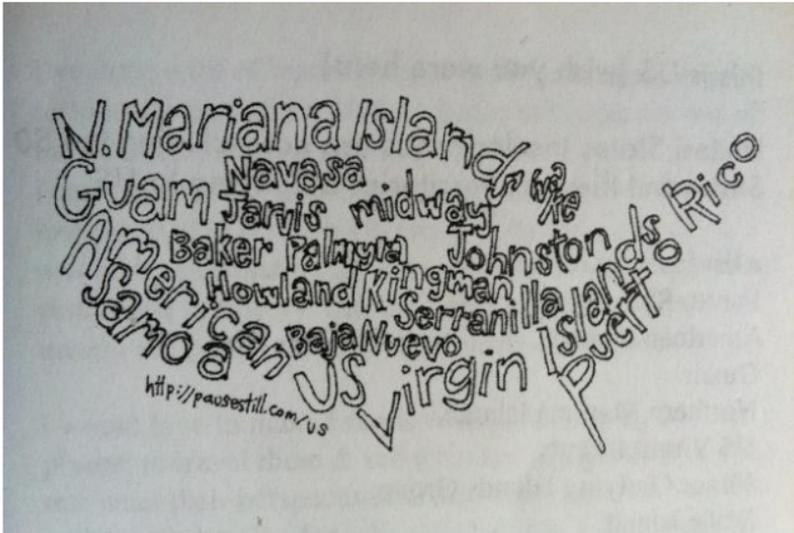


this is US (wish you were here)

United States territory
that you might not know about



this is US (wish you were here)

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“this is US (wish you were here)” (2009)
was an original exhibition with prints and
zines available for sale.

At Nancy:

Seattle, Washington, Aug. 14 - Sept. 10

At the Independent Publishing Resource
Center (IPRC):

Portland, Oregon, November 5 - 27

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United States Insular areas do not include the 50 States but they are territories belonging to the USA.

A list for easy reference:

Puerto Rico

American Samoa

Guam

Northern Mariana Islands

US Virgin Islands

Minor Outlying Islands Group:

Wake Island

Johnston Atoll

Midway Atoll

Kingman Reef

Palmyra Atoll

Jarvis Island

Baker Island

Howland Island

Navassa Island

Serranilla Bank

Bajo Nuevo

While researching I thought about what American culture is and how technology is changing that. It seems related to isolation, identity, and space.

I did a lot of reading about the insular areas that are technically part of the United States although not one of the 50 states. I had no idea some of these places existed. I can't remember why I started learning about this in the first place. This feels like a US Geography class project & it was really fascinating for some reason despite my general disinterest in History. I'm including the dates but it's mostly the parts I thought were worth mentioning.

I would love to make friends with people living in these places (if they are occupied) and to travel there and see what it's really like. I'm curious about what their perspectives on American culture are. Sometimes I don't really know what American culture is. I feel like this is related to technology and global culture.

Technology can make us feel more isolated despite the supposed connections.

In this series of textile illustrations I just wanted to create interest and share what I found out about our country: it was founded on claiming what it can for itself at the expense of others and it hasn't changed much. Even though the people who colonized the Americas were trying to separate themselves from the restrictions set by being citizens of England, Spain, and France, they ended up not being much different - as the European tradition of having territories was imitated.

Our distant relationship with the US insular areas is like a dysfunctional personal relationship: not openly admitting existence of the relationship, not living together or spending time together often, not knowing details about each other, not communicating openly, and no consistent rules or boundaries.

The territory known about by most Americans is **Puerto Rico**, located in the Northeast Caribbean. It is 3515 total square miles (9104 square kilometers) and is the most populated of the territories with nearly four million residents.

Spain forced natives (called Taino) into slavery in the early 1500s, killed them, then brought in African slaves. In 1898 during the Spanish American war, Puerto Rico was acquired by the US under the Treaty of Paris (along with Guam, Cuba, and the Philippines).

In 1917 (despite unanimous opposition by the Puerto Rican House of Delegates), Puerto Rico was granted US citizenship and new citizens were drafted for WWI.

An evolved Spanish is spoken there and English is spoken as a second language.



Puerto Rico

American Samoa is located in the South Pacific near New Zealand with a population of over 55 thousand people. The islands are 76 square miles (197 square km) total.

American Samoa was acquired in 1899 when the Samoas were divided between US and Germany. During WWI US marines outnumbered Samoans and were a large cultural influence. The capitol city according to residents is Fagatogo but the US calls it the seat of government and says Pago Pago is the official capitol. American Samoa is the only occupied US territory where residents are US nationals but not citizens.

Swains Island is known as Olohega by locals and is also claimed by Tokelau whose language they speak. The island is culturally part of the New Zealand territory north of American Samoa.

