



Bendel Hydes, *Untitled I*, 1995.

Inspiration Artist: Bendel Hydes

Age Range: Upper Primary to Secondary

Subject Areas: Geography (Maps)

MAPS AND SYMBOLS



**NATIONAL
GALLERY** | CAYMAN
ISLANDS

DART



In This Packet

In this lesson, you will find out about the history of map symbols and how they were developed over the years from pre-historic times to the present day.

You will see in particular how symbols have been used not only in land maps but also in sea or nautical maps.

Symbols have also been used a lot by artists in their work to convey meaning that cannot be explained in words. You will look at artwork by Caymanian artist Bendel Hydes that uses symbols and references nautical maps.

An art activity inspired by Bendel Hydes is included at the end of this lesson.

Key Words

Exhibition: An art exhibition is traditionally the space in which art meets an audience. There are temporary exhibitions, which change throughout the year, and permanent exhibitions, where the artworks are permanently on display.

Map Symbol: A character, letter, or similar graphic representation used on a map to indicate some object or landscape/seascape characteristic.

Symbolism in art: The art or practice of using symbols especially with a symbolic meaning.

Pre- history: The period of time before written records.



A brief look at the history of symbols in maps and art

Thousands of years ago, many ancient cultures walked the Earth, slowly leaving a footprint for future generations.

Advanced ancient civilisations appeared all over the world. No matter where we look, whether it is America, Europe, Africa, or Asia, the Earth saw great civilizations come and go through history.

While many of these ancient civilisations are long gone, with traces of their existence present in history books and museums around the globe, some of the remains have been forgotten, hidden and protected by nature for thousands of years.

Traces of long-gone civilisations are found in many ways. Some are the massive pyramids and structures that have been built across the globe, some of which are eerily similar in design and shape despite being separated by thousands of kilometers!

An example is the intricately carved blocks of stone in Bolivia's Puma Punku. Some of the stones there are cut with laser-like precision. Intricately carved, designed and polished, some have even claimed that these ruins were once created with the use of technology that far surpasses our own.



This is one of the ancient monoliths (a large single upright block of stone) from Bolivia with symbols that depict ancient stars.

Image source: <https://curiosmos.com/3-confounding-ancient-monoliths-that-depict-ancient-stars-maps/>

In the above image, you will see that the ancient civilisation that made these massive carved stones used images, or symbols to express an idea. In this example, they are showing stars.

In Australia, the aboriginal population also made sense of their world by using a set of symbols to describe their world and to communicate with each other.

