

Press release

**They've Made Us Ghosts**

Calais is one of the bottlenecks for refugees in Europe. Among others people from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia, from Iran and Syria find themselves stranded in the French port on their way to the UK. They are stopped by a complex border control regime comprising surveillance systems, fences, and police security—a landscape that has been given a military makeover thus collides with an improvised, temporarily erected living environment. In his new artist's book Christoph Oeschger cuts together the perspectives and realities of border guards and refugees.

Refugees began trying to get over to England from Calais in the mid-1990s. Since that time checkpoints, surveillance and border systems have been established, developed, and refined. Refugee shacks sprang up in the woods and dunes and were evacuated and destroyed by security personnel. By 2016, the largest camp included ten thousand inhabitants. Known as the "Jungle", it became a symbol for Europe's misguided refugee policy. There, not far from the centre of Calais, a distinct society of people had evolved without any legal security. In a prevailing atmosphere of permanent emergency, a collection of tents turned into a small settlement comprising improvised shanties with a school, snack stands, shops, a mosque, and a church. To improve living conditions and impose a sense of discipline on the space, the French government took the initial step in January 2016 of installing accommodation in the form of shipping containers that included 1,500 places to sleep and common areas catering to social needs. In October

2016 the camp was forcibly closed. Today, refugees still congregate in the region, though now they are once again hidden in the woods and industrial areas.

From spring 2016 until summer 2017, Oeschger observed the way political power structures operate in the border security systems and the impact and ramifications that they have. In his book the emptiness of the places he photographs and the absence of any dramatic scenes act as an echo chamber, reflecting the sense of void that is engendered by enforced waiting. We see the drive along the almost endless border installations around the harbour and Eurotunnel terminal, wide expanses of landscape cut through by fencing and walls, desolate containers used for housing, improvised huts, the indeterminate daily activities of the people who live there, and the traces they leave in the landscape. The pictures do not follow any chronological or geographical system. They are grouped together in different formats and the motifs repeat themselves, like the building and dismantling of shacks, the extension of the physical border and the attempts to cross it unnoticed. Oeschger intersperses his own photographs with technical shots of the surveillance that now plays a key role in border security. Thermal imaging cameras are used to scan the nocturnal landscape, and the flatbeds of lorries are examined with microwave X-ray technology. In these images people become wraith-like apparitions, just like the description one of the refugees gave to Oeschger to conjure up his situation in the camp: "They've made us ghosts."

*Christin Müller*

Christoph Oeschger;  
They've Made Us Ghosts; 140 pp;  
1060 photographs; Softcover;  
161×261 mm; 550 copies; Text by  
Léopold Lambert; Graphic Design by  
Christof Nüssli, Christoph Oeschger,  
Chiara Zarotti; Published by cpress,  
Zurich; ISBN 978-3-9524710-2-9.

## CONTACT

cpress: mail@cpress.ch,  
+41(0)445209086  
Christoph Oeschger:  
mail@christophoeschger.ch  
+41(0)793898842

Christoph Oeschger (\*1984 in Zurich) is an artist, publisher, and since autumn 2017 artistic associate in the Department of Transdisciplinarity at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). He studied media art at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG) and photography at the ZHdK. His most recent publication was the artist's book Miklós Klaus Rózsa (with Christof Nüssli). His work has been shown at a variety of venues including the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Fotomuseum Winterthur, and Kunstverein Amsterdam. In 2014 he founded the cpress publishing house together with Christof Nüssli.

Léopold Lambert is the editor-in-chief of The Funambulist, a bimestrial magazine dedicated to the politics of space and bodies. He lives and work in Paris, is trained as an architect and is the author of three books about the political violence of architecture, in particular in Palestine. His next book project consists in a spatial history of the French states of emergency from 1955 to 2017.