

Grounds for Concern

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EIMaArt

Text by Brit Seaton

The installation *Grounds for Concern* by Jessica El Mal questions the concept of land ownership and the true boundaries enforced by human-made borders. Printed on chiffon, this digital collage triptych merges Google Maps and Google Earth satellite images of the Strait of Gibraltar, overlaid with imagery of a 'foreign' algae found in the water. Drawing an imaginary line in the sea, the Strait of Gibraltar is incredibly significant as a frontier between Europe and Africa, also utilised for historical trade routes between Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Today, it provides a passage for migrants to the EU from Africa. Because of this, it is one of the most heavily surveilled areas in Europe, particularly by Frontex, the company paid by the EU to enforce border control through technologised means such as drones and infrared detectors. Throughout her research into this contested area, El Mal discovered that the *Rugulopterix okamurae* algae has migrated to the Strait of Gibraltar from Asia, affecting the ecology and tourism industry of Spain's southern beaches. While countries fight over this border and its tax regulation, spending millions to police human migration, this tiny organism has been able to infiltrate undetected. El Mal's appropriation and disruption of the satellite imagery – presented in an abstract and decorative composition – subverts the primary functions of the source material: to observe and monitor. Embedded with the presence of a ubiquitous and ungovernable living organism, *Grounds for Concern* acts as a testament to the inability to truly possess or enclose nature. Initially left blank, the central panel of the installation was created collaboratively by Rotterdam residents in a research workshop run by the artist. The group explored the changes in laws, regulations and borderlines on the ground, with their findings displayed as a map of connected research. This final piece aims to underscore how abstract and contested the notion of land ownership really is, and to create a collective and democratic network for alternative ideologies.