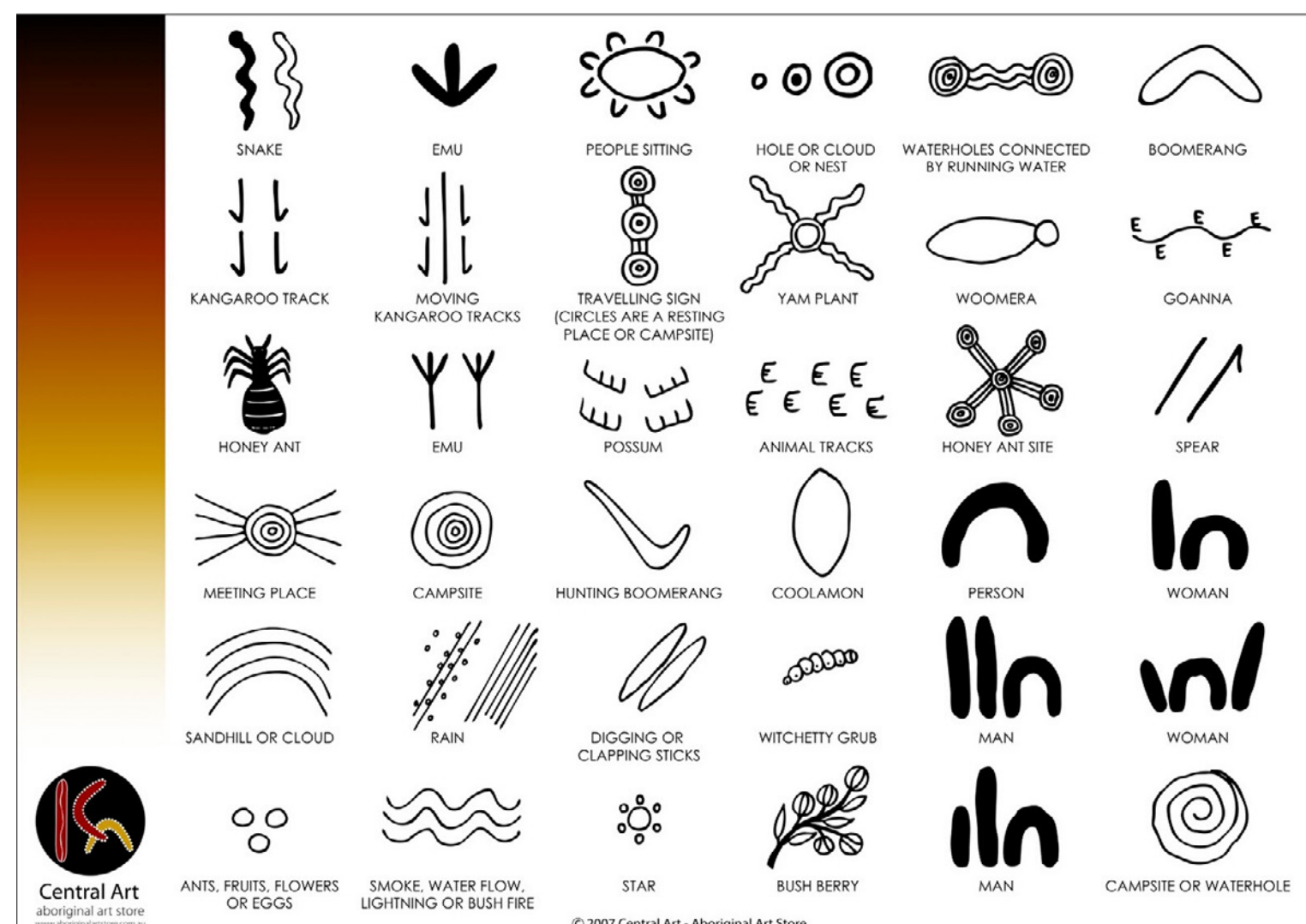


Image source: <http://www.aboriginalartstore.com.au/>

Imago Mundi

The oldest map in the world is thought to be the Imago Mundi. More commonly known as the Babylonian Map of the World, the Imago Mundi is considered the oldest surviving world map. It is currently on display at the British Museum in London. It dates back to between 700 and 500 BC and was found in a town called Sippar in Iraq.

