

# British Library Showcases Magnificent Maps

By: Karen Dabrowska

Maps can be works of art, propaganda pieces, expressions of local pride or tools of indoctrination. The British Library's Magnificent Maps exhibition brings together 80 of the largest, most impressive and beautiful maps ever made, from 200 AD to the present day.



Among the most impressive maps on display is Psalter World Map, c.1265. Despite its small size, this is one of the 'great' medieval world maps. It is probably a copy of the lost map which adorned King

Henry III's bedchamber in Westminster Palace from the mid-1230s. The original colours are intact. Showing east at the top, it is a visual encyclopaedia, embracing ancient history, politics, scripture and ethnography as well as geography.

Fra Mauro's world map c.1450 is a 1804 copy of perhaps the first 'modern' world map, made by the Venetian monk Fra Mauro in about

1450. It points south because 15th-century compasses were south-pointing. It shows the Portuguese discoveries in Africa and questioned the authority of medieval and classical sources. Intended for display in Venice, it emphasises the feats of Marco Polo. The British East India Company commissioned this copy, thus implying that Britain was heir to the Portuguese empire.





**Klencke Atlas**

Chart maker Diego Gutiérrez shows the Spanish Empire in all its glory. This was made for the approval of Philip II, shown in the guise of Neptune, borne aloft the turbulent Atlantic. He is surrounded by sea monsters, animals and attributes of empire. The artistry of such maps enabled their messages to reach Europe's elite.

centric view of the English capital and its commuter towns as independent from the rest of the country. The artist, a Londoner with a love of his native city, offers up a huge range of local and personal information in words and symbols. Stephen Walter speaks in the dialect of today, focusing on what he deems interesting or mundane.

The Island satirises the London-

**Nicolo Longobardi  
Manuel Terrestrial  
Globe**



«It's not about way-finding, it's not about accuracy, it's not about practical use,» exhibition curator Tom Harper explained. «It's as much about the art as it is about the geography. People relate to maps because they have pride in a certain place. So really the messages are still working today, - the exhibition has had a very positive response from visitors".

Magnificent Maps also explores the reason behind the construction of these visually arresting works of art which range from maps used for indoctrination or expressions of local pride to irrefutable statements of power and illustrations of rulers' spheres of influence.

The exhibition is supported by a wide range of events, from talks and discussions to family events.