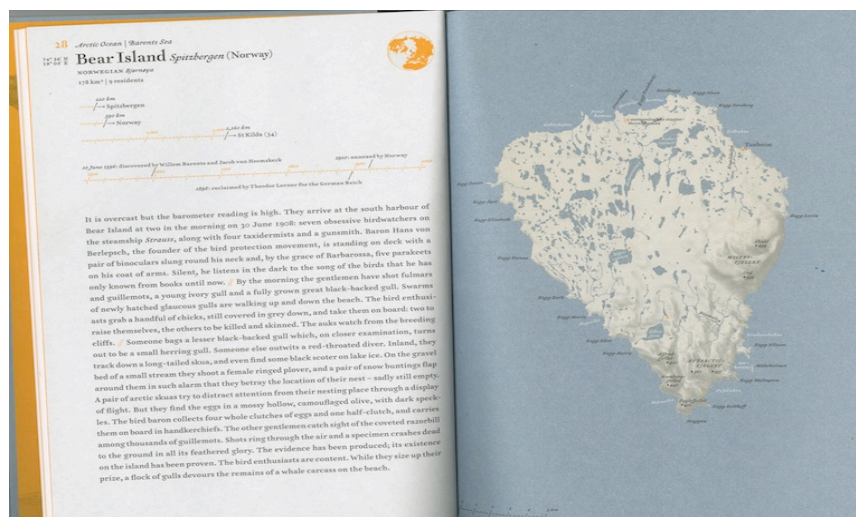


The *Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I have Never Set Foot On and Never Will* charms its reader with its presentation and frank approach. The book opens with an essay that introduces the reader to the author's enchantment with the concepts of atlases themselves. The atlas gives the person reading it the ability to travel across the world without leaving their room. This has been said of any number of artistic endeavors, be they maps or otherwise, but few times has an audience been given the chance to feel that possibility like they are allowed to in this book. The tentative nature of the opening essay, the childish excitement that it elicits while simultaneously allowing the reader to engage intellectually with the idea of an atlas is astounding. This essay is only the beginning, as well. There is some magic to this book, it tells so many disparate stories, and has so many narratives that an attempt to unify it would only lead to a schizophrenic destruction of what it is as a piece. In many ways it is the epitome of what the 228 production should look like. It simultaneously combines the personal narrative overlaid on the historical and all the while it is set against an opposite page, which contains only a map. It is the pure creation of story from map, while at the same time it acknowledges that the maps each came about from a story. That is, if it weren't for the stories of the explorers of these islands, no maps would have arisen for these islands. It is a delightful marriage of the concepts of narrative and cartography.

*"It is overcast but the barometer reading is high. They arrive at the south harbour of Bear Island at two in the morning of 30 June 1908: seven obsessive birdwatchers on the steamship Strauss, along with four taxidermists and a gunsmith."*



This is a small sample of the whimsy and page layout that are so key to the strategies that this book employs. There are so many different islands, but they are all portrayed in the same way. White and grey blobs on a blue field simultaneously evoke the 'island-ness' of the things, but also make them somehow all the more majestic and remote. By placing them out of context and yet strangely in context, the islands appear to be the more magical.

Combining this fact with the whimsy of the narration, the book becomes somehow transcendental. The stories don't even need to be true; the simple presentation of them seems to be enough to make the book work. To that degree, it doesn't seem to matter if the islands themselves even exist, the point is that the narrative that can come about from the idea of the islands is far more compelling than the thing that is actually somewhere out in the ocean. The opening essay also covers this fact, but you don't really start to believe that conceit until you start into the book.

Howland Island is another example of the way that this narrative works:



*She is the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic- from Newfoundland to Northern Ireland in fourteen hours and fifty-six minutes- and only the second person to do so, after Lindbergh. She flies from Los Angeles to New Jersey, from Mexico City to*

*Newark and from Honolulu to Oakland: Amelia Earhart, a pioneer who writes her records in the sky with vapour trails. Her greatest successes are at high altitude. Over and over again, she is the first woman. But now she wants to attempt something that no one has ever done: she wants to be the first person to circumnavigate the Earth at the equator. Please know I am quite aware of the hazards. The last picture taken before her 29.000-mile journey shows an incongruous pair in front of her Lockheed L-10E Electra, a streamlined silver twin-engine propeller plane. Amelia Earhart's hands are resting on her hips. Her flight suit is zipped wide open, her curly-haired head tipped to one side, and she is grinning in a daredevil fashion. She is tall and thin. Next to her, standing like a shy, diligent girl, is her navigator, Fred Noonan.*

This narrative is only even vaguely about the island. It is a subjective interpretation of some hard historical data. The data that is presented is fact, but it is so embellished with interpretation and detail that it takes on its own life, and makes itself more compelling than it already was. The story of Amelia Earhart is not a foreign one, but suddenly you are asked to examine it from the perspective of- in some way- the island itself. Suddenly you have a frame that is not the familiar one for the Amelia Earhart story. You get the opening completely free of the minor detail of who she is. You know that this is a person who you have heard of, being the first woman after Lindbergh, but the narration doesn't give that fact up until well after the opening, and in that way the level of alienation caused by that opening is enough to make the story completely fresh, and fascinating in an entirely new way.

There is magic in this book, and it sneaks out of the covers in such a quietly charming way, that as a reader, one doesn't notice it until you've been swept away on currents of narration that carry you to the very corners of the known world.