American Samoa



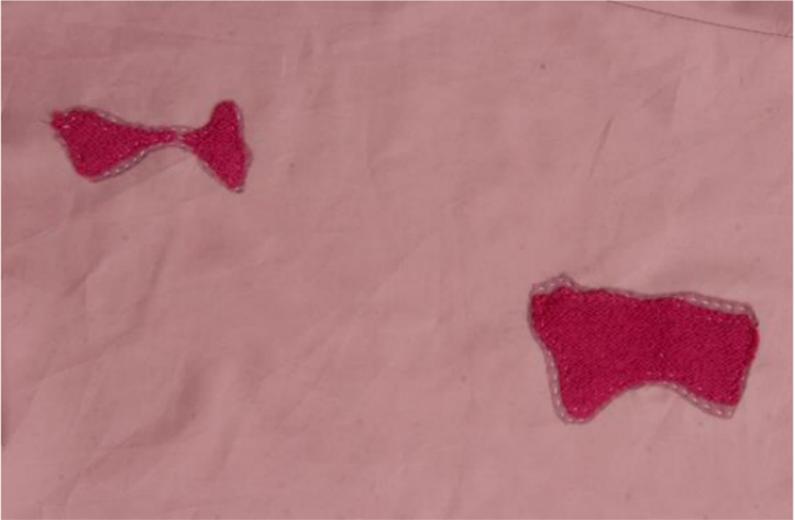
Swains Island



Rose Atoll



Tutuila & Aunu'u



Manu'a: Ofu, Olosega & Ta'u

Guam is located between the Philippines and Hawai'i with 209 square miles (541 square km) and a population of over 159 thousand people. It became a territory in 1898 during the Spanish American war. Guam was occupied by Japan from 1941-1944 during WWII. It is known as "America in Asia" and 75% of tourists visiting Guam come from Japan.

Another US insular area, the Northern Mariana Islands, are an archipelago just north of Guam.



Guam

The **Northern Mariana Islands** have a total of just over 179 square miles (463 square km) and a population of around 54,000 people on only four of the 14 islands.

The economy of the occupied islands depends on tourism & previously, garment manufacturing. The islands were exempt from US labor laws until May 2007 and goods made here were labeled “Made in USA” even though the wages being paid were far below minimum wage for the states. The minimum wage has been increasing gradually to match that of the 50 states by 2015 and is currently at \$6.55/hour.

The islands were occupied by Spain then sold to Germany in 1898, then awarded to Japan in 1919. After being defeated in WWII the islands were all transferred to the US from the time between 1944-45.

No residents are living on most of the islands. The islands of Agrihan, Anatahan,

and Pagan were evacuated due to active volcanic activity in the past. The only significant populations live on the three largest islands, Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.



Farallon de Pajaros,
Maug, Asuncion



Agrihan Pagan,
Alamagan, Guguan



Sarigan, Anatahan,
Farallon de Medinilla



Saipan, Tinian, Rota

US Virgin Islands

St. Croix



The US Virgin Islands were acquired in 1916 when purchased from Denmark.

The islands are almost 134 square miles total (346 square km) and are home to over 106 thousand residents.

They speak English and are the only US territory to drive on the left, as is the custom in Denmark, although most cars are from the mainland and are left hand drive.

St. John & St. Thomas



Minor Outlying Islands Group



Wake Island is an atoll (area of coral reef and islands at least partially encircling a lagoon) with 2.85 square miles (7.4 square km) of land. Wake Island is in the North Pacific and was acquired by US in 1899. The island is also claimed by former US territory

Marshall Islands. Wake is the only inhabited outlier with about 150 permanent residents although it is a restricted access area as it is a military missile facility.

Several of the territories claimed as the Minor Outlying Islands Group are disputed territories, also claimed by other countries. Wake Island is one of these.

Also in the North Pacific, **Johnston Atoll** is just over one square mile (2.67 square km) total. Two islands were formed by coral dredging and two are natural although they were expanded in this way.

The atoll was a Hawaiian territory until 1859 when it became part of the US. After a short stint as a bird refuge, the island has been used for storage and destruction of chemical weapons, once housing a 25 acre landfill on the largest island. In 2003 removal of all

toxic materials was completed and the area is now cared for by the US Fish & Wildlife service.



Midway Atoll in the NW Hawaiian Islands was acquired in 1867 with 2.4 square miles (6.2 square km) total land. Until recently, visitors were allowed via non-profit marine conservation organizations and fewer than 100 temporary residents work there.

The atoll was at one time a large volcanic island that sunk below the surface almost entirely. The coral reef formed around the former volcano above the sunken land.





Kingman Reef is mostly submerged with almost no coral based land above sea level. Kingman is a marine national monument in the central Pacific and was claimed by the United States in 1860.