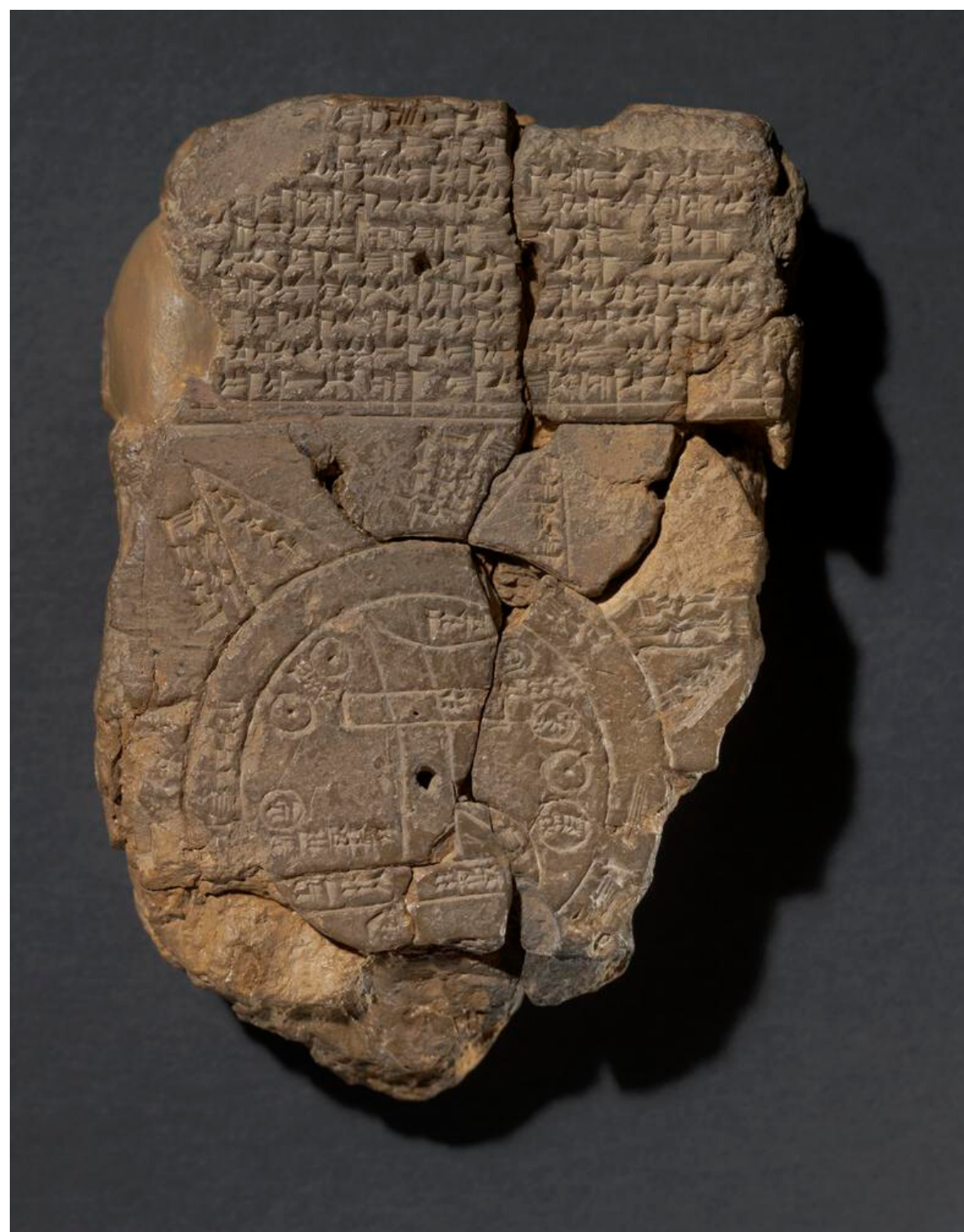


Image source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1882-0714-509

The carved map depicts Babylon in the center; nearby are places like Assyria and Elam, all surrounded by a “Salt Sea” forming a ring around the cities. Outside the ring, eight islands or regions are carved into the tablet. The map is accompanied by a cuneiform text (wedge-shaped characters used in the ancient writing systems) describing Babylonian mythology in the regions depicted on the stone.

Symbols continued to be widely used by mapmakers to describe features without having to use words.

Here is an example of map symbols for different water crossings. These symbols were compiled by Francois de Dainville from historical European maps.

