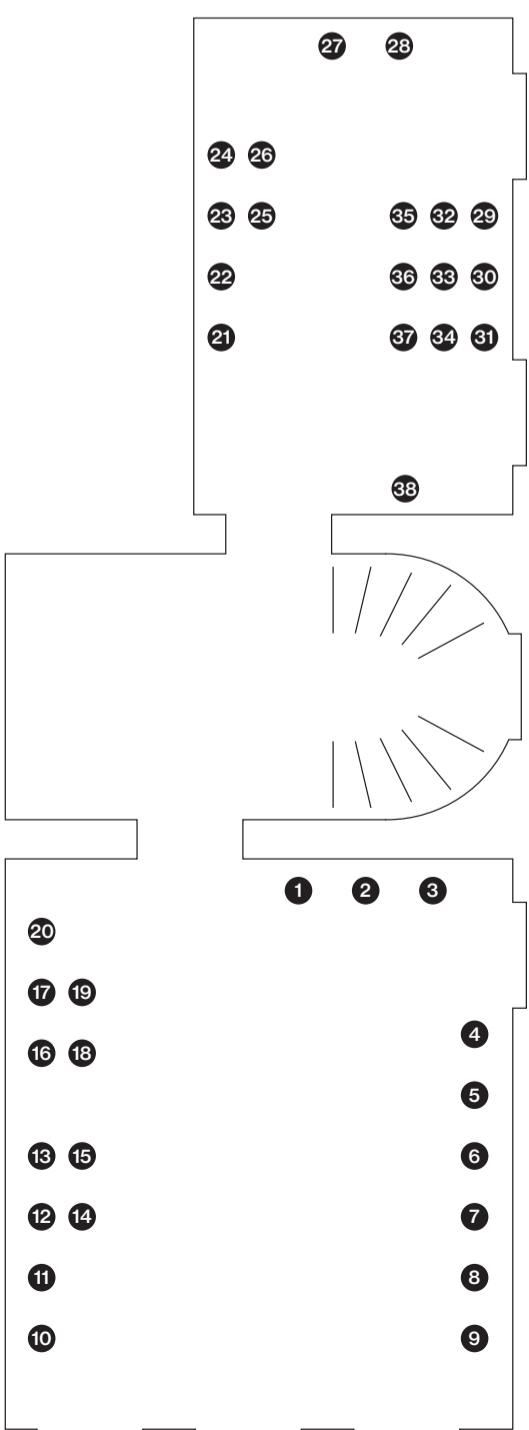


# BORDERLANDS KAROL GRYGORUK 11.2—24.22



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**Karol Grygoruk "Borderlands"**  
11.2—2.4.2022  
Galeria Promocyjna, Staromiejski Dom Kultury

Karol Grygoruk has partnered with journalist and activist Anna Alboth to follow refugees trying to get into Europe since 2018. Karol and Anna have worked on all major migration routes, documenting the developments in formal and informal refugee camps. They have shared reports of the humanitarian crisis in the Canary Islands, the exploitation of female migrants in plantations in the Spanish Almeria, the problem of refugee homelessness in the streets of Europe and human rights violations in the frontier forests of Poland.

In his documentary practice, Grygoruk has intentionally stayed away from the classic concept of critical moments. Instead, he exposes his audience to the day-to-day reality of exclusion and systemic violence. By creating wide black-and-white shots and static portraits, he has made a point of avoiding the build-up of a perilous news narrative. He is in search of new forms of representation that counterbalance luridness and "momentary outrage" (Judith Butler). The series seeks to put together an unbiased registry of realities that only apparently contradicts the author's engagement. Grygoruk has done away with the archaic divide between the role of a photographer and an activist.

The long-term "Borderlands" project is a multithreaded narrative about experiencing displacement, hope, "lost illusions" and inertia of the Old Continent. The photographs displayed in the gallery space, selected from a set of one thousand frames shot in recent years are an attempt at a broad review and understanding of the contemporary migration phenomenon in the face of the growing humanitarian crisis on European Union's borders.

