

Hillary Mushkin

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Hillary Mushkin is a visual artist and research professor of art and design at California Institute of Technology (Caltech). She started Incendiary Traces in 2011 to reverse-engineer the politics of landscape visualization. Subjects have included the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, in Twentynine Palms, California; Mexico City's C4i4; Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems, in Redondo Beach, California; the San Clemente Island Range Complex; the USC Institute for Creative Technologies, in Los Angeles; and the US-Mexico border. A 5-year retrospective exhibition, "Project Series 51: Incendiary Traces" was recently presented at the Pomona College Museum of Art concurrently with the exhibition "Goya's War". The accompanying book includes an essay by Susanna Newbury discussing the effect of military technology on visualizing conflict, an essay by Sarah Seekatz on the history of Southern California's date industry and the orientalist fantasies associated with the Coachella Valley desert, and narrative captions by Mushkin. Mushkin's essay on the project and Mexico City's massive Ciudad Segura surveillance system will be included in the forthcoming Routledge book *Control Rooms: Nodes in the Networked City* edited by Simon Marvin and Andrés Luque-Ayala, with chapters contributed by Bruno Latour and Beatrice Colomina.

Incendiary Traces at the EU Border: Frontex to the Hellenic Coast

In June 2017, six artists took out their watercolor sets, pencils and sketch pads, and began to record their observations of the Frontex Situation Center, the primary border surveillance center of the EU border protection agency, in Warsaw. We were part of Incendiary Traces (incendiarytraces.org), a collective art, research and media initiative started by Hillary Mushkin that visits military bases, para-military government agencies and their contractors to explore the diverse ways they remotely visualize spaces of international conflict. Frontex is headquartered in a new international business district in Warsaw, Poland. Housed in a contemporary glass and steel skyscraper complex known as the Warsaw Spire, its neighbors include an international real estate investment firm, Samsung research and development, and the Hilton Hotel conference center. Within its corporate interior, bathed in harsh bright white light, lies the Frontex Situation Centre, the agency's central control room, where agents at workstations envision the EU border beyond. Their work is challenging, not only because of the Situations Centre's distance from the Mediterranean but, more generally, because of the border's murky status as both a political concept and a physical area. The boundaries of nations, international alliances and international law crisscross in the sea, while political alliances and international agencies join forces to surveil and mobilize in areas far beyond the often ambiguous EU borders.

(1)



PLACES WHERE THEY CAN DEPARTED FROM

Frontex uses a military-style command and control system to collect and share border surveillance data in near-real time from a wide range of government agencies within and outside of the EU. Surveillance comes from observations on the ground, the water and in the air. The goal is to gain "situational awareness" in order to control the observed area. While Frontex agents in the Warsaw control room render "security alerts" as abstract data points on maps, the agency projects a public view of itself as an on-the-ground humanitarian rescue agency. Its press office provides heroic images of field patrol and maritime rescue missions. Men in weatherproof uniforms and sturdy-looking boats extend life vests to men, women and children in everyday clothing and overflowing small vessels. The maritime images are most striking because the water and the sky are so placeless. The people are in a sea of blue, literally and figuratively. With no markers, they could be in any large body of water, close to land or far from it. The circumstances surrounding their situations—including where they are, where they came from and where they are going—are unclear, though certainly critical for everyone pictured. The people in the conference rooms and control room at Frontex's headquarters, too, are in a placeless setting that could be in nearly any international city.