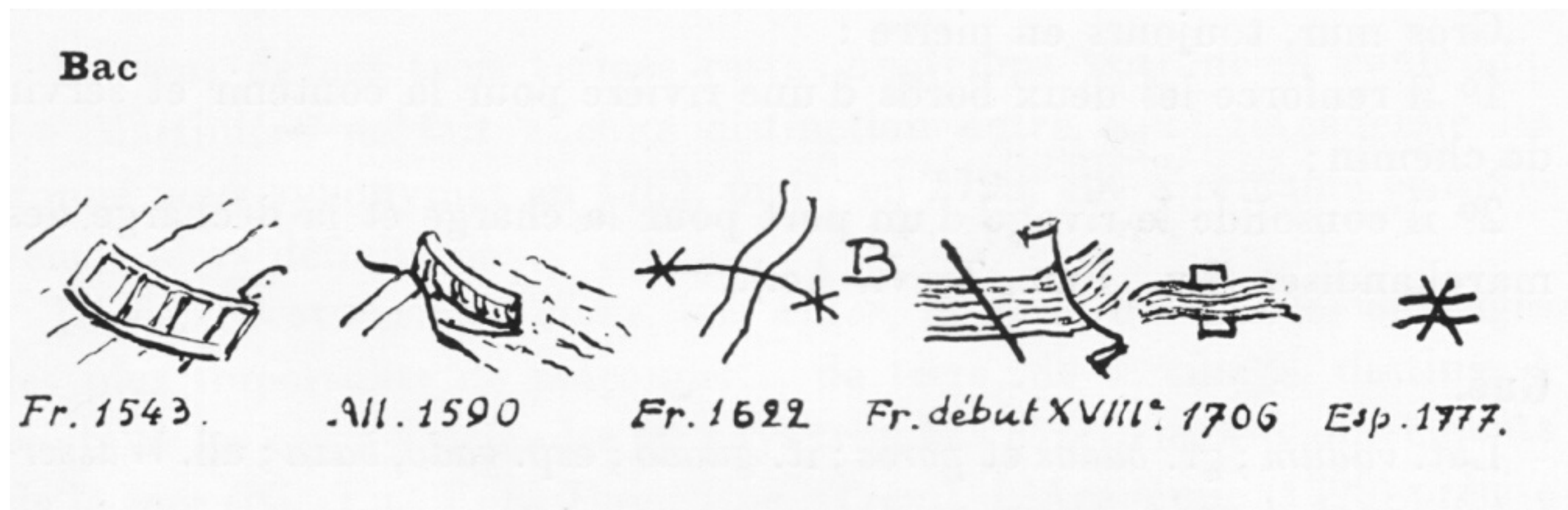


Image source: <https://makingmaps.net/tag/map-symbols/>

Activity: In the boxes below, design your own symbols to represent the given words.

Mangroves

Reef

Ironshore

Palm tree

House

Pond

Maps Today

Today, symbols are used in two different types of maps; land and nautical maps. Nautical maps are used by sailors to help them navigate the oceans; they give them details about the coast lines as they come close to shore.

Activity: Look at this nautical map of the Cayman Islands.

