

galleria
raffaella
cortese

Zoe Leonard

Excerpts from Al río / To the River

november 18 2023 ~ march 9 2024
via a. stradella 1 ~ 4 ~ 7, milan



For the first time in Italy, Galleria Raffaella Cortese presents a curated selection of passages from Zoe Leonard's *Al río / To the River*. This emblematic work consists of hundreds of photographs taken between 2016 and 2022, along the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, where for 2,000 km the river is used to demarcate the border between the United States and Mexico. Leonard says: "The shifting nature of a river – which floods periodically, changes course and carves new channels – is at odds with the political task it is asked to perform".

These powerful and nuanced photographs describe the natural beauty of the region, while also drawing attention to political and human dimensions of life in the borderlands. Through Zoe Leonard's gaze, the river is seen as a complex place where daily life unfolds alongside control, conflict and surveillance. In this journey along the river, the artist depicts nature and built environments; movements of animals and people; and structures that both connect and divide. Together these elements become chapters in an evocative, ongoing narrative.

Al río / To the River is structured through "passages", sequences of photographs that unfold in chronology, continuity and movement. Leonard creates visually rich compositions filled with meaning, where one can find references to pre- and post-colonial histories, and where close attention is paid to systems of power evident not only in the form of walls and fences, checkpoints and detention centers but also in the constant flow of people and commercial goods across the river in both directions. This extensive work reflects on the civic and symbolic significance of boundaries, which resonates especially at this time of unprecedented global human migration.

As the artist says: "This work considers not only a geographic location but also a social and political landscape".

For the exhibition *Excerpts from Al río / To the River*, Zoe Leonard has selected a number of passages – including previously unreleased ones – from her extensive photographic work, interspersing harsh images of border control infrastructure and desolate urban landscape along with images of peaceful rural communities, animals at pasture and water at the heart of it all as a source of life.

Furthermore, Zoe Leonard's photographic work advances a metatextual exploration as a medium and a material. Bringing into question the ways in which photography has been used to frame the world, both literally and metaphorically, Leonard looks at how photographs convey

and construct social and political viewpoints through their visual and formal perspectives. Through her longstanding engagement with photographic medium and printing techniques, the artist asks us to reflect on the subjectivity of the photographer and, by extension, the complex nature of depiction itself.

The internationally recognized greatness of the artist is conveyed not only by the poetic quality of the images she creates but also by her critical and self-critical spirit towards the very act of making art and producing images. Zoe Leonard asks us to reflect on how an image-based account of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo can shape our perception of the border and borders and, more broadly, how we see and form our view of the world.

Al río / To the River was exhibited at MUDAM in Luxembourg (February 26 - June 6 2022), the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris (October 15 2022 - January 29 2023) and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (August 11 - November 5 2023).

