

FRANCIS ALÿS
Border Barriers Typology

Oct. 16 - Dec 22, 2021

Opening: Oct. 15, 2021

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present *Border Barriers Typology*, the fourth solo exhibition by Francis Alÿs (*1959 in Antwerp, Belgium) in the gallery. The exhibition will encompass a new group of works consisting of paintings in small format, which occupy the four main rooms of our location in the Rämistrasse. The 23 paintings are made of oil and encaustic on linen and mounted on small wooden panels measuring approximately 14 x 19 cm. The individual works thematically tie in with Alÿs' longstanding exploration of territoriality and borders and summarise his observations collected while traveling into various conflict zones in a serial, poetic-typological study. In the context of the exhibition, a publication with a text by Catherine Lampert will be published and available through the gallery. The book launch will take place on Friday, November 19 at 6pm in Rämistrasse, in the presence of the artist.

The politically complex dimension of the subject of *Border Barriers Typology* is translated in Alÿs' work into a simple straightforwardness that finds its formal equivalent in the presentation in the exhibition space: at eye level, the paintings positioned evenly on the wall form a calm line of monochrome, earthy brown tones that stretches across all three rooms on the upper floor. Only upon a closer look, does the viewer become aware of the white, delicate brushstrokes found in grids and static beams that draw an individual border fence in the deserted space on each work.

Alÿs began the series in 2020, when he was secluded in the rural valley of Tepoztlan, about 75 km south of Mexico City, during the first Corona lockdown. He oriented his work based on his own sketches and archived photographs of various closed borders from around the world, which he merged with his memory of each place. Each fence has neither beginning nor end and reveals itself to be insurmountable and impenetrable, partly through barbed wire and partly through fine-meshed wire patterns. Despite the abstract landscapes, the names of the regions in conflict, such as AFGHANISTAN/ PAKISTAN or ISRAEL/ WESTBANK, are written in capital letters in the lower left and upper right corners respectively.

Borders - be they man-made or appropriated as such by man through their geographical location - play a recurring role in the artist's work. However, the approach to this conflict-laden theme usually takes place through a metaphorical action that is only subtly politically charged, as in works such as *The Green Line - Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic*, when Alÿs draws a trail of green paint behind him in a two-day action in 2004 to trace the demarcation line that Moshe Dayan marked on a map of Jerusalem in 1948.

The paintings in *Border Barriers Typology* are upfront. In their simple brown colour, they are reminiscent of the paintings Alÿs presented in the Iraqi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2016, which were created after his nine-day stay on the front line with the Kurdish Peshmerga forces outside Mosul in Iraq. The border fences capture a reality in which people dream of crossing a border and may never manage to do so, although explicit elements of surveillance, such as security towers or laser jammers, remain invisible in Alÿs' paintings. As Catherine Lampert describes it:

The Border paintings invite the eye to scan the geometric variations, the parallel lines and 'X's, overlapping triangles, constructions 'in plan', these depicted as if a chalk-line approximation best matches the crudeness of the concept. Leaning tops on the double rows of poles bend towards each other, other times like a 'Y' they salute, or the aligned concrete planks each have an eye/dot at the top. The barriers run-off the lateral sides of the little boards, un-neat slices, and they appear large in relative scale, intimidating. The white flecks and the woven threads of the canvas are like two complementary scripts. If he paintings were to be installed along geographic routes, you could go from the Mediterranean, Syria/Iran via Pakistan/India; India/Bangladesh; Bangladesh/Myanmar, or turn northwards, Pakistan/Afghanistan.

Viewed in dim, raking light, these paintings are nearly 'precious'. The eye picks up evidence of the painted surface having been sanded, and like real earth, some mineral-like particles appear to sparkle.

This mixture of delicacy and ruggedness gives rise to a desire to wrap them singly in cloths and pack all thirty-five in a rucksack. Silently walking, maybe with this bundle over the shoulder. Could they function like a talisman, to subdue dread, to help refugees evade detection, catapult over the fences, be welcomed, be safe, and thrive? (Catherine Lampert, 2021)

In addition to the installation on the upper floor, which gives the exhibition its title, a selection of further paintings is shown on the ground floor, which are complementary to the border theme.

Since 1986, Alÿs has lived and worked in Mexico City. His work has been exhibited worldwide since the early 1990s. Parallel to the exhibition at the gallery, the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne will present the solo exhibition *Francis Alÿs: As long as I am walking* curated by Nicole Schweizer (14 October, 2021 - 16 January, 2022). In 2022, Alÿs will represent the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale with a solo exhibition curated by Hilde Teerlinck. Other recent solo exhibitions have been presented at the following institutions: Fragmentos, Bogota; Tai Kwun, Hong Kong; MUAC, Mexico City (all 2020); Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, Montreal (both 2019); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai; Art Sonje Center, Seoul; Beirut Art Center, Beirut (all 2018); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016); Malba, Buenos Aires and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (both 2015). Alÿs is a regular participant in international group exhibitions and biennials, including Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2020); MoMA PS1, New York; Phillips Collection, Washington D.C; Lille 3000, Tripostal, Lille (all 2019); Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool; Shanghai Biennial, Shanghai (both 2018). Alÿs' works are in the public collections of institutions such as: 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami; Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt; Fundació la Caixa, Barcelona; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate Modern, London, and many more.

For further information please contact Fabio Pink: fabio@peterkilchmann.com or Imara Paternò Castello: imara@peterkilchmann.com.