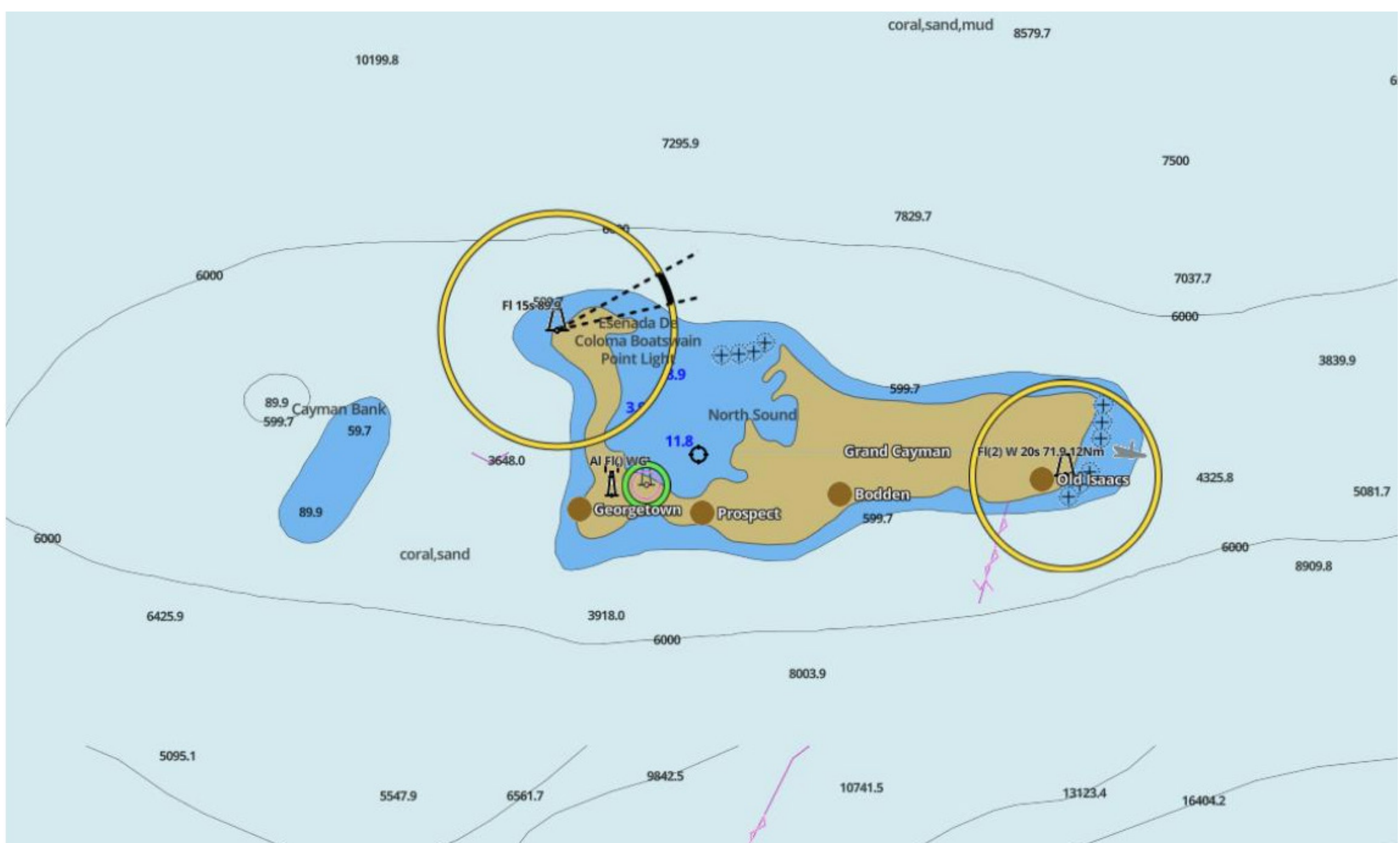


Image source: http://www.gpsnauticalcharts.com/main/cb_gb_0462_2-grand-cayman-nautical-chart.html

Find the three circles on this map. Look carefully at them. What information are they showing?

Using the symbols chart on the next page, can you identify two other important symbols on this map?

BREAKERS			CORAL REEF OVER WHICH DEPTH IS SHOWN AT MEAN LOW WATER
EDDIES			ROCKY REEF OVER WHICH DEPTH IS SHOWN AT MEAN LOW WATER
TIDE RIPS			REEF LINE
WRECK ALWAYS PARTIALLY SUBMERGED			ROCK DANGEROUS TO NAVIGATION
WRECK WITH DEPTH CLEARED BY WIRE DRAG			AN AREA FOULED BY WRECKAGE, ROCKS OR CORAL
WRECK WITH DEPTH SHOWN			SUBMERGED PILING
WRECK WITH ONLY MAST VISIBLE AT MEAN LOW WATER			ROCK OVER WHICH DEPTH IS SHOWN AT MEAN LOW WATER
WRECK NOT DANGEROUS TO SURFACE NAVIGATION			ROCK NOT DANGEROUS TO NAVIGATION

Image source: https://www.marinerslearningsystem.com/study_guides/MLS-Navigation-for-the-Mariner.pdf

Activity: On this chart of coastline symbols found on a nautical map, which one would you NOT find in the Cayman Islands?