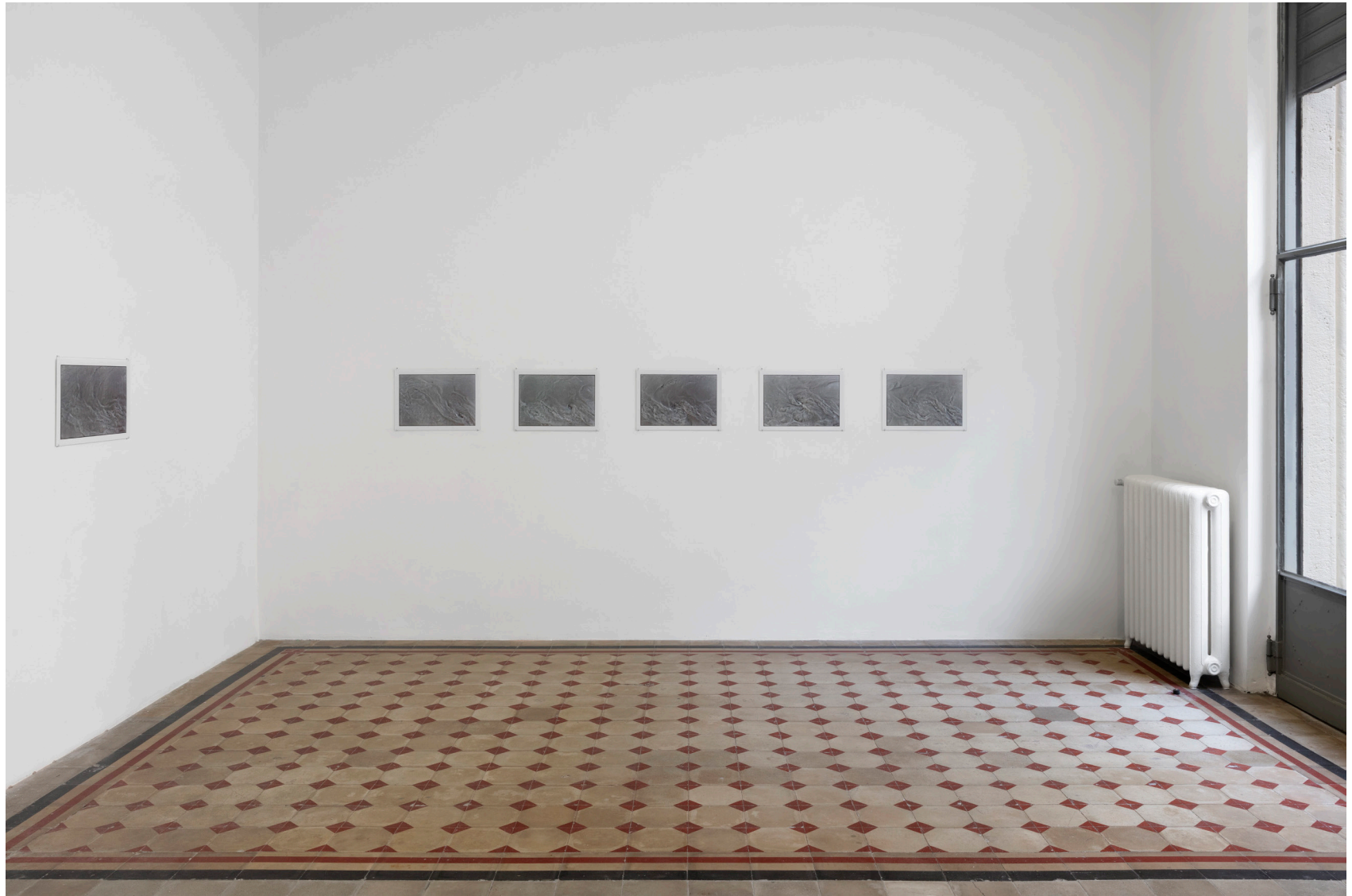






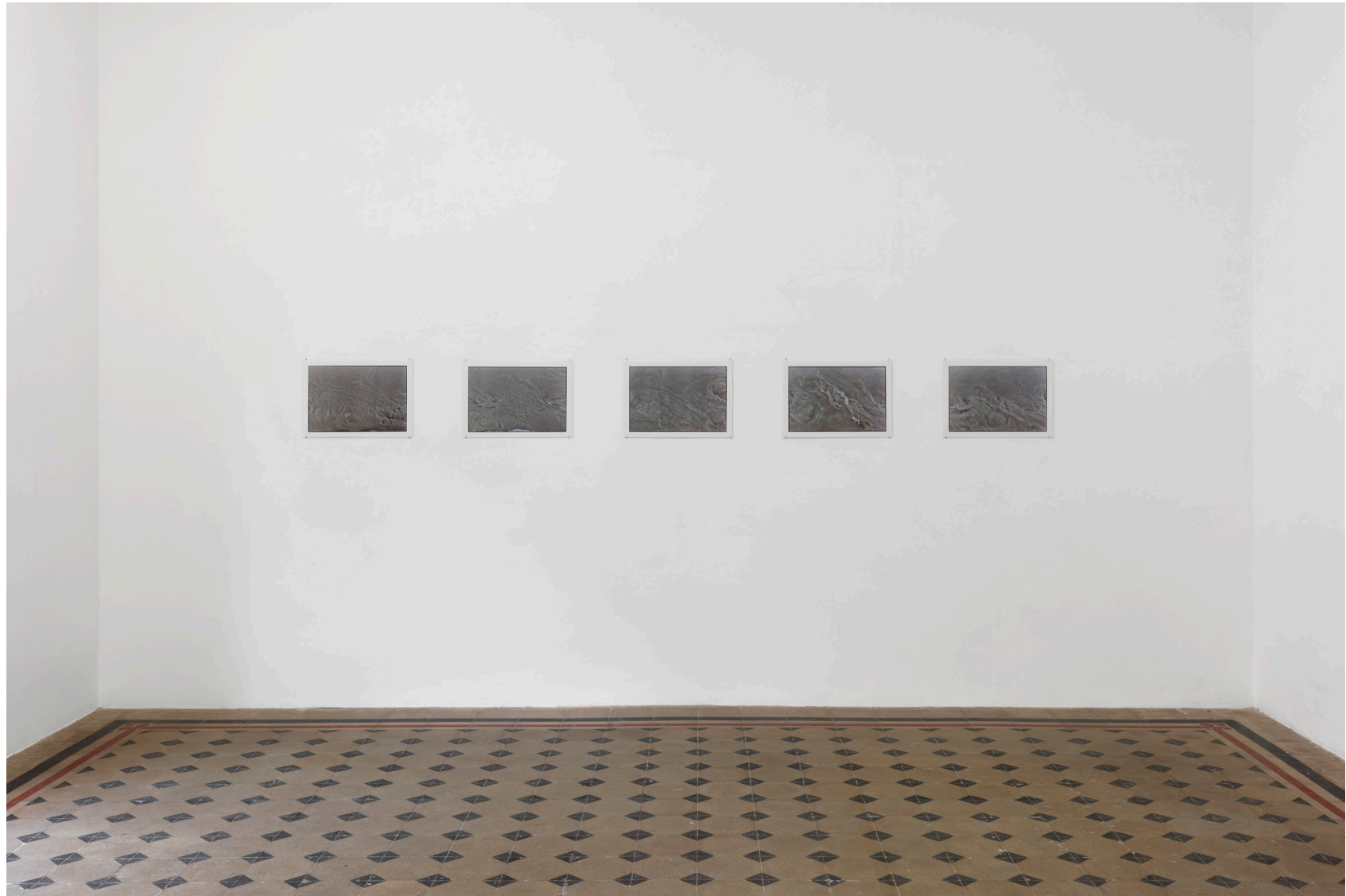












