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## FEMINIST ECOLOGIES IN CYPRUS: EXPLORING A CONTESTED LANDSCAPE

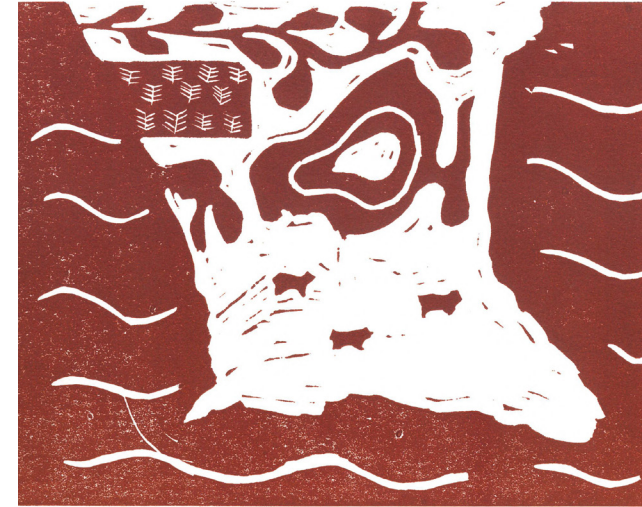
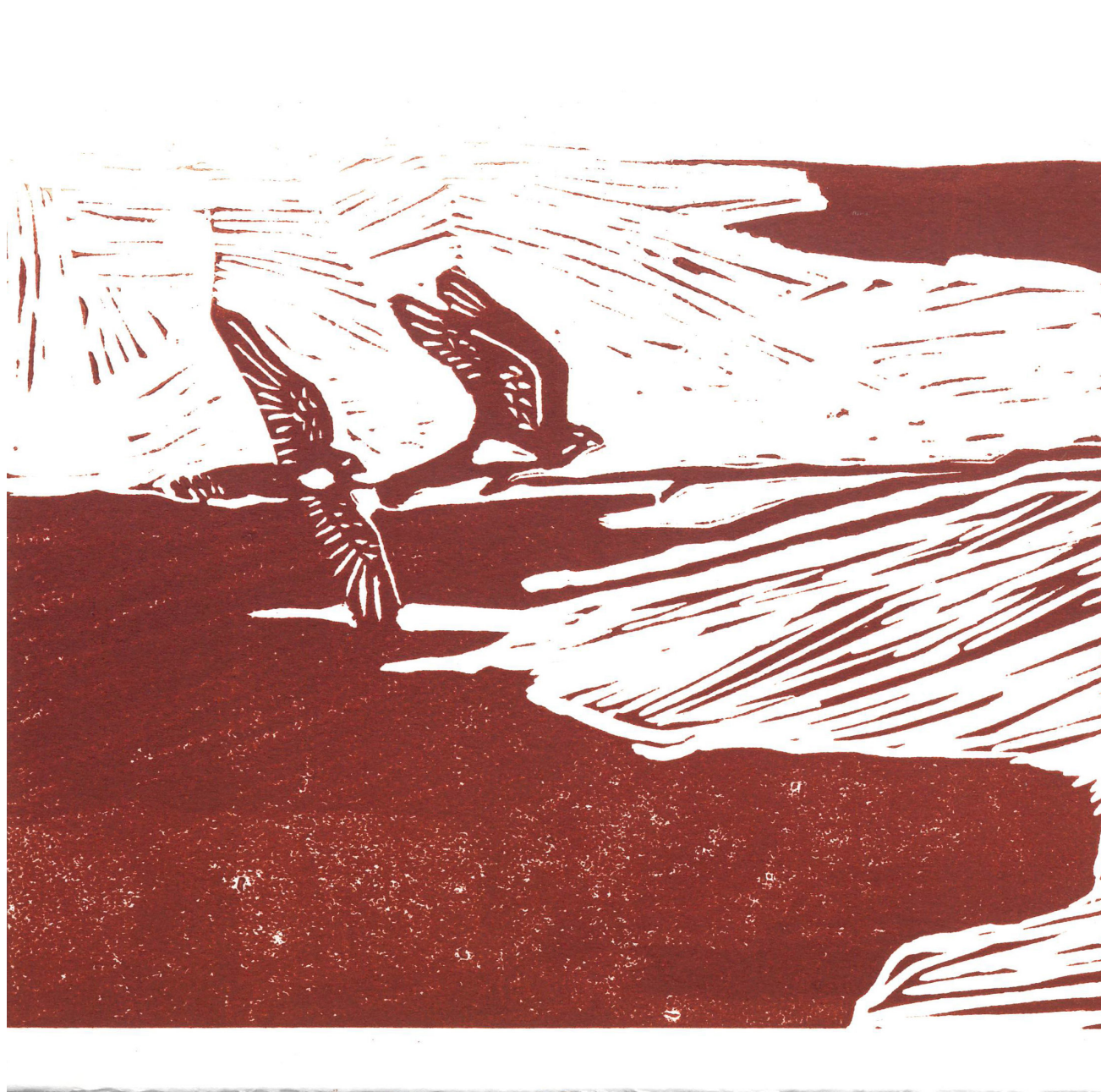
*MArch Design Studio Invisible Cities,  
Sheffield School of Architecture.*