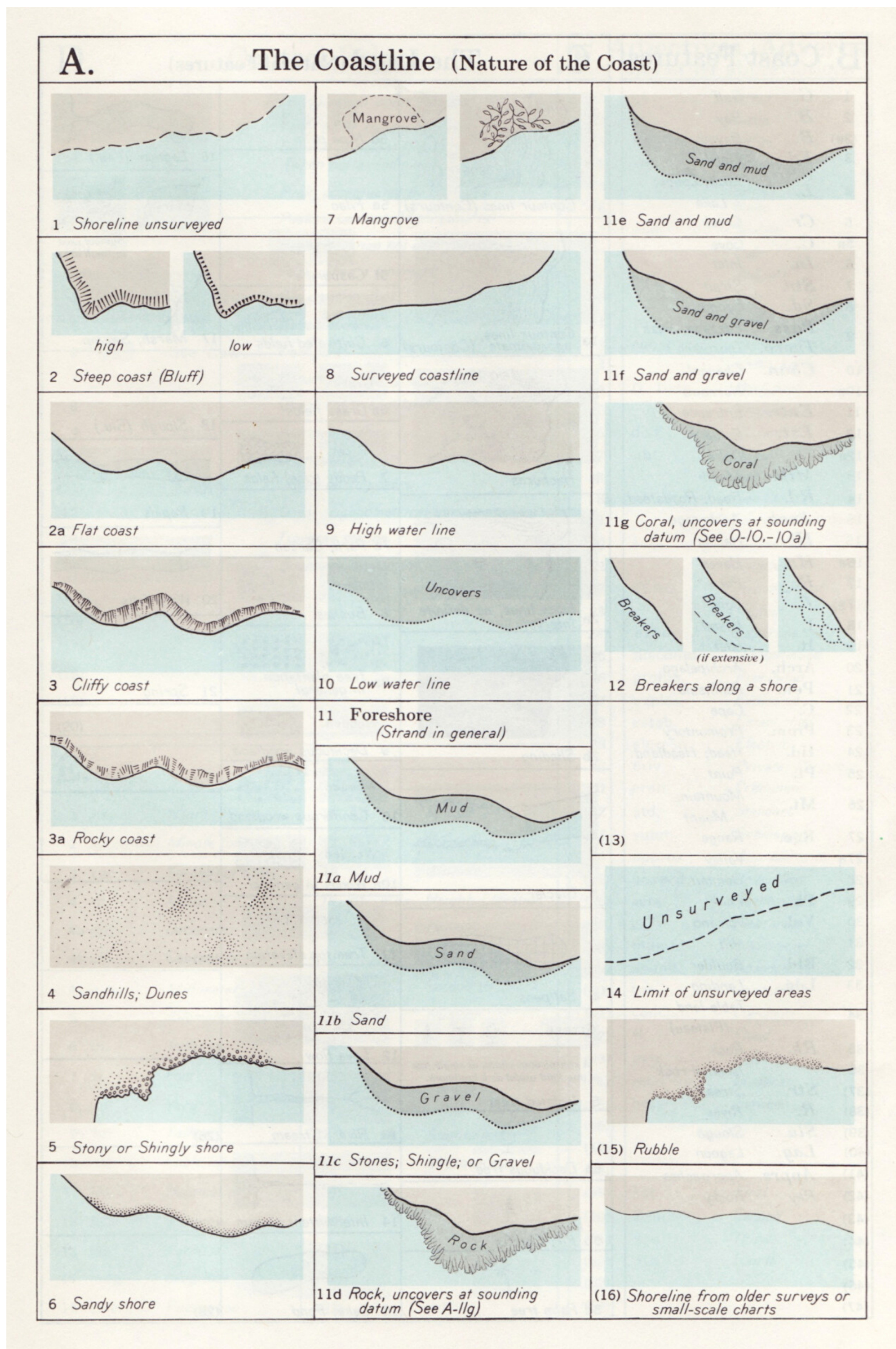


Image source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/461970874274606472/?nic_vl=1agDh0Tk4iJXT4QrOP9GAFd%2BYf8BL1YmarlD2MEoltpanfM8lmKvdAizt8QmaQQtvc

Maps in Local Art: Bendel Hydes

Bendel Hydes is celebrated as the founding father of Caymanian contemporary art, being the first Caymanian to acquire formal fine art training and the first to receive international acclaim for his work.

Hydes spent most of his adult life living and working in New York but his paintings contain many reflections on his life growing up in the Cayman Islands.

He is considered an abstract painter. Abstract art does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of something realistically, but instead uses shapes, colours and forms to achieve its effect.

In the mid-1990s Hydes produced two large bodies of abstract work that expressed his ongoing interest in Cayman's seafaring past: *Soundings in Fathoms* (1994-95) and *Source* (1996).

Untitled (Wells Harbour) (pictured below) and *Untitled I* (pictured on the lesson cover page) explore similar themes, referencing nautical maps and the scattering of small islands that dot the western Caribbean—the same terrain that was once explored by Cayman's turtle fishermen.