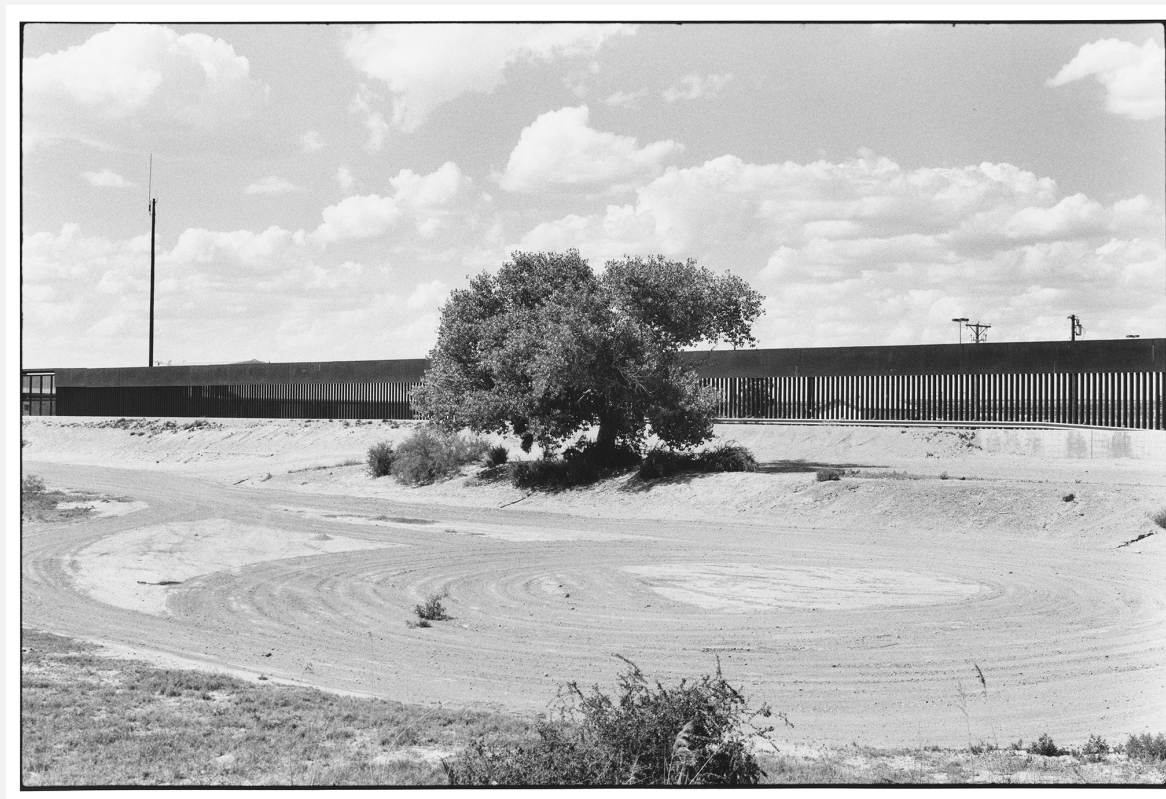
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works