*Cith Skelcher*

### ABSTRACT

What if the architectural object were revealed to be something closer to a thing among other things, operating necessarily in ecological relation, apt to emerge only to decay.

Hélène Frichot, *Creative Ecologies: Theorising the Practice of Architecture* (Bloomsbury, 2018), 7.



Figures 1-5: *The Commoning*, Eleanor Moselle









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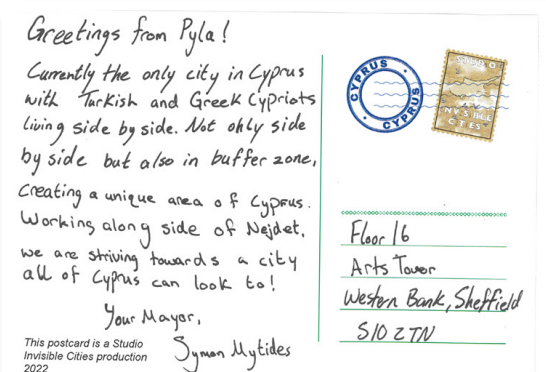
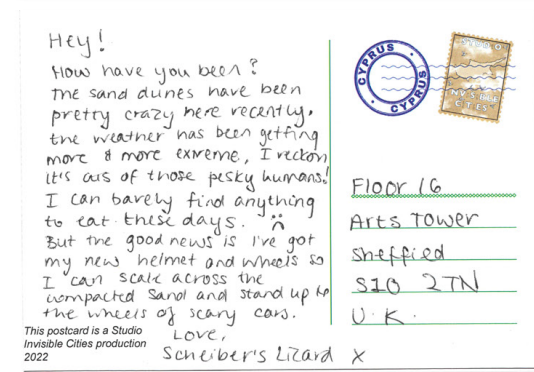
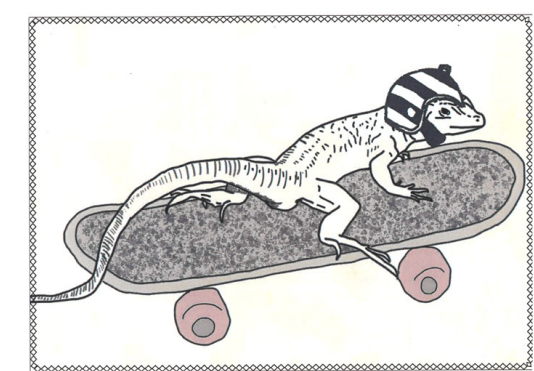
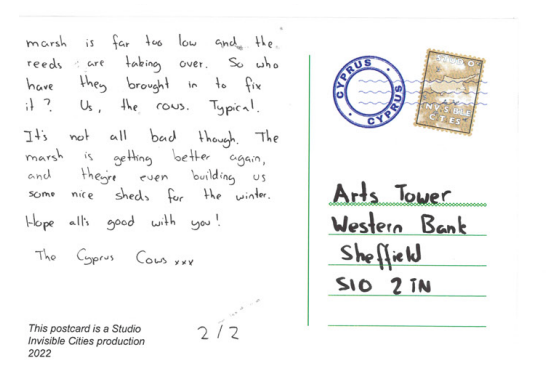
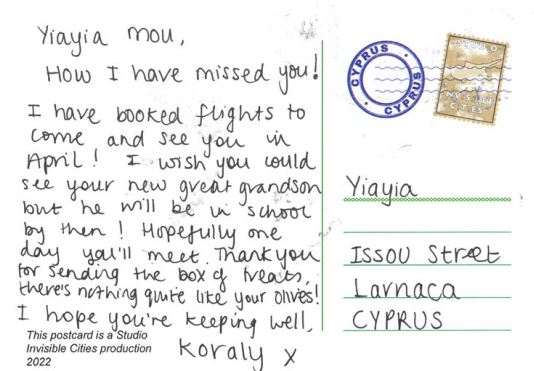
Studio Invisible Cities has this year been exploring the idea that architecture is contingent, and part of a broader and richer ecology. We have been working in the context of Cyprus, a complex and contested island. Situated politically and culturally within the European Union yet geographically located near the states of Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt, the island has been and remains between west and east, with its strategic location making it subject, over the centuries, to occupation by a number of world powers, including Britain.