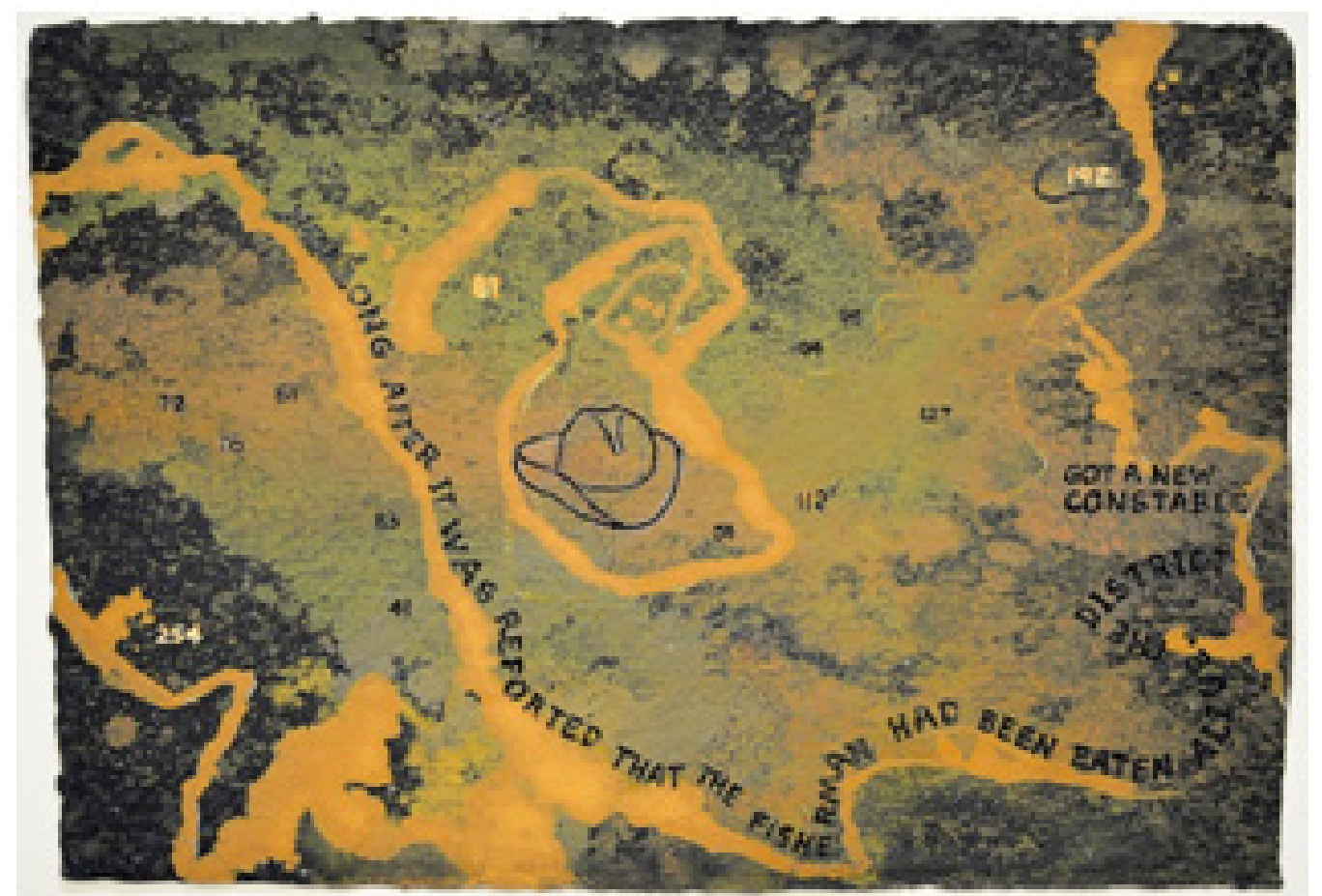
Bendel Hydes, *Untitled (Wells Harbour)*

In the *Soundings in Fathoms* series (1994-95), Hydes draws on the practice of measuring ocean depths to metaphorically represent his own exploration of his personal memory.

