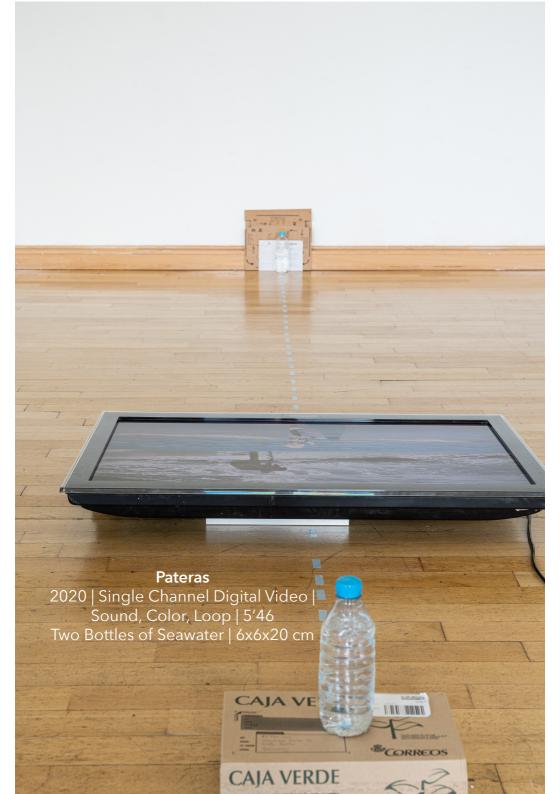
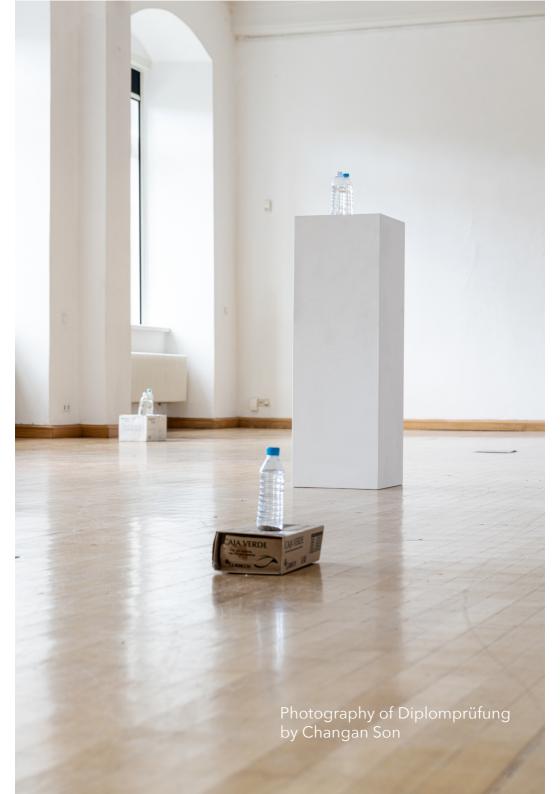




Burial At Sea 2020 | Single Channel Digital Video | Sound, Color, Loop | 7'15 One Bottles of Seawater | 6x6x20 cm





Invisible Borders Law Ho Man





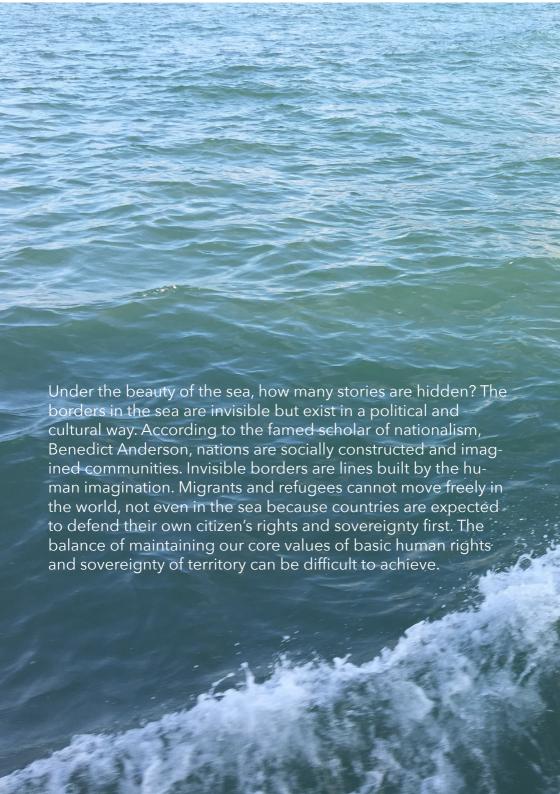
Borders in the sea though, are less visible. Oceans cover more than 70 percent of the Earth's surface and have been serving as a carrier for humans and goods for thousands of years with its slow moving space and time. Thus the question must be asked: does a border exist in the sea, even if it is invisible? The seemingly invisible power of the sea shapes our history and society today unconsciously with mass migration and movement.

