

# Dan Mills

Human Topographies



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CMCA  
CENTER FOR MAINE CONTEMPORARY ART



# Went Looking for Answers

In 2015, Dan Mills went looking for answers. “There is a lot of suffering due to conflicts in our world, but *how much* due to current wars and conflicts?” The answers he found fluctuate and expand constantly. In the resulting series, he attempts to make sense of issues and data that are not always easy to grasp. The visual systems he creates help bring perspective to information that may be easily read, but not necessarily quickly absorbed. The work urges you to slow down and consider what he is questioning and seeking to understand.

Mills’ extraordinary manipulation of collage can be seen in all his work, however it is particularly fundamental in the *Current Wars and Conflicts* series. The Cubists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso were the first to use collage as social commentary and a means to move away from and question traditional modes of representation. Shortly after, the Dadaists used it to comment on the political climate surrounding World War I, forming a method of piecing images, information, and fragments together to create a whole, often analyzing war and emphasizing its absurdities. Mills adds to this rich history of collage as social and political commentary. Using maps as a framework to physically associate information on world conflicts, he enables the viewer to fully realize the scope of the issues presented. The often unusually long titles serve as legends for deciphering the information, containing the key to analyzing the visual system.

In one of the most recent works in the series, *Current Wars & Conflicts... (with, by continent, Belligerent and supporter groups marked with letters, and Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced, Refugees, Stateless, and Killed marked with a letter for every million)*, 2019, Mills presents a vibrantly colored, large-scale world map. The array and multitude of letters provide instant impact and recognition of the true scope of belligerents and supporter groups in the world, so much so that the letters extend past the landforms, cascading to the outer regions of the map. This, in turn, forces the letters representing Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced, Refugees, Stateless, and Killed, out into the oceans, connected by thin lines to the respective continent. At first glance, the amount of letters seems manageable to comprehend, then one realizes each letter represents a million people, requiring a recalculation and closer look. The smaller works in the series, created on pages from discarded atlases, also benefit from close looking. For example, *Current Wars and Conflicts by Continent, Belligerents and Supporters III*, 2015, in which the cascading, colorful dots, signifying amounts, create a flurry of movement that is in line with the volume of events they represent.

Dan Mills’ collage/paintings create access points to understanding the magnitude of current wars and conflicts. However, it is imperative to express that the works also function by having a striking visual presence. By utilizing multiple mediums, including collage and painting, the works perform both as a method of social communication and as works of art, effectively assisting in the viewer’s acknowledgement of the information presented.

## Bethany Engstrom

Associate Curator, CMCA

Image:

*Current Wars and Conflicts by Continent, Belligerents and Supporters III*, 2015, ink on printed map on paper, 15 x 22 ½ inches, Collection of Jeffery and Hillary Becton

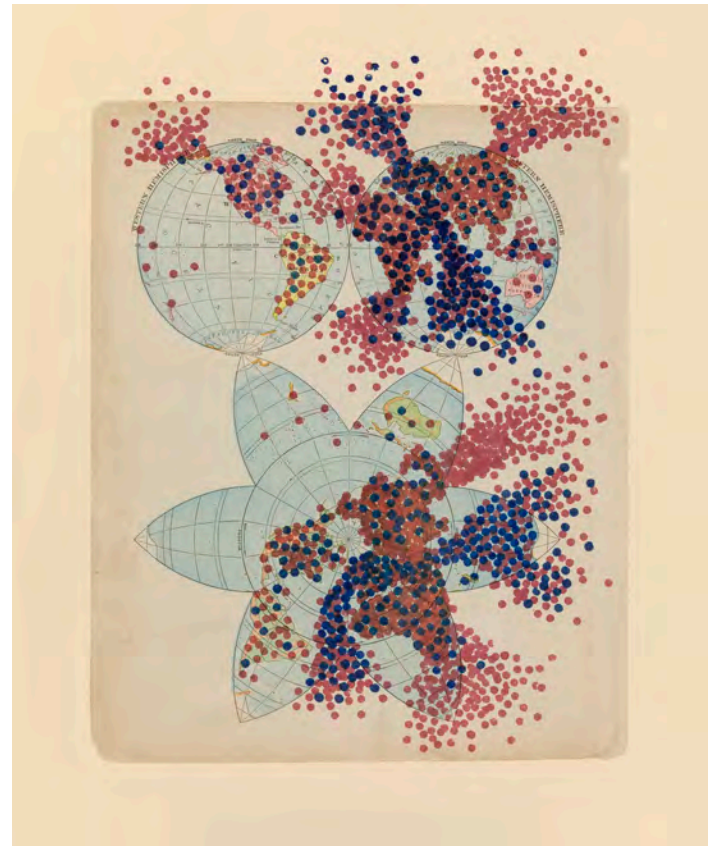




Image:  
*Current Wars & Conflicts...* (with, by continent, belligerent and supporter groups marked with black and red circles respectively, and Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced, Refugees, and Stateless marked with a letter for every million, and killed marked with letters for every 250k), 2017, ink on digitally reworked map, 95 x 148 7/8 inches





Image:  
*Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness (+Incarceration and Murder) State Ranking, 2017*,  
 acrylic and graphite on collage laid down on board, 78 x 141 inches



## Biography

Dan Mills is an artist and museum director based in Maine. He has had solo exhibitions at The Chicago Cultural Center, Sherry Frumkin Gallery in Los Angeles, Tianjin Academy of Fine Art Museum in China, and Zolla/Lieberman Gallery in Chicago, as well as featured in solo and group exhibitions throughout the US and internationally. His *US Future States Atlas* was published as a book by Perceval Press, Santa Monica, in 2009. He directs the Bates College Museum of Art in Lewiston, Maine. [www.dan-mills.net](http://www.dan-mills.net)

## Artist's Acknowledgements

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–Dan Mills

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Image: *Contest – The Americas (with nationalist colors and including the colonial era)*, 2018-19, acrylic, watercolor, and ink on map laid down on paper, 6 x 8 5/8 inches