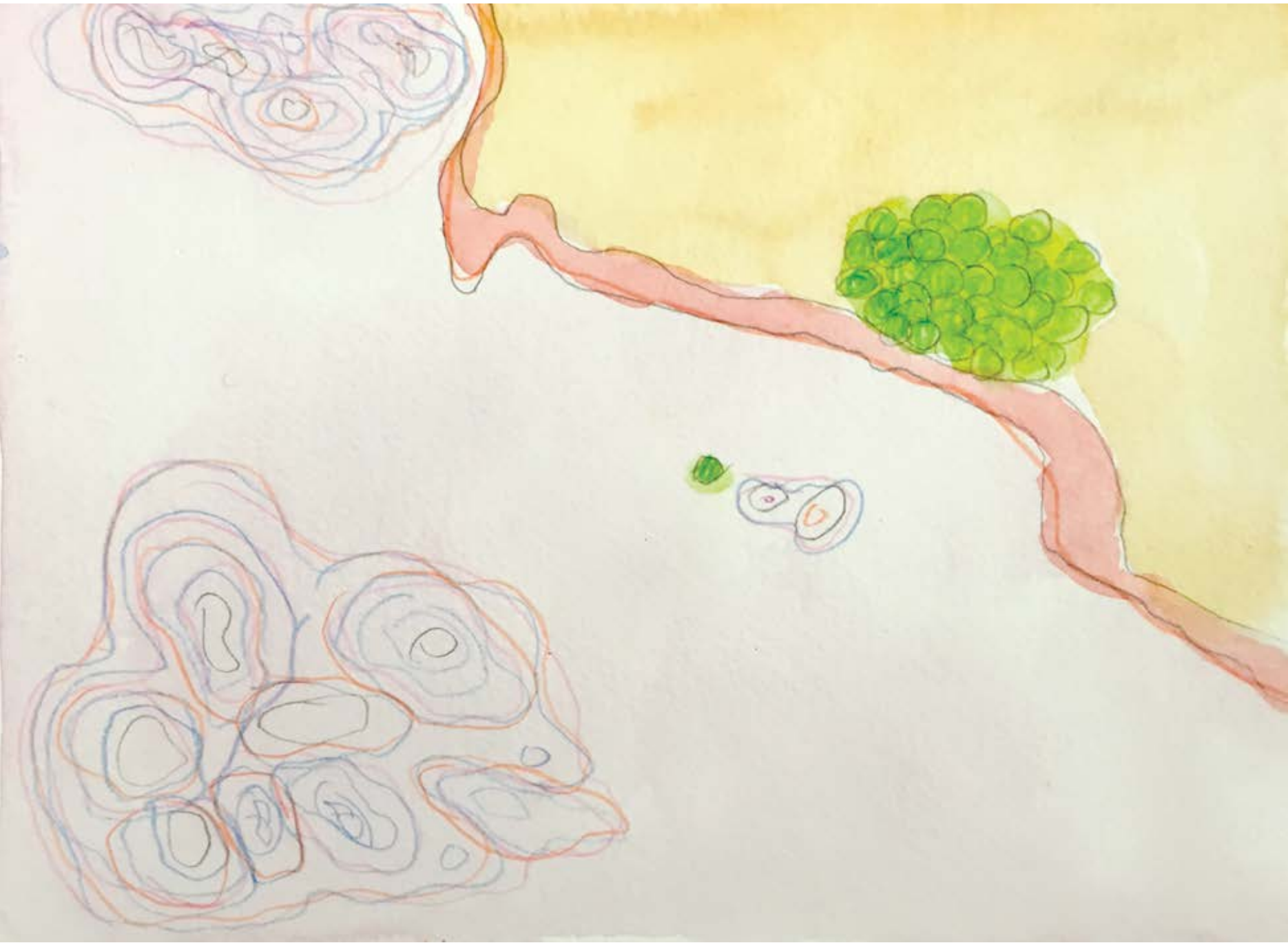


(2)

Where is the EU border? As much as it is defined and mapped through politics, laws and agreements, it exists where it operates – in addition to the vessels in the sea, it includes the Frontex headquarters in Warsaw, the European Space Agency satellite control rooms in Italy, their satellites in space and the objects of their gaze, located in Niger and viewed by Frontex agents in Warsaw. Together, these places comprise a complex border ecology.

(3)

Following our visit to Frontex in Warsaw, Incendiary Traces traveled to Athens to sketch outside the headquarters of the Hellenic Coast Guard, the Greek paramilitary government agency responsible for Greece's sea border surveillance and a key affiliate of Frontex. As it happened, our view from a bus stop nearby had been occupied by hundreds of refugee tents several months earlier. Inside the building is a control room where Greek agents share surveillance data with Frontex in Warsaw.



(4)



Sketching at these sites, we position drawing as a collective visual practice parallel to the para-military's, while highlighting human observation, interpretation and gesture. Our deliberately imprecise and messy drawing tools and techniques contrast with the apparent accuracy of digital visualization, highlighting the fundamentally incomplete, ephemeral nature of all observation, regardless of technology. The resulting work is shown in table-top displays of sketches, ephemera, photos and explanatory texts. In contrast to an abstract view of international land and sea borders from a control room or a limited single perspective from the ground, our collected sketches and other visually artifacts present a materially textured, human scale "situational awareness".

Artists in Warsaw: Daria Infanti, Natalia Kulka, Michał Murawski, Hillary Mushkin, Dorota Podlaska, and Zuza Ziółkowska/Hercberg; in Athens: Maayan Amir, Sofia Bempeza, Sofia Dona, Hillary Mushkin and Ruti Sela. Many thanks to Beata Sosnowska in Warsaw and Sofia Dona and Giorgos Arahovitis in Athens for help organizing.

(5)



(1)

PLACES WHERE THEY DEPARTED FROM
Natalia Kulka, 2017. Frontex Situation Centre, Warsaw, Poland. Watercolor on paper. 29 x 20.7cm

(2)

Frontex Situation Centre. Photo Courtesy of Frontex

(3)

IMAGE ANALYSIS Hillary Mushkin, 2017. Frontex Situation Centre, Warsaw, Poland. Watercolor, graphite and colored pencil on paper. 6x8 inches

(4)

Documentation of Natalia Kulka sketching in the Frontex Situation Centre, Warsaw, Poland, 2017
Photo: Michał Murawski

(5)

OVERVIEW OF FRONTEX SITUATION CENTRE
Dorota Podlaska, 2017. Frontex Situation Centre, Warsaw, Poland. Graphite on paper. 22.5 x 32.5 cm

IMPRINT

Gender_Gap:
It is nGbK's policy to use the Gender_Gap in the German version of all publications in order to underline an explicit linguistic representation of social genders and genderidentities beyond the hegemonic binary conception of gender.

TUNNEL BELOW /
SKYJACKING ABOVE:
DECONSTRUCTING
THE BORDER

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