The wide blue oceans in the world are all connected. Yet, countries attempt to divide the sea into pieces by creating often controversial maritime borders. They build fences and walls at the border on land but the borders on sea are difficult to control. Thus, many illegal immigrants choose to transit through dangerous and risky sea routes.

We are living in a society that produces migrants and refugees due to inequality. There are more than 70 million displaced people in the world. We cannot choose the country we are born in thus, to a certain extent, birthright citizenship decides the mobility of many in the world.

More than 27,000 migrants and refugees have drowned in the sea since 1993. In fact, more people have died in the sea than on the land in migration activities.

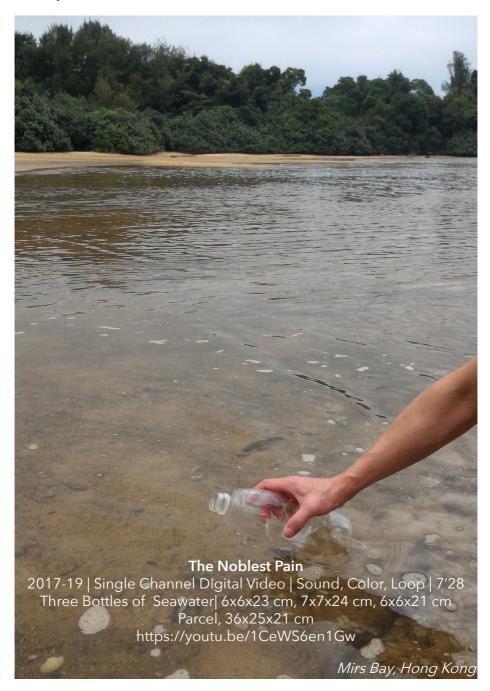


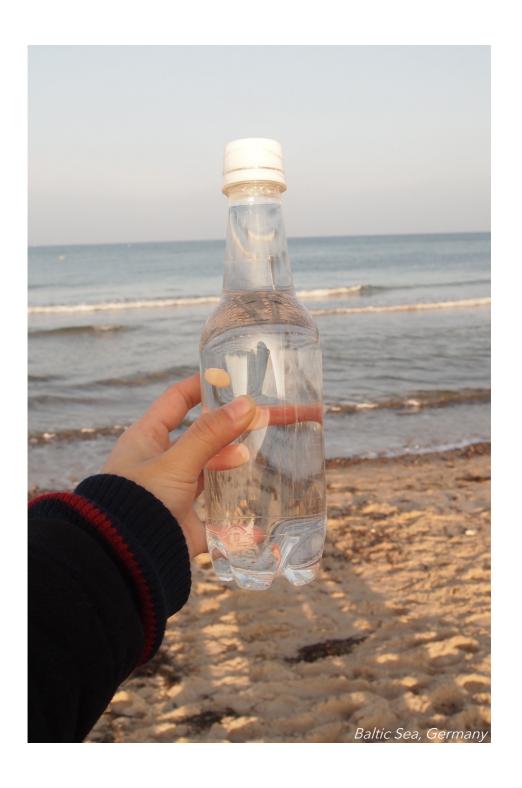


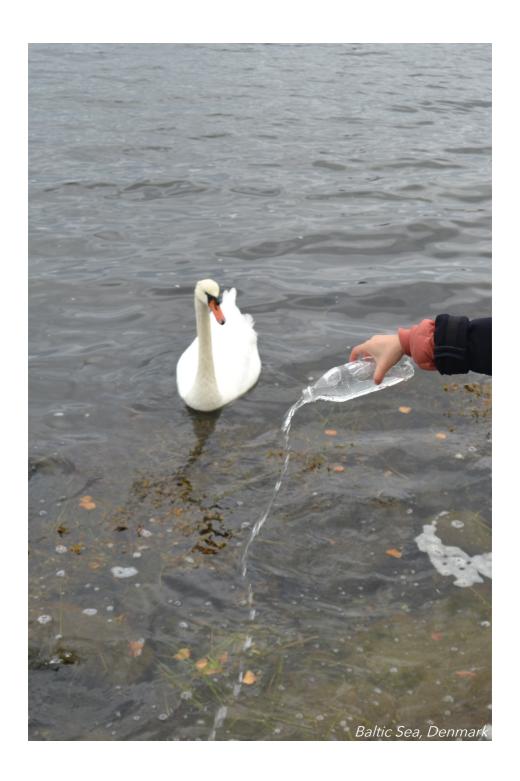


Humans have stood in awe of the oceans since ancient times. Nothing is purely natural after the participation of human activities. The ocean has long been a cultural symbol for humans. In the time of humans dominating the development of the earth, the seascape is being reformed by humans. The life and history of the sea are essential and precious. The ocean is the waters connecting different continents with information, colonialism, trade, and mobility of people. It is an important passage for free movement of people. Humans are connected by making use of the sea as a medium connecting with different regions and countries. However, almost all human resources are used to explore land in modern times. Humans have forgotten the importance of the sea including the hidden stories and death in the sea.

