

No Men's Land

cym
cym@mur.at
<http://nomensland.eu/>

In her project 'No Men's Land' cym tries to capture something of the rapid changes that are happening to the borders in Central Europe. Since 1995 cym is traveling regularly between the former West- and East-European countries and she has followed the so-called 'opening of the borders' very closely. In her project 'No Men's Land' she is following the main border that used to divide Europe in East and West.

As a first step cym is traveling to the actual borders that mark the countries. She takes photos with the digital camera at the different border situations. The photos give a good impression what this political line looks like in reality. Very often you can't see anything special. There is only the knowledge that there are actually two different countries visible on the photo.

As a second step, and this is where the project 'No Men's Land' really starts, cym creates an abstract image from the original photo. This abstract image is created entirely with HTML, the language used to create websites. The abstract image therefore is no longer an image, but only a piece of HTML code. The abstract images are not perfect copies of their original photos, but new compositions made by cym based on the photos captured in reality.

In this way the abstract images show some similarities with the political border lines in Central Europe. Political lines are constructed to define the boundaries of the different countries, but reality does not always follow these lines.

When living closely to the border, one realizes that borders are in a way just an imaginary line on paper and in people's heads. If you actually go and try to find that line in reality you will be surprised that, except of white stones every 50 meters, there is no visible line marking the country. The tree on one side looks the same as the tree on the other side. Even the house on one side looks very similar to the house on the other side. The vegetables that grow on the field on one side, are the same as the vegetables that grow on the field on the other side.

In her project 'No Men's Land' cym focuses mainly on the Central European borders. Through her photos she tries to capture something of the rapid changes that are currently happening in Europe. Many of the photos show situations that would have been impossible to photograph twenty years ago. And many of the border crossings that are still visible in the photos now, might disappear completely within the next ten years.

There is the river between Austria and Slovakia that many people tried to swim across in the night, with all their belongings above their head. If they would make it to Austria without being shot, they would be save. These days people row a boat there or swim, just for relaxation. The big piece of land around the river, that was empty to secure the border, is now turned into a recreational park where you can go for a picnic on a sunny afternoon.

Many of the white stones that mark the border around Czech Republic and around Slovenia still show the inscriptions of the old country names. The old letters were scraped off, or painted over, and the new characters that mark the new name of the country were put there instead.

Would it still make you a little nervous to cross the border ten years ago, these days festivals are organised between the borders to try to find a new use for these big pieces of land with its empty police-stations and closed tax-free shops. However, at the same time a new border is appearing around the EU. Was the situation 20 years ago that you were either east or west of the line that divided Europe, these days you are either inside or outside the lines that define the European Union.

In the project 'No Men's Land' cym is creating a transition of a real situation into a new, digital composition. The transition of the photos into abstract images creates a new layer, a new map and a new way to explore the Central-European borders.

The photos in this project have all been taken after May 1st, 2004 and before December 21st, 2007 and show just

a short moment in time within the longterm process of changes in Central Europe. The selection of photos could be seen as a snapshot of the time just after May 1st, 2004, when the former, so-called, Eastern-European countries joined the European Union and before December 21st, 2007, when these countries joined the Schengen zone and the regular border controls disappeared.

The digital images created in the 'No Men's Land' project can also be seen as individual compositions, almost like paintings, without the connection to the

original photo. Although it is important for the selection of the images to know the background of the chosen photos, artistically the abstract images can also be seen as individual, unique compositions.

The project 'No Men's Land' not only creates a transition from a real life situation into a digital composition, there is also the imaginary transition back to the real life situation, when the viewer watches first the abstract image and tries to imagine what the original source photo could be like, before clicking 'view source'.

