

apexart

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The Walls That Divide Us

The globalisation process has suppressed the spatio-temporal limits in the western hemisphere, tearing open new civilizational horizons. Today, the one way power relation defining centre and periphery disappeared—the periphery is the new centre. Within this intellectual framework, contemporary history defining events that were understood from an European or North-American perspective have to be contextualized differently. This is the case of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which many consider to mark the end of the short twentieth century. However, although the sequence of changes that took place in the former Eastern Europe revolutionized the political landscape of the continent and of the globe, other 1989-occurring events contributed to the symbolic character of that year. For example, the protests in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China; and within the artistic field, the exhibition “Magiciens de la Terre” in Paris, which aimed at showing works from both western and non-western artists. Acknowledging this state of affairs, this exhibition focuses on issues through the lenses of the global order while keeping in mind the local context.

If the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was an event with a world-wide impact, as it prompted the end of the Cold War, also significant was its construction fifty years ago. The Berlin Wall was a separation barrier with guard towers placed along large concrete fences that completely cut off West Berlin from East Berlin and the surrounding GDR. In this sense, the Berlin Wall replicated the architecture of other walls, and was one of many that have been and still are present in several different parts of the world. Today, apart from famous walls currently under construction such as that of Jerusalem or the US-Mexican frontier, less known walls include cities and countries such as Baghdad; Belfast; Ceuta; Melilla; Sharmel-Sheikh; Botswana/Zimbabwe; China/North Korea; Cyprus/Northern Cyprus; Egypt/Gaza Strip; Malaysia/Thailand; India/Pakistan; Iran/Pakistan; North Korea/South Korea; Pakistan-Afghanistan; Russia/Chechnya; Uzbekistan/Afghanistan. As before, these walls separate populations and aim at limiting the movement of people across both lines of the divide.

This exhibition addresses the proliferation of separation barriers in the post-Cold War political landscape. From conflict zones in disputed territories to pacification processes and from anti-illegal immigration policies to counter-terrorist strategies, many are the reasons evoked by states to erect walls. However, what are the repercussions to peoples' everyday lives in a divided society? And what are the short- or long-term cultural consequences of such actions? The artists brought together in this exhibition shed light on these questions, calling attention to the social injustices that more and more characterize land use in uneven geographies. Border crossing and diasporic identities emerge as appropriate subject matter. However, topics less evident such as surveillance or community building also appear in the selected works. The checklist includes historical pieces such as *Town, Country and People, 1985-86*, by Locky Morris (Northern Irish, 1960), an installation that alludes to the troubles in Northern Ireland, and contemporary pieces such as *Crossing Surda, 2003*, by Emily Jacir (Palestinian, b. 1970), a video that records the artist's daily walk across Surda checkpoint in Palestine, to and from work, for eight days. It also includes works by Chen Chieh-jen (Taiwanese, b. 1960) that examine the burdens of marginalized ethnic groups in Taiwan and beyond, as well as works by Teresa Margolles (Mexican, b. 1963), whose recent practice is a moving chronicle of the economy of death that plagues the north of Mexico.