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N.Y. exhibit shows a new take on maps

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Enlarge By New York Public Library, AP

An image from The Periodic Table. It can be seen in the exhibit "Places & Spaces: Mapping Science" which opened this week at the New York Public Library's Science Industry and Business Library.

PHOTO GALLERY

This week in space: April 6



Science Lens: April 7



By Deepti Hajela, The Associated Press

NEW YORK — From ancient charts to computerized navigation systems, people have always relied on maps to tell them where they are and where they can go. But there are maps that are more than just physical destinations. A map can also be an abstract place.

A new exhibit shows how mapping can go metaphysical, charting such information as the relationships between different scientific fields. "Places & Spaces: Mapping Science" is on view at the New York Public Library's Science Industry and Business Library through Aug. 31.

The show features 20 maps, from older ones with ancient depictions of the planet to a chart giving a timeline of anthrax research literature. A series of globes chronicles information such as the number of patents held in various countries, and an interactive illuminated map displays how different scientific fields are connected and where research is done.

It's all about providing a guide to how science has evolved, said Deborah MacPherson, one of the curators of the show. Science has advanced so much, but the general public's understanding of it is still lagging.

"We need to simplify how science is explained," she said.

We've all seen examples of how science information can be expressed visually. One is the periodic table of elements, a fundamental part of any high school chemistry textbook. It

is laid out in rows and columns that group the elements in certain patterns, showing anyone looking at it the links between them.

The exhibit includes other uses. For example, one map reminds viewers of the London Underground map, but tracks thought processes instead of trains.

Knowledge maps are needed now more than ever because people need ways to manage the sheer volume of information out there, said Brad Paley, who created a map in the show that functions as a visual index of a book.

"We have more information than has ever been accessible to human beings," he said.

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