From the Los Ebanos Crossing, 2019/2021

34 gelatin silver prints, 35,6 × 50 cm each



From the Puente el Porvenir, 2019/2022,
gelatin silver print, 67 × 95 cm

ZL1125



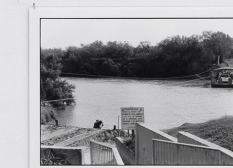
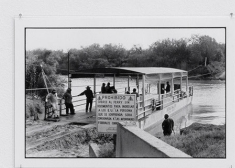
From the Puente Colombia, looking upstream, 2017/2022
gelatin silver print, 67 × 95 cm

ZL1127



Beside Boundary Marker I, 2020/2023
gelatin silver print, 42 × 60,8 cm

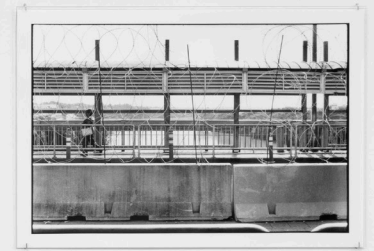
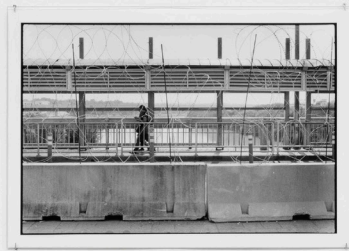
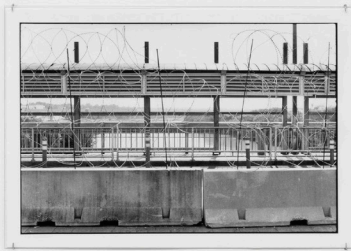
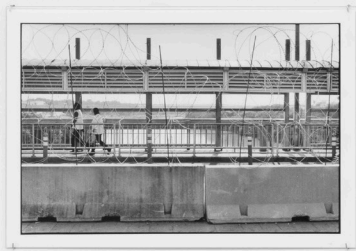
ZL1145





From the middle of the bridge, 2017/2022
gelatin silver print, 42 x 60,8 cm

ZL1135





Biografia

Zoe Leonard was born in 1961 in Liberty, New York. She lives and works in New York.

She works with photography, sculptures and installations in a conceptual and a poetic view on the world; often questioning the evolution of society. During the Eighties and Nineties she was activist with ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and the queer activist art collectives Gang and Fierce Pussy. Several works by Leonard stemmed from the feeling of loss, also derived from friends' death caused by AIDS. Fundamental themes in her research are the urban and natural landscapes and their contrasts, personal and collective memories, migration, gender. Her work is able to make the viewer rethink the act of looking itself, how moments and situations can compose a narration.

"[...] I think the work is instinctive." For Leonard a photograph "[...] is a subjective view. It's a picture. [...] It's an object. It's not reality. It's not truth. It's a work on paper and I made it. This is my truth. And my truth is no more true than anyone else's.". Through her works one can see how the act of observing can be dense and every moment anew.

She has taken part in several solo exhibitions such as: *Al río/To the River*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia, Sidney (2023); *Al Río/To the River*, Mudam, The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg, Luxembourg City / Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (2022); *Survey*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York / MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2018); *I want a president*, High Line Art, New York (2016); *Zoe Leonard: Analogue*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015); *Photographs*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna (2009); *You See I am here after all*, Dia:Beacon, New York (2008); *Photographs*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2008); *Photographs*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Zurich (2007); *Vienna Secession*, Vienna (1997); *Kunsthalle Basel*, Basel (1997).

A selected list of group shows include: *'Exposé-es'*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023); *Prelude*, Poetic Intention, MACBA, Barcelona (2022); *Arcimboldo Face to Face*, Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz (2021); *Among the Trees*, Hayward Gallery, London (2020); *Queer Forms*, Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minnesota (2019); *Histories of our time. On Collective*

and Personal Narratives, Kunsthaus Baselland, Basel (2019); *The Warmth of Other Suns: Stories of Global Displacement*, The Phillips Collection, Washington (2019); *Carnegie International, 57th Edition*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2018); *The Restless Earth*, La Triennale di Milano, Milan (2017); *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*, The Met Breuer, New York (2016); *L'image papillon*, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2013).

She took part in Documenta IX (1992) and XII (2007); Whitney Biennials 1993, 1997, 2014.

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