This project seeks to discuss human activities on the sea to remember the almost forgotten stories.









The first video of Invisible Borders Project was started by a wave of nostalgia for my homeland- Hong Kong. In the two stories featured in the video, migrants sailed for freedom despite the pain of nostalgia.

From the 50s to the 70s, over two million Chinese immigrants escaped from Mainland China to Hong Kong. A similar occurrence happened on the Baltic Sea where East Germans escaping from the DDR would swim from Rostock, Germany to Denmark. The similarity between the two seas is a destiny, connecting the two of them together. The Chinese immigrants escaped to Hong Kong because they did not want to live a life under the rule of the CCP. My grandfather was also one of the Chinese refugees. In my video, I have asked my father to collect the seawater from Mirs Bay and send the water in a parcel to me in Germany. This is a journey for me to deeply understand the root of myself. The narration of the Hong Kong part of the video is a Chinese immigrant, Law Tim Chai, who escaped through the sea to Hong Kong.

From 1961 to 1989, around 5,600 East Germans tried to escape the GDR through the Baltic Sea. Unfortunately, only less than 1,000 succeeded. As the border of Baltic Sea between



Rostock, Germany, and Denmark is invisible, escaping through the sea had a better chance of survival than escaping through the Berlin Wall but also was dangerous none the less. In this video, I had an interview with a West German, Thorvald Greif, who built a boat in 1974 in order to save his wife and two daughters from GDR and planned to flee to Bornholm, a Danish island. They planned to meet at a beach on the Baltic Sea but unfortunately the plan failed. They got arrested and went into jail. Fortunately, the family was reunited in 1976 in Creglingen, Germany.

I have found that the historical events between Hong Kong and Germany were surprisingly similar. Both had people trying to escape from communist rule through the sea. I poured some seawater from Mirs Bay, Hong Kong to into the Baltic Sea, Germany to connect two seas symbolically. At the same time, some seawater from the Baltic Sea was as well kept in a water bottle. The two bottles of the seawater, from Germany and Hong Kong, are put next to each other in the installation. The distance between the two seas became minimal. At the end of the video I poured some seawater from Germany into the Baltic Sea of Denmark in order to give a satisfactory ending to Mr Greif's story symbolically.







The second video of this project is Mare Nostrum, which means our sea in Latin. It is about the escape story of a Syrian refugee. The Mediterranean Sea has long been a space of transit, departure, and arrival. It represents hope for many Africans and anxiety for some Europeans at the same time. The Mediterranean Sea connects 22 countries across three continents. It serves as a buffer zone between conflicts but at the same time is an area of migration activities. In the last twenty-five years, over 25,000 people have died at Europe's maritime borders and two-thirds of the dead bodies still lie on the sea bed making the Mediterranean Sea and the surrounding seas the deadliest sea area in the world.

The interview features Abdul Alnesser, a Sryian refugee who escaped to Germany through the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The whole escape route was around 3400 km. During the escape, he took a boat from Samos Island, Turkey to Greece and shared the terrifying experience in the video.

This is a sad sea, which contains huge amount of dissolved human remains. In the video, I went to the Aegean Sea to collect the seawater. The seashore is often filled with tourists, seemingly indifferent or unaware of the stores of the thousands of people who have died in the sea. The escape story from the refugee reminds us that this sea is a symbol of a high risk of dying to them rather than a paradise. The picture of the beautiful sea makes a huge contrast with Abdul's narration and strengthens the sadness of the sea.





I filmed this video at a stay at the artist residency in Olafsfjordur, Iceland. This video records the story and death of seaman in Iceland. Icelandic men are born to be seamen. They admire and obey to the great power of nature. In the novel, An Icelandic Fishermen, the seaman was going to die in a shipwreck and his last thought was to take the sea as his wife and lay down his life to the sea.

I would like to show the power of the seaman against the power of the sea in this video. The Icelanders celebrate the Seamen Festival on 1st of June every year to honour the sacrifice of seamen. They fish, sail, and work on the sea to provide for their families despite the dangers of waves.



One of the celebration activities is to pull a truck together to show the strength of the seamen. The voiceover of the video comes from an old seaman who worked on the sea for 20 years. He tells one of his stories he experienced from his long time working on the sea. I have also collected seawater from Iceland. I image myself as a seaman, collecting stories of the sea. My own heavy breathing in the background represents my fear and nervous at the Greenland sea.

