

Border 1981–1983

Austria borders on seven foreign countries:

the Federal Republic of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein—countries which represent the most diverse political systems: the so-called Eastern Bloc, one non-aligned state, the NATO, a neutral state and a principality.

Artificially drawn political borders have always played an important role for mankind and probably will continue to do so as long as man exists. Such borders, I believe, will only lose their importance when common defence against an extra-terrestrial enemy is called for.

The 1,681-mile-long Austrian border is far less brutal than, for example, the Berlin border, where a concrete wall cruelly cuts a city in half. It is even beautiful, romantic, inconspicuous, but in this quiet landscape one feels the silent, sad facts even more strongly than in Berlin.

On my trips along the border I have tried to find places where tragic incidents occurred and to dig up personal stories in my exploration of the “border” phenomenon.

Seiichi Furuya, 1983

Border 1981–1983

Seven years ago I completed the project “Border Part I” (Border to the Eastern Bloc Countries). In the late 1980s, a “revolutionary” typhoon originating in Moscow had blown through Central Europe from north to south. From today’s perspective, it looks as if the eye of the typhoon still hovers above the Balkans.

As far as the Austrian border to the “Eastern Bloc” is concerned, this symbol of political and human fates that emerged after the Second World War has been torn away. The border as fate is a thing of the past—the visible barriers have disappeared at any rate.

A work like “Border” would no longer be feasible today—it has already become history itself, which I find pleasing. But we must not forget that only one part of the existing borders has disappeared—many invisible walls always remain standing between us.

Seiichi Furuya, 1990

(Text for the exhibition catalogue ZEICHEN im Fluß, 1990: Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna; Galerie hlavního města Prahy, Prague; Muzej Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb; Pécsi Galéria, Pécs)

Border 1981–1983

In 1983, I compiled “Border 1981–1983, Part I”, a portfolio of twenty-three photographs with accompanying text and a map of the locations I had photographed. The reason I added the subtitle “Part I” was because I intended to soon produce, as “Part II”, a series of border photographs along the non-Eastern-Bloc countries neighbouring Austria. However, in the spring of 1984, my family and I moved to Dresden on short notice, and around the same time, my personal circumstances became very pressing, which forced me to restrict my artistic activities altogether. As a result, “Part II” never took form.

“Border” was chosen for inclusion in “Where the Truth Lies”, a solo exhibition at the Heidelberger Kunstverein in 2014. It was also decided that we would publish a book, *Border 1981–1983*. Some thirty years have passed since I created the portfolio, and during those years conditions around the borders have changed dramatically. Some countries have vanished, while others have been born. On the occasion of publishing the portfolio, I began a process of revisiting the materials from that time, from the perspective of the present, with an understanding of the historical changes that have taken place. This resulted in the addition of six photographs to the original twenty-three in the portfolio. In sum, this book presents the border stories of twenty-nine locations.

I began the border project with a very simple question that began to form when I moved to Central Europe after being born and raised in a country that had no man-made borderlines. At the time, I could not visualize how a national border would physically appear within a landscape. There was a crucial moment when I was photographing along the border between Austria and Yugoslavia. I kept looking at the map I was carrying and at the wheat fields spreading before me, when I realized that the stream flowing at my feet was itself the borderline I was searching for. I’ll never forget the strange sensation of completion mixed with disappointment that I felt at that moment.

It has now been forty years since I left Japan, crossing the ocean borderlines of the Pacific and the Sea of Japan.

Seiichi Furuya, 2013