



Above
Fig. 1 'Nova Utopia', Stephen Walters, 2013.

Right
Fig. 2 'A map of Utopia, after the narration of Raphael Hythlodæus, the writings of Thomas More as well as the drawing of Abraham Ortelius', Abraham Ortelius. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AUtopia.ortelius.jpg>

Opposite page
Fig. 3 Detail of 'Nova Utopia': Cosmo is a controversial area known for its euthanasia tourism and scientific research. It boasts a rich literary heritage and is widely considered to be the cultural capital of Novi.

Fig. 4 Detail of 'Nova Utopia': Flosris is a small secluded headland of beaches, chic hilltop villas and luxury resorts – a haven for the world's rich.

Overleaf
Fig. 5 Detail of 'Nova Utopia': Feo is, the old industrial heartland of Novi. Locals consider the city of Novus Utopos, the birthplace and resting place of Father Utopos to be the country's legitimate capital.



WORTH A LOOK

Stephen Walter's 'Anthropocene' and 'Nova Utopia'

To speak critically of any utopia is to enter a realm of interdisciplinary squabbling traversing across the centuries far into the unseeable future. An unknown, a no-place, Utopia, or utopias, are the source of interminable academic anxiety, yet the pursuit of utopia, in its multitudinous forms, remains an unwavering ambition and intellectual occupation of writers, philosophers, artists and dreamers alike, a challenging exercise in both imagination and practical application. Enter Stephen Walter's most recent work, the map 'Nova Utopia', highlight of his recent exhibition 'Anthropocene' at the Londonnewcastle Project Space in Shoreditch. Modelled on Thomas More's 1516 *Utopia*, Walter's 'Nova Utopia' uses the template of Abraham Ortelius' 1596 map of 'Utopia' to depict the fictional state a century after violent capitalist revolution has reconfigured the essence and ultimately 'utopian' character of the island. The map of 'Nova Utopia' illustrates its transformation

into a veritable leisure island, fuelled by a capitalist culture, reminiscent of, and plagued by, many of the pressing political and social issues faced by today's European societies.

Stephen Walter, whose work crosses the dynamic intersection between the cartographic and artistic fields, is renowned for his intricate hand-drawn maps such as 'The Island', the associated 'London Series' (2008), and 'London Subterranea' (2012). Yet the 'Nova Utopia' goes further in introducing a new dimension to Walter's artwork, charged with the polemics and politics of utopian and dystopian traditions, as well as providing scathing critique and exploration of the cultural norms of our society. The visual terrain raises questions as to whether our current institutional frameworks can indeed provide a sustainable future, and whether utopianism can still inspire a society widely ambivalent to the idealism of transnational and local communities and unions.





Thomas More's *Utopia*, ever the yardstick for the genre, presents its readers with an egalitarian and self-sustaining republic, devoid of its own currency and consequent consumer culture, which imposed harsh penalties on criminals and rigorously restricted freedom of individual movement. It is a utopia deeply at odds with today's liberal values, a friction articulated through Walter's map: this is no longer More's Utopia, but a utopia mutated, underlining the contradictions within modern society. While the artist acknowledges More's vision as the foundation of the 'Nova Utopia', his map acutely reflects the evolution of the utopian project, as well as the meaning of the word utopia itself. Distinctly removed from Ortelius' map, Walter's new Utopia is one of advertising and package holidays, of local cooperative movements and private police forces, a utopia which challenges the traditional associations of utopianism in its adherence to the norms of the modern biopolitical state. Walter's work poses new questions of the utopian

genre, confronting not only our expectations of the term utopia itself, but the longevity of utopias, as the framework of the fictional 'Nova Utopia' is ultimately riddled with the latent potential to exacerbate social inequalities and generate the further ideological disaffection of its citizens with both the state and the global capitalist system.

Relying on a diverse collection of symbols, languages and cultural references, Walter conveys through his 'Nova Utopia' the complex history and development of an entire nation state, juxtaposing the remnants of ancient Utopia against the building projects, shopping malls and environmental protection programs of its reluctant descendant. In so doing, Walter achieves a symbiosis of the aesthetic and the political, a map which is not just thought-provoking, but which uses the utopian tradition and beacons of modern culture to produce an entertaining and at-once identifiable piece.