



## **MOBILE ARCHITECTURES**

### **URSULA BIEMANN**

Aerial surveillance photographs tracking illegal migrants hiding in the desert where they build mobile architectures and boats.

#### **Evidence and Artifice**

Sahara Chronicle includes a number of records of the more or less successful efforts at keeping the fluctuating migration currents through Morocco, Mauritania and Libya in check, by means ranging from off-road patrols in border terrain to aerial surveys by propeller planes and high-tech surveillance drones. Engaging with this politics of containment sucked me right into the gigantic visualizing apparatus and made me a part of it.

As their budget is barely enough to cover one surveillance flight per week in the vast desert areas around border of Laayoune in the Western Sahara, I didn't want to initiate an extra flight for aerial filming that would risk the detection of a group of clandestine migrants hiding in the dunes. The police were willing to give me the photographs they had taken on previous tours; these pictures have a different status from the frames I would have shot from the same plane, functioning as evidence for use within the confidential circuits of police investigation. They capture the moment between recognition and possible disciplinary action. A simultaneous role as witness and record endows these images with a juridical effect, providing evidence of infringement and the occasion for judgment and deportation. Integrating these photographs in my artwork further contributes to the process of exposing the furtive act to the public, bringing it out into the open and positioning the viewer as both voyeur-witness and moral judge of the scene. However, the scrolling text in the video thwarts the fantasy of a potent vision, which has the power to evict, by introducing a thriving solidarity between the transiting migrants and the local populations. Moroccan carpenters have started to prefabricate boat kits, which can be quickly assembled by migrants in their desert hideouts. Distanced judgment is baffled here by a sense of local complicity.

---

IMAGE 1

IMAGE 2

IMAGE 3

IMAGE 4

IMAGE 5

IMAGE 6

IMAGE 7

IMAGE 8

IMAGE 9

IMAGE 10

**Cluster:** Sahara Chronicle ? West

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.worldofmatter.net/mobile-architectures>