

In the summer of 2017, Marco Noris walked three hundred kilometres of the France–Spain border, from El Pas de la Casa to Portbou, travelling along many of the paths and border crossings that were the backdrop for Spanish Republican exile during the Civil War. He did so having never before made such a trek, carrying about fourteen kilos divided between two backpacks and accompanied by an expert mountain guide, Amaranta Amati. During some parts of the route, which lasted twenty-five days, some of Noris' friends and family members joined him on occasion: they brought him water and other provisions, walked alongside him and even put him up for the night. Even so, Noris and Amati walked alone most of the time, until the twentieth day of the trek, when the guide ended his accompaniment and the artist continued on alone.

Noris did not undertake this journey merely as an athletic pursuit or a hiking activity. The trek was in itself an artistic project with walking and painting at its structural core since the artist looked for the border stones marking the path during his long excursion, and he stopped in front of each one to paint it – or to paint the landscape surrounding it or some element of the environment that he found interesting. We can say, then, that *On the Border* draws from two major artistic traditions: the pleinairism that arose in the 19th century and the set of practices that find a form of inquiry and aesthetic production in the action of walking, in particular with Situationism but also beforehand with Dadaism.

However, we can also say that Noris' project does not fit easily into either of

these traditions. On one hand, many practices that have the act of walking as a central element, especially the tradition of the situationist *dérive*, are developed in the urban environment and its peripheries and often integrate chance into their development. Noris' trek, by contrast, mainly took place on the mountain – although he did also cross through some municipalities and semi-urban environments – and it was an action that the artist had previously prepared in detail: he thoroughly studied the entire route, identifying camping and resting points and implementing a complex supply logistics for the whole journey. On the other hand, while in *plein air* painting the practise of going outside to work is undertaken according to the needs of the work process and for the benefit of the future work, in Noris' project the execution of the work and the artistic criteria were instead largely dependent on the functionality imposed by the logistics of the journey (although it was a priority to record each of the border stones through painting). An example of this is the small, strong, lightweight and transportable case the artist designed for drying the paintings once they were finished; as is the decision he made shortly after starting the route to draw or paint many of the border stones using markers so as to go more quickly and keep the artistic action from altering the project's general schedule.

Although Noris' project might appear to be an act of recording, of taking inventory, it is distantly removed from the cold and rational nature of these activities. The artist knew of the existence of exhaustive photographic records of all of the border stones

along the border, and he in fact made use of them occasionally for preparing and planning the trek. His motivation, then, did not respond to the need to give visibility to unnoticed elements but instead to the desire to understand these functional markers through a lived experience, making a depiction which incorporated his gesture and his time, his way of being there at that specific moment, far from the instantaneous and mechanical recording of a camera. Each of the paintings and drawings of border stones in *On the Border* contains the conditions of the trek, the experience of travelling a path on foot, in a more or less veiled way. One of the main senses of Noris' project, therefore, is the appropriation and resignification of impersonal geopolitical markers through experience.

Over the stretch of the trek that I travelled with the artist on a particularly cold and rainy day, Noris told me that on a specific part of the route where the path intermittently crossed the border, every time he entered French territory he received the message the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs sends to citizens when they arrive in a foreign country on his cell phone. It was these messages that made him realize he had switched countries and not any distinctive element or significant change in the path. In the territory, on either side of this border, there were the same kind of cows, rocks, scrub and trees, wholly indifferent to a political distinction that is imperceptible and indistinguishable on the ground. Another sense of *On the Border* lies, then, in the self-evident truth that any political fragmentation of the land is conventional, that mountains, seas →

→ and valleys constitute a continuum, divided only by laws. In a Europe turning its borders into increasingly insurmountable and exclusive boundaries, Noris' project highlights the arbitrary nature of these barriers. His nomadic life over the course of a month can be interpreted as an action

of conquering this "smooth space" free of obstacles defined by Deleuze and Guattari,¹ as opposed to the "striated space" of the state.

Eduardo Martínez de Pisón says that complete understanding of the mountain requires immersing oneself in it, travelling its paths, ascending it,

and that only artists who have done so can give a deep and consistent artistic response to the mountain.² *On the Border* is Marco Noris' search for this absolute understanding of the territory. And it is also his response.

Marco Noris (Bergamo, Italy, 1971) lives and works in Barcelona.

A drawer and painter in essence, Noris made a foray into the world of video art, net art and photography before re-establishing and re-focusing his artistic practice on painting.

In Spain, he has exhibited in Barcelona (Galería Trama, Cyan Gallery, Galeria Esther Montoriol, Galeria Contrast, Galeria H2O, The Private Space, Casa Elizalde, Can Felipa, Espai M at La Escocesa, Galeria Sicart, etc.), in Madrid (Matadero), in Castellón (Galería Cànem), in Vic (Roman Temple of Vic, 5th Biennial) and in La Jonquera (MuME – Exile Memorial Museum). He has also taken part in exhibitions and festivals in the United States (New York, The Active Space, 2014), in Italy (Different Pulses, 2013, and ParmaPoesia, 2002) and in France (Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2002).

From 2015 to 2017, he was an artist in residence at Hangar, a visual arts production centre in Barcelona, and in 2017, he was awarded the Barcelona Producció grant for the project entitled *On the Border*.

In parallel to his artistic activities, over the past 20 years Noris has created or collaborated on different group projects. Noris's artistic career began in Bologna, Italy, in the 1990s, working on collaborative projects in digital fields. In 2006, he dedicated his time and efforts to organising artists involved in a new art factory project in Barcelona. That process led to what is now La Escocesa, a centre for artistic creation that has been included in Barcelona City Council's art factories project since 2008. In May 2018, he co-founded Fase, a centre for artistic creation and thought in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat.

He is currently an artist in residence at Piramidón, a contemporary art centre in Barcelona.

¹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

² Martínez de Pisón, Eduardo. *La montaña y el arte*. Madrid: Fórcola, 2017.