

Gallery alexander levy is delighted to present *Pillar of Salt* by Ella Littwitz on the occasion of Gallery Weekend Berlin.

Littwitz's practice is marked by an artistic interaction with geopolitics, history and religion. Her unmediated connection to sites imbues her work a quasi-archeological quality and confronts us with "artifacts" and "documents" of conflict, migration and culture.

In *Pillar of Salt*, the artist reconceptualizes space and borders as perpetually mutable. Littwitz challenges the conception of frontiers as immovable lines delimitating territories reorientating them. Works on show focus on Littwitz's native Israel, a country whose relationship to borders is ubiquitously complicated.

The artist focuses on one particularly artificial border – the southern division between Israel and Jordan along the River Jordan, a line complicated not just by geography but also politics and religion. The river is at the border of two tectonic plates in the Great Rift Valley, and thus its landscape is constantly changing, and a controlled territory and frontier become wholly uncontrollable. Qasr El Yahud is also the site of Jesus's baptism and the crossing of the Israelites to the Promised Land, and so a question of spiritual border begins to emerge. Politically, this part of the border came into Israeli military control in 1967.

There has been a lengthy dispute over which side the baptism took place, raising the question of whether there can be a holier side of the river. *High Degree of Certainty* (2020) is a manifestation of this. The pair of geotextiles, which are tellingly used to strengthen soil, were dipped on either bank of the river. The foundational textiles underwent a ritual baptism before being transposed into the gallery space. The work complicates issues of "authenticity". The artist seems to indicate to an idea of space within space – "If everything that exists has a place, place too will have a place, and so on ad infinitum" (Aristotle, Physics).

The Hebrew Bible relates that after crossing the border, the Israelites progressed towards establishing a political identity after years of living nomadically, in essence, they started to form a nation. Dictated by Joshua, the successor of Moses, a series of religious rituals were carried out after the crossing, including a ceremony where the twelve tribes were divided between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The Levites, direct descendants of Levi, and priests stayed in the valley, where the city of Nablus is located, between them uttering blessings and curses to which both sides responded.

The pillars in *The curse and the blessing or region bounded by two functions* (2021) echo this religious ceremony and the region's geography – one pillar is made from Nabulsi soap, produced in Nablus (West Bank, Palestine), the other with mud from Qasr el Yahud (where Jesus was baptized). As the two intersect they form a locked space, inaccessible from either side yet formed mutually.

Areas of crisis, fenced minefields, shooting zones and no-man-lands, are marked by strict boundaries and have heterotopic qualities to them, they are "outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*). In reappropriating the semiotics of these spaces and exposing the failures of their delimitations Littwitz reorientates their boundaries, making them visible and documented.

*If everything that exists has a place, place too will have a place* (2020) is a direct visual transposition of this type of border. The barrels previously marked the limits of a shooting practice zone, though by their appearance one would think they are the shooting targets themselves. Standing next to each other they no longer define space, just their own tenuousness, the work becomes a "witness" to material emptiness.

For *Semiology of the Underground* (2020), Littwitz used a minefield warning plaque as a surface for an illustration of an *Arabidopsis thaliana*, a plant that can be genetically engineered to turn red in soil that contains a nitrous oxide, a component leaked by unexploded bombs. Both methods of signaling danger have been known to fail, so the artist seems to point to the fallibility of processes of modulation of nature. Ultimately, nature cannot be dominated by the state or ideology and so a controlled territory loses its control.

Just as she reorientates these symbols of sovereignty, she compresses time, logic and direction. In *The Path* (2021), stones, originally used to mark right way, are piled creating heterochrony, since time (and in this case also distance) is accumulated into a single object. Further, in removing these stones the artist intervenes with actual directions, which become present in the gallery space and absent in landscape. *All at Sea* (2021) emphasizes that there is powerlessness and an inherent fallibility in our reliance on paradigms of space and orientation. As basalt stones preserve the magnetism of when they were formed, the compasses placed on top are drawn to the magnetic north recorded by the stone and not true north. So, one of the oldest and most reliable forms of telling direction is altered, skewed, implicating also that history is not a guide.

In Hebrew stealing the border, means crossing without permission, in creating these works Littwitz not only steals but also relocates and appropriates them. The works become metaphorical pillars of salt – “But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt” – Littwitz questions the present as she looks back at all these divisions, metamorphosing them and making them tangible.