Philosophical thinking from the seventeenth century onwards casts nature as an object of study, a blank place to explore and a force to be controlled. During the British colonial period, the media of art, custom and language were used as instruments of “civilisation” and, as late as the early-twentieth century, the British both violently and insidiously exported their particular brand of “nature perfected” through literature, landscape painting and garden design to the island of Cyprus, transforming its landscapes.

As Tiffany Kaewen Dang writes: ‘As a discipline, landscape not only reflects social and political power relations as a symbolic aesthetic medium; it is itself an instrument and agent of power.’<sup>1</sup> In this context, the studio asks: *How can we begin to intervene within a contested landscape?*

Our starting point was to critique “landscape as an idea” within our local context in Sheffield. We investigated key landscape types – garden, park, allotment, common – analysing their histories, the versions or visions of nature they espouse, and the politics and methods of survey and design that made them. Drawing on Hélène Frichot’s book *Creative Ecologies* we worked together to develop a set of counter methods for reading these landscapes to reveal hidden or latent ecologies.

Figure 6: *Migratory Stories, Postcards from Cyprus*, Invisible Cities Studio: Mia Gaines, Harry R Lord, Eleanor Moselle, Sofia G Sergiou, Jasmine Howarth, Razvan Ivanov, Ella Murrell, Colombine Vaillaud, Shunshun Zhang, Fenella Pakeman, Aisha Khan, Amy Crellin



<sup>1</sup> Tiffany Kaewen Dang, ‘Decolonising Landscape’, *Landscape Research*, 46:7 (2021): pp.1004–1016 (p. 1008).



Preparation for our visit to Cyprus in November 2022 continued through a number of conversations, initially with Emma Cheatle, who shared ideas from her emerging research into migratory stories of the un/common local ecologies in Cyprus, introducing us to her collaborator Angela Kyriacou Petrou, from the University of Nicosia. Esra Can and Emre Akbil shared tools and tactics that they had developed through their 'Hands-on Famagusta' project, designed to support practices of commoning as a 'transformative framework in negotiating urban contestations'.<sup>2</sup> The stories and insights shared by our friends and collaborators from the island, both personal and political, challenged us to rethink our flawed assumptions about Cyprus, to engage with its complexities and to reimagine our role as designers.

Building on diverse and collective methodologies of design practice such as mapping, ethnography and creative writing, the students searched out stories of resistance, creativity, joy and ambition. From the wider territories of the British Airforce base RAF Akrotiri to the more compressed landscape of the UN instigated Green Line in Nicosia, students explored and situated themselves within Cyprus' flora and fauna, its borderlands and horizons, its complex histories, infrastructures and institutions.

The initial ambition behind the studio was to explore the notion that "good architecture" does not begin and end with a building, that informed decision making and design sees architecture as part of a broader and richer ecology. Working within Cyprus' contested landscapes has opened up rich seams of possibility. In seeking to learn, rather than to solve, the projects and approaches that have emerged from the studio have been joyful and diverse.

