Visual Geography

An exhibition sponsored by the
U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey
and the
National Geographic Society
Maps are, among other things, a way of making geography visual. They are world views, ways of thinking, and ways of communicating. They depict our world and guide us through it.

Visual Geography probes the essence of maps and mapmaking. It follows the story of cartography through the millennia, across the globe, and beyond the solar system. It includes some of the world’s most beautiful and enduring maps, some of its most historic—a map in Columbus’ hand, the map that was carried to the Moon, the first map to show America—and it examines the urge to map, to measure our world, and to record it graphically.

Charting the Heavens begins with the idea that for thousands of years, we looked to the heavens as a way to understand the Earth. We now view the Earth from the heavens, plotting its size and shape, and our place in the universe from remote satellite data beamed back to Earth.
Beyond Geography reveals the myriad uses to which maps are put—from conquering enemies, to helping us predict the weather, to determining the age, size, and history of the Earth. From simple maps that could be spread out and read, we have now developed electronic maps that can answer a range of previously imponderable questions. Old and new maps are displayed together according to topics of enduring human concern—conflict, time, people and politics, oceans...

The Epilogue is a statement about the power of maps in capturing the human imagination and a visual feast of maps—from Leonardo’s view of Imola, to Wurman’s map of Philadelphia.