flattening of artistic images themselves, which might be expected, given that artists, like the rest of us, consume information on smartphones and laptops.

"I think they're responding to their environment," Ortiz said.

She points to an installation in "Flatlander" by San Antonio artist Jesse Amado. The work is made from 100 percent virgin wool felt of solid colors and in pieces that flow on to and across the flat floor, depict prescription pills floating in water — "antidepressants frolicking in Boulder Creek," to be precise, according to Amado, who said he based it on a study that found that the creek's fish were contaminated by pharmaceutical chemicals. Amado's colors are flat, Ortiz noted. The artist explained that the wool he uses is extremely "absorbent" and reflects little light.

"Drugs do that, too," he said, gesturing to the pill shapes in his creek. "They flatten out the world so you can deal with it."

The exhibit features work by 10 artists. Besides Amado, there's Carlos Aires, Man Bartlett, Matthew Chambers, Mark Hogensen, Cisco Merel, Jeanne Quinn, Xochi Solis, Penelope Umbrico and Rebecca DiDomenico. It's on view through Sept. 13.

For all its preoccupation with modern technology, the exhibit gets a good deal of aesthetic thrust out of old technology. Amado's wool felt is one of civilization's oldest known fabrics. Paper currency, whose obsolescence seems imminent with the advent of bitcoins, is the basis of Carlos Aires' "Disaster" series. Rebecca DiDomenico's installation is made from maps — the unsearchable, unscrollable, foldable paper kind that belong to a much rounder time.

DiDomenico's work is a highlight of the show, and, though its conceptual ties to "Flatlander" are tenuous — maps represent land on a flat surface, but what's that got to do with flat screens? — its impact makes up for any incongruity.

The work is made of maps from which DiDomenico cut out the spaces between "pathways," such as roads and rivers. The maps are arranged not flat on the wall but in the manner of vegetation, so that they're like jumbled webs from the floor to above your head. You still can read many place names on the maps. They refer to locations all over the world, and many have some connection to DiDomenico, like Nepal, where she lived for a year, and Point Reyes, Calif., near where she was raised.



This installation by Jeanne Quinn is on display as part of the exhibition "Flatlander," which runs through Sept. 13 at BMOCA. (Quentin Young / Daily Camera)

Metaphor radiates from the work like thoroughfares from a city center. Look at it for a moment and you'll start pondering life journeys, inner journeys, the nature of memory, the arbitrariness of national borders, the unity of humankind, the road not taken. It's one of those pieces that will traverse your mind even as you tour other works.

Another standout is an installation by Jeanne Quinn, an associate professor of art at the University of Colorado-Boulder, whose practice is to deconstruct objects and ideas through large-scale arrangements of porcelain, wire, paint and electrical hardware. In "Flatlander," she created a work that looks like white lace as viewed from a front, stationary position. But its components are hanging and spread about a corner of the gallery so that the piece presents an ever-changing three-dimensional image as the viewer moves, or even sways. It's like a protest against the world's flattening forces. It foists depth onto a flat object.

Maybe this is what culture will do as the pressures of the Internet press ever harder through our smartphone screens. Ortiz seems to believe we humans, as creative creatures, will react with depth: "As we become more global, we'll probably root down more and become more local."

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Selections from artist Carlos Aires' "Disaster" series of currency-based artworks is part of the exhibition "Flatlander," which runs through Sept. 13 at BMOCA. (Quentin Young / Daily Camera)

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