<sup>2</sup> Esra Can, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/architecture/postgraduate/phd/phd-research-students/esra-can> [accessed 28 June 2023].



Hi,  
I'm writing to you from the Akrotiri  
marsh! It's not a bad life  
here for a Cyprus cow. It's  
strange thinking about the olden  
days, humans relied on us for  
everything! They wouldn't have been  
able to put food on the table  
without us. Then the machines came  
and they had no time for us  
anymore. But now they've messed up  
big time - all their fancy machines,  
and big harvesters have caused  
havoc, the water level in the

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Hi!  
We are cats wandering  
around the 'dead zone', though  
we don't really have an idea  
of what 'border' is. We just  
go around and do whatever  
we want! We like being  
close to people, so looking  
forward to seeing  
you in Cyprus!

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Hi Susan,  
Not moving out of the 'buffer zone'  
was one of the best decisions  
I ever made. The street has transformed  
into a lush garden paradise, my  
neighbours are quiet and the UN  
are kind enough to bring my shopping.  
All that said, I really do miss having you  
close by - hopefully the boys will stop  
fighting soon.

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2022 Love Annie

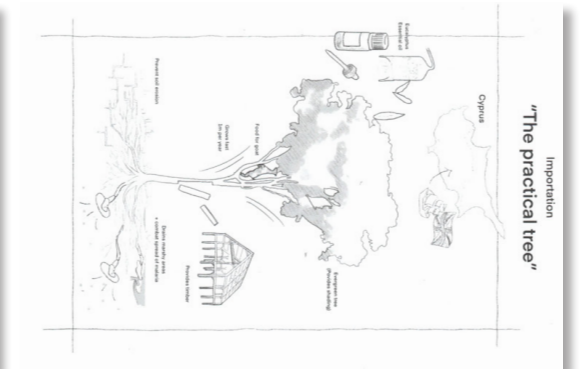
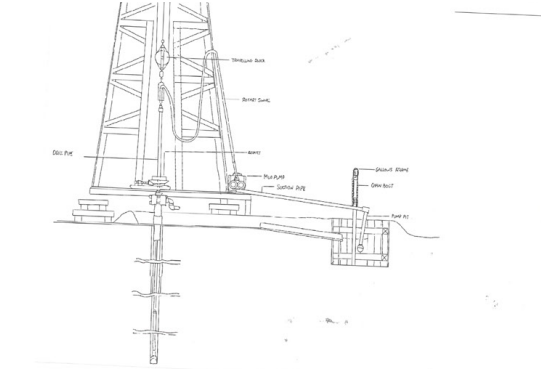
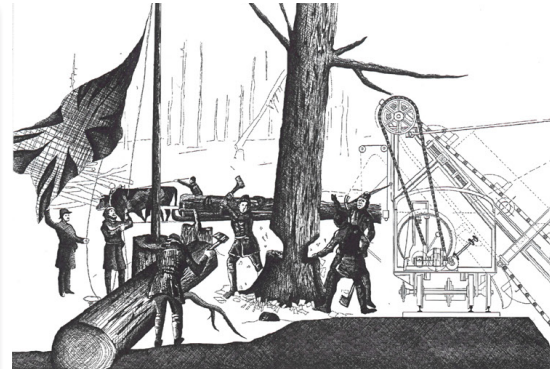


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We've taken over!

For years these humans restricted us. Now, only thoughts dressed to look like us come by. I have been almost 50 years since we were last restricted. The things they left have begun to fall apart making our takeover that much easier! All nature is welcome here. Sincerely,  
The Buffer Zone's Flora and Fauna

This postcard is a Studio Invisible Cities production 2022




Rest of Cyprus  
ALL Streets  
ALL Postcodes  
CYPRUS

WE HAVE NOT BEEN TREATED WELL. RAPID EXPANSION OF TOWNS, INDUSTRIALISATION, COPPER MINING. INTENSIVE CULTIVATION, HAS CREATED A STRAIN WHICH HAS KNOWN OUR EQUILIBRIUM OF LIFE. BRITISH PRESSURE FOR GREATER PRODUCTION HAS LEAD TO THE OVERSEER OF WHAT WE PROVIDE. WE HAVE NOW PASSED OUR 'PEAK' POINT WITH ALL OUR NATURAL RESOURCES. NOW, WE PROTEST. WE WILL NO LONGER GIVE ANYMORE WITHOUT THE PROMISE OF SOMETHING IN RETURN.