Humans have stood in awe of the oceans since ancient times. Humanity's mobility, the sea, and land are all intertwined. We must ask ourselves what role humans should play. The sea does not need humans but we definitely need the sea. When we talk about the sea, we must ask: whose sea is it? We should also put ourselves under the system of the natural power of the earth. The memory of the sea remembers the traces of life and time.



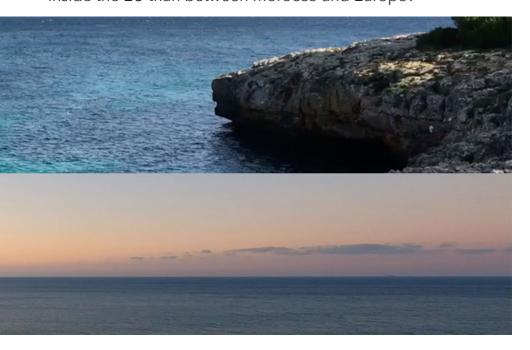


The lower part of the video was filmed at the Strait of Gibraltar, Morocco. The Strait separates the two continents of Europe and Africa. The narrowest part is only 14 km wide. Spain, in Europe, and Morocco, in Africa, are at the bottleneck of the Strait. The hope of many people from Tangier to live in prosperous Western Europe led many to cross over the Strait of Gibraltar despite the dangers of losing their lives to the ocean.

Moroccans have been smuggled into Spain through the Strait with small boats called pateras. Migration is their life. Around 8,000 people have died or disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea around the Strait of Gibraltar since 1988. The Strait is not only a line of demarcation between Europe and Africa but also a transitional area filled with trade, conflicts, different cultures, religion, and politics. It is a natural frontier with no clear boundary.



I had a spontaneous talk with a Moroccan. He is well educated but still was unemployed for months. He had talked about work most of the time and was curious about working in Europe. The flow of goods is like the mobility of people. I collected seawater from Spain and Morocco respectively. The seawater of the Strait of Gibraltar in Morocco represents the hope of many Moroccans and I tried to post the seawater from Morocco to Spain to see if the flow of goods is different than the limitation of movement of Moroccan. The long waiting time at the post office in Morocco reminds me of my experiences at the Ausländebehörde in Germany. We received a waiting number first and waited to be called. Unfortunately, the attempt failed. This is my first time failing in posting seawater. In general, posting liquid is usually forbidden but customs allows this most of the time. In the upper part of the video, I posted seawater from Spain to Germany successfully without any questioning and control. It is surprising that the control of post in Morocco is stricter than in Europe. Does this mean the flow of goods and people is easier inside the EU than between Morocco and Europe?



This project is still ongoing. Every sea has different stories, but yet similar. The stories of the dead and escapers shall not be forgotten. This journey of collecting seawater all over the world has led me to both rethink the connection between the ocean and myself and a greater understanding of relationship between nature and humanity.

Photography Text Editing

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Law Ho Man (b.1992) is a video conceptual artist from Hong Kong. Her works examine about identity, migration and culture by creating videos and have been exhibited in various institutions in Hong Kong and Europe.

Exhibitions

Palindromes/The Imaginary Border, Palazzo Ziino, Palermo, Italy	2019-2020
The Yellow Raincoat Man, Listhus Artspace, Olafsfördur, Iceland	2019
An_archiv, HGB, Leipzig, Germany	2018
Turn On! A Moving Image Exhibition, a.m. space, Hong Kong	2017
Full Stop, Final show of Pilotenkueche International Artist Residency, Leipzig, Germany	2017
Diese Garderobe, Rundgang 2017, HGB, Leipzig, Germany	2017
Wire Arts Experiment, vol. 2, Berlin, Germany	2015
Mobile Cinema @ City Visions Jena, Jena, Germany	2015
Hairly, Law Ho Man Solo Exhibition, Ako Berlin, Germany	2015
Vanishing Line I-care sponsored exhibition, CUHK, Hong Kong	2014
We Don't Drink Water, The Art of CUHK 2014 Graduation Exhibition, CUHK, Hong Kong	2014
praktis/ Lai Oi Ki and Law Ho Man Joint Exhibition, CUHK, Hong Kong	2014
FFFF Joint Exhibition in Hui Gallery, Hong Kong	2013
dOCUMANTA(13.5) , The Exhibition of Art Tour in Germany, Hong Kong	2012
CUHK Fine Arts, Annual Exhibition of CUHK, Hong Kong	2012
Happy Birstday, The Year One Showcase Joint Exhibition, Hong Kong	2011