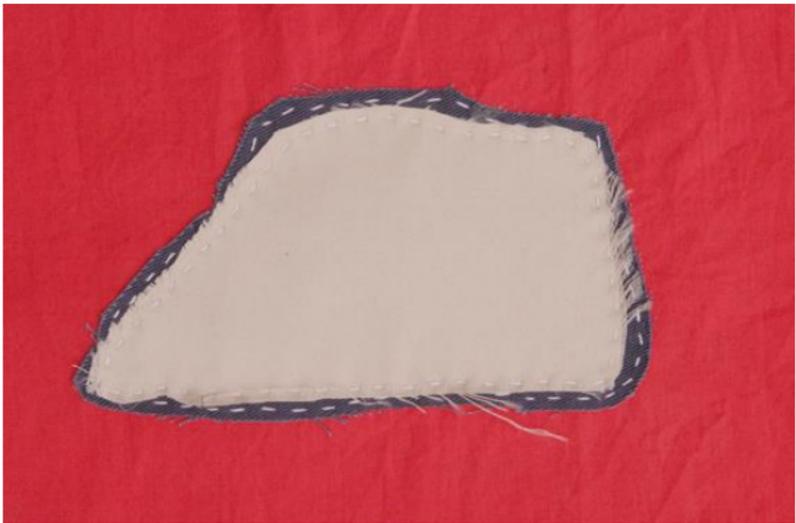
Palmyra Atoll is 4.6 square miles (12 square km) in the central Pacific and was acquired in 1912 when it was part of Hawai'i until it became independent from the state in 1959.

There is a small temporary population of scientists and researchers on the atoll and vegetation is primarily coconut trees.



Jarvis, Baker, and Howland Islands were used for attempted colonies in 1935 until they were evacuated in 1942 because of WWII.

Jarvis Island is 2 square miles (4.5 square km) of land in the central Line Islands. It became a US territory in 1856. The island is technically an atoll although it's lagoon is dry.





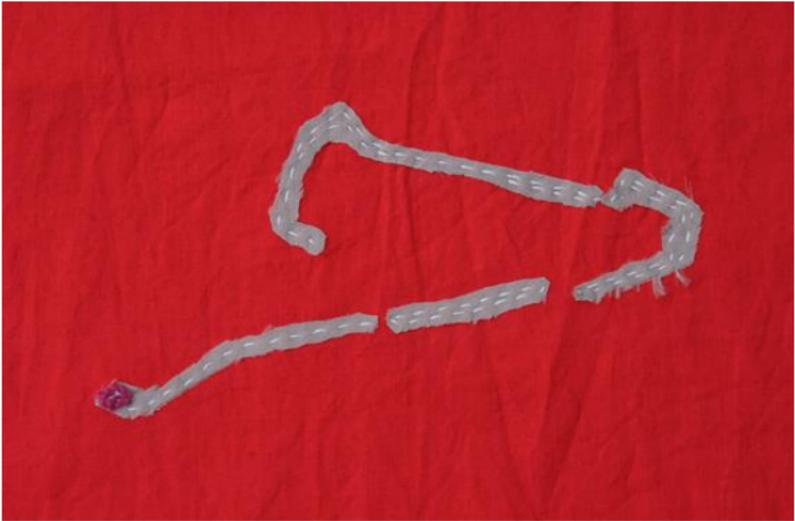
Baker Island in the central Pacific became a US territory in 1856 along with Howland Island. Baker, only .81 square miles (2.1 square km), is a treeless national wildlife refuge for the large bird habitat and marine wildlife.

Howland Island is home of Itascatown, one of the settlements of the attempted colonization. Howland is less than one square mile (1.6 square km) of land above a fringe of submerged land and reef.





Navassa Island (2 square miles or 5.2 sq. km) in the Caribbean became a US territory in 1858 although this is disputed as it is also claimed as part of Haiti. Goat herds feed on grasses there and fishermen visit but there are no indigenous people.



Serranilla Bank in the Caribbean was claimed by the US in 1880 and is now administered by Columbia. The bank is over 1200 square kilometers of mostly submerged coral reef. There are lots of wrecked ships in the drying reef and only the lighthouse is inhabited. Nicaragua and Honduras also claim ownership of the bank.

Bajo Nuevo is similar in that although it was claimed by the US in 1869 it is also currently administered by Columbia. Along with the US; Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Honduras claim the bank. There are two separate atolls with a deep channel between them. There is a light house but it is unknown if anyone is living there and operating it. There is almost no dry land but around 46 square miles (145 sq. km) of reef.



Textiles are not my strength. I chose to use textiles to try out building with something new. A few of these territories make a big part of their income from the garment industry so it made sense to use textiles. Some of these inhabited territories are still making a lot of traditional handcrafts so hand sewing seemed fitting. Some of the work was sewn on the local inactive volcano, Mt. Tabor, a few blocks from my place. I think all of the territories are either formed from volcano or coral reefs.

When I tried to explain what I had made a friend informed me it's called "appliqué." After completing the project I saw appliqué as the medium describing the technique used by Ainu (native northern Japanese people) to make amazing traditional robes that were displayed at the Portland Japanese garden. This was so rad because some of the patterns used were a sort of map (if only

symbolically) so the wearers would not get lost. What I had done was use textiles as a more two dimensional topography. I liked that connection.

Every material used in these pieces was scrap fabric: the wool sweaters I shrunk, free pile leftovers, scraps from altering, that sort of thing. The scraps of the scraps were used as stuffing in the window piece at Nancy. It feels nice to use up these materials by finding a new purpose for them.

Thank you,
(heart)
alissa robot

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US Virgin Islands at Nancy



Outlying Islands at Nancy



At the IPRC



Guam at IPRC



Window display at Nancy