THE ENVIRONMENT


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CYPRUS HAS SUFFERED FROM WATER INSECURITY FOR DECADES WHICH HAS CREATED AN ISLAND OF WATER-POORERS. HOWEVER, WITHOUT PROPER EDUCATION AND OTHER INDUSTRIALISATION PROJECTS THE WATER IS DISAPPEARING. UNTIL INDEPENDENCE IN 1960, THOUSANDS OF BOREHOLES WERE DRILLED IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WHICH RESULTED IN DEPLETION OF GROUND WATER RESERVES ESPECIALLY IN THE MAIN WATER-BEARING AREAS DUE TO OVER PUMPING.

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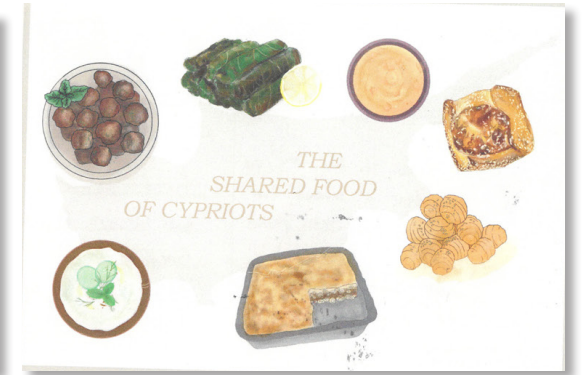
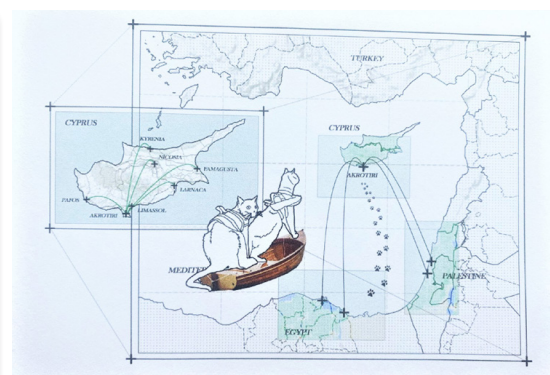
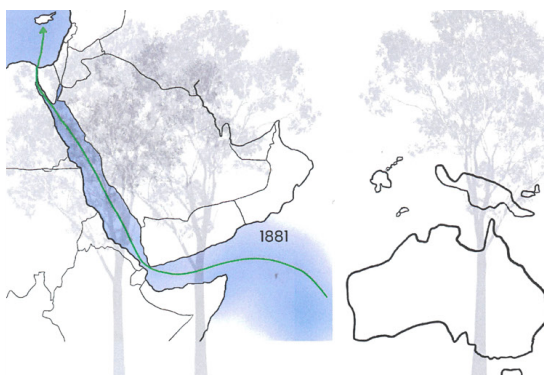
Hey Mom!

I've had new growths again this month! You'd be so proud of me. I really like it here. Humans keep telling me how nice I smell. I found my purpose! I help the local humans within economy, all they need are my leaves! I'm also planning to donate my body for them to build new homes once I die.

Your leafie xx

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Success!

There are many wetlands for us here! With in a few years we will be as big as ever. The people didn't like us at first but now adore us! Apparently we helped rid this country of a disease! Hope you can come visit one day!

yours Truly,  
The Eucalyptus Tree

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Eucalyptus Family  
East Arnhem Region  
Northern Territory 0822  
Australia

Meow --

Meow! Meow!

\* You might need a cat language translator

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Western Bank  
Sheffield  
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Hello!

I'm missing my Australian home! I feel guilty that I'm threatening the lives of all these native species and taking their water. People are using my branches to illegally trap songbirds and I can't do anything about it. I don't feel welcome here, please take me back home!

sending love,  
Acacia Tree x

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Feia sou!

I hope you enjoyed the food on your travels.