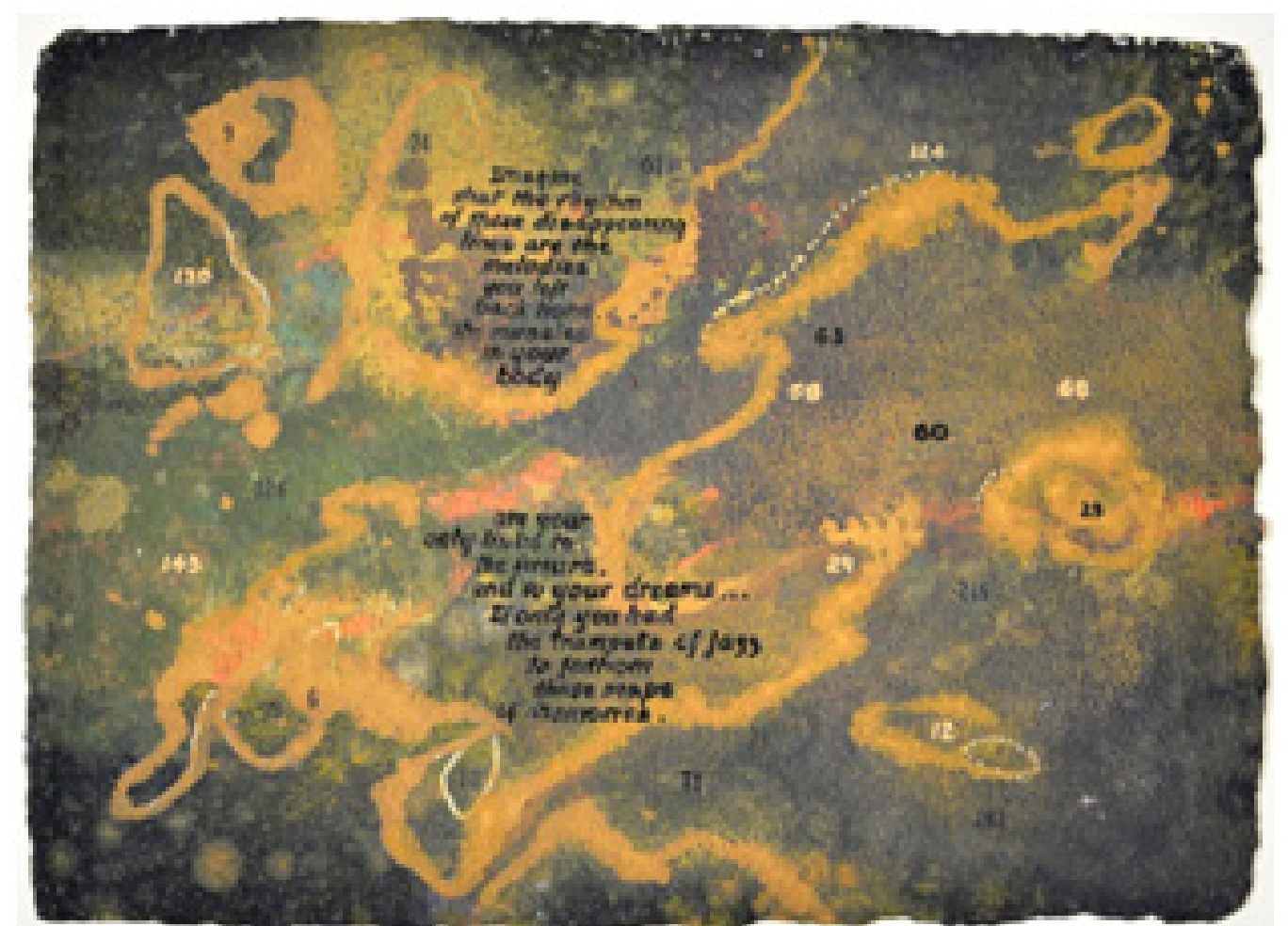
Using a thick sheet of paper that has been deliberately made to look aged and weathered, *Soundings #2* (1994) resembles a preciously guarded map. With the markings of a nautical chart clearly visible beneath the surface, this work invites the viewer to explore the artist's imagination as if it were a kind of map, with objects and images ("turtlegrass, gynip seeds, and marl rocks") functioning as cultural symbols or clues that help unlock its meaning.



Bendel Hydes, *Soundings in Fathoms #2*, 1994.



Bendel Hydes, *Soundings in Fathoms #9*, 1995.



Bendel Hydes, *Soundings in Fathoms #14*, 1995.

Learn more about Bendel Hydes by viewing the National Gallery's virtual *Bendel Hydes: A Retrospective Exhibition*:
<https://www.nationalgallery.org.ky/whats-on/exhibitions/bendel-hydes-a-retrospective/>

Art Activity: Room Map

Materials:

- Pen and Pencil
- Pencil crayons, crayons and/or paint
- Drawing paper
- Eraser

Step 1: Look at the room around you. Create symbols to represent the main objects in the room, for example a couch, desk, television, chair or bed. As you have seen above, the symbols can be simple line drawings - no need to get too detailed!

Step 2: Draw a border for your map using the shape of the room you are in. Notice if the walls are all straight or if some of them curve or meet at angles.

Step 3: Sketch a map of the room inside the border/walls using the symbols you have created. You can start with pencil, then go over this with pen when you are ready.

Step 4: Think about your relationship to this room. Do you have any interesting memories here? What words do you think of when you are in this room? Include these words on your map. You can choose to write them out normally, or write them in an interesting pattern like Bendel Hydes did in *Soundings in Fathoms #9*, where he followed the shape of the image with his words.

Step 5: Add colour using crayons, pencil crayons or paint. You even can choose to tear the edges of your map to make it look older like Hydes did.