Despite the divide of our land, the Cypriots still share a mutual love of me. The recipes have been passed through generations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, connecting people throughout the island and beyond.

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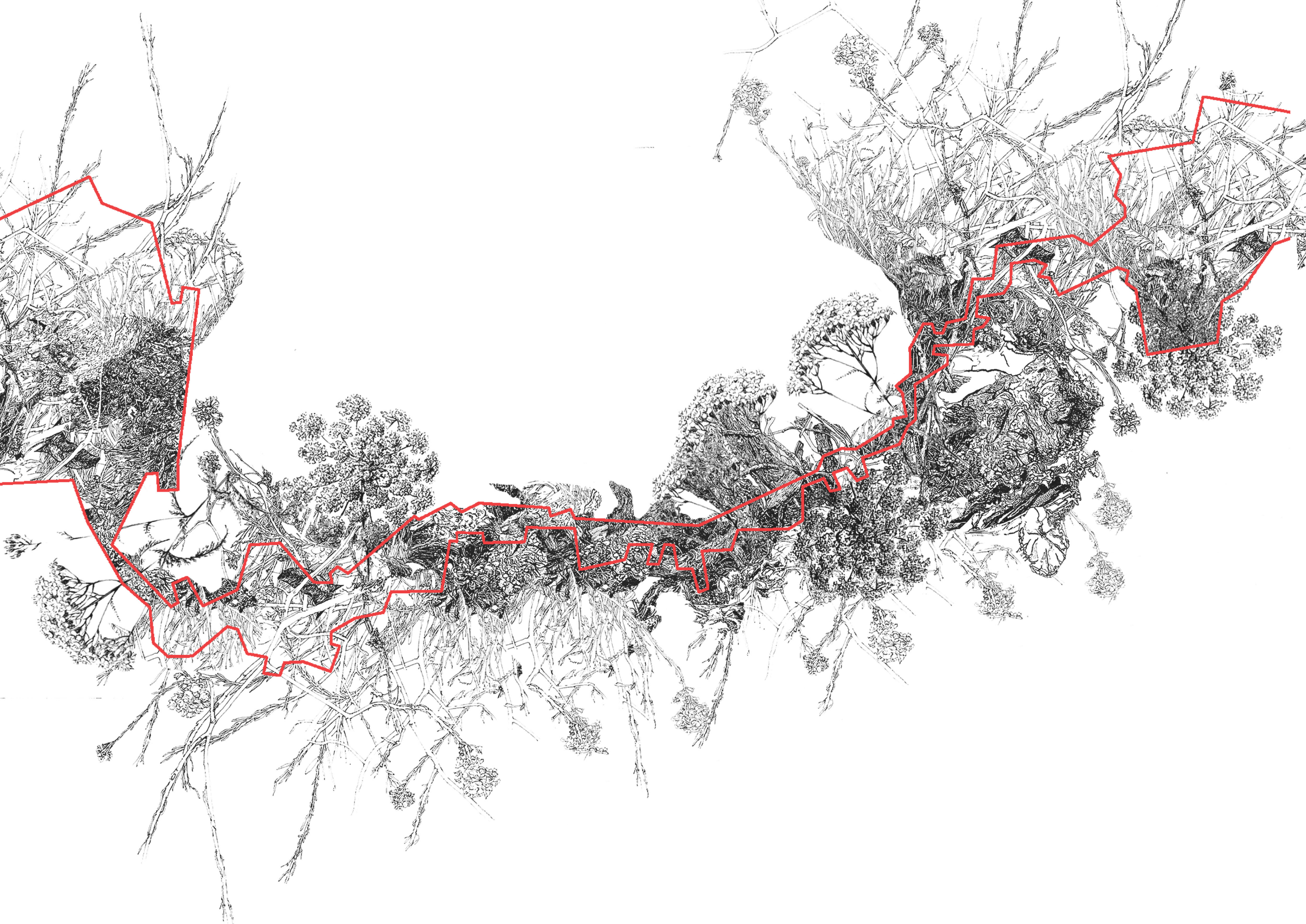


Figure 7 (left): *Nurseries for Nicosia*, Ella Murrell

Figure 8 (right): *Stitching the Buffer Zone*, Ella Murrell

Figure 9 (next page): *Rewilding the Buffer Zone*, Jasmine Howarth







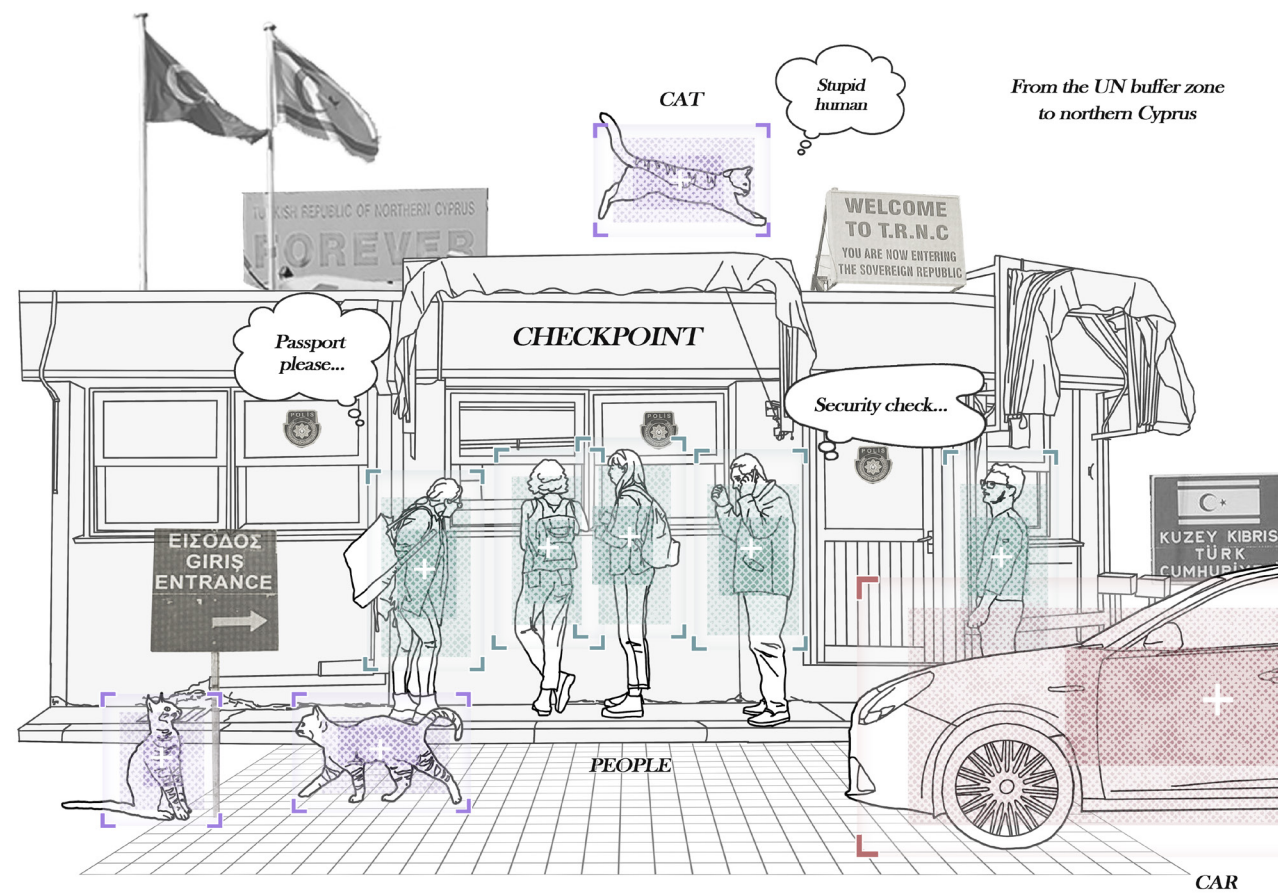


Figure 10: *Crossing the Border*, Shunshun Zhang



Figure 11: *Networks of Care*, Fenella Pakeman



Figure 12: *Mapping Acts of Resistance*, Harry Lord



Figure 13: *The Commoning*, Eleanor Moselle