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## Bosnia and Herzegovina / Balkan route

Having reached Greece, whether by sea or land, when life seems impossible after years in a camp or on the street, many decide to take the Balkan route, which leads through Macedonia, Serbia, all the way to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the last country before Croatia, the dream European Union. To get there, you have to cross mountains. It is difficult terrain, but guarded by Croatian officers with the help of effective and expensive technology paid for by Brussels. There are drones flying in the mountains on the border and thermal imagers looking out. Whoever decides to "play the game" (this is the Balkan term for crossing another border), knows that it is almost impossible to get through the first time. You have to wait for spring, for a warmer day, you have to earn money for another pair of shoes or a smuggler. Many stay in Bosnia for years. Sometimes in camps, where there is no hot water, heating, food, medical assistance or media access, and sometimes in old abandoned factories, mountain huts or in the forest.

**1** A young man seeking privacy in the overcrowded Ušivak camp. Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019 **2** Google map with marked stops along the Balkan migration route. Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019 **3** Afghan teenagers camping out in an abandoned cement factory in the border town of Bihać. Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019

## Poland / Polish-Belarusian Border

The humanitarian crisis in eastern Poland began in the warm August of 2021, continued through the icy winter and is still not over today. Thousands of people have walked the route, strategically organised by Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko, who launched extra flights from the Middle East to Minsk. And many have been stranded for months, between aggressive Belarusian officials and Polish border guards, leading to illegal round-ups on the Polish side and deportation to the Belarusian side, with no access to guaranteed international protection. Violence at the border has become a daily business. Men, women and children, old and young, healthy and disabled, have become ping-pong balls between two sides who, by using violence, by taking away clothes and shoes, by destroying telephones, by allowing dogs to bite and batons to strike, have reached the highest level of human rights violations in Europe. The imposition of a state of emergency has made the situation even worse because without the help of humanitarian organisations, medics and without media monitoring, the tragedy is happening under the cover of dark cold forests.

**4** Razor wire on the Polish-Belarusian border. Polish government imposed a state of emergency in 68 border municipalities on 2 September 2021. The total cost of the planned wall exceeds PLN 1.6 billion. Poland, 2021 **5** Djwar (21), Osama (21), Amlad (25), Amad (15), Wadla (43), Elena (5), Kawsar (31), Aeman (20), Avin (27), Yanis (28). A Kurdish family from Duhok. The whole group was transported and pushed through razor wire to the Belarusian side of the border several times by Polish border guards. They had dog bite marks on their legs and arms. Elena suffers from epilepsy. They have all found safe refuge in a camp in western Germany today. Poland, 2021 **6** The grave of an unknown man. His body was found on 22 October 2021 near Kuźnica. He had no ID documents on him. He was one of many activists failed to reach in time. Poland, 2021 **7** Asmin (25) from Iraqi Kurdistan shows the baton marks of Belarusian border guards. Together with a group of over a hundred people, she was pushed back through a razor wire to the Polish side near the River Bug. She fell into the icy river after fleeing from dogs and officers equipped with live munitions. Poland, 2021 **8** Sameh (25) and Ali (40) from Yemen are running across a forest road to hide from the Polish army and Border Police patrolling the border. Poland, 2021 **9** Mohamed (30) fled the war in Yemen to Beirut, where he spent a long time trying to put his life back together. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic collapse in Lebanon forced him to flee again. Poland, 2021

## France, Belgium / Western Europe

Some have spent years on the road to get here: from Afghanistan or Sudan. They walked through mountains, deserts, crossed the Mediterranean, spent winters on the Balkan route or in the Alps. The big cities of Western Europe were supposed to be welcoming and offering opportunities. The reality turned out to be unimaginably difficult: accommodation under bridges, violence on the streets and structural racism that makes it difficult to work legally, take language courses or build a family. For others, the French coast is the final difficult leg of the journey to their dream UK. Families and loved ones are often waiting for them there. Under the bridges at Calais or in the abandoned buildings of Dunkirk, thousands of people try their luck again and again on the next boat or under the next lorry. Although it is the last stage, it is extremely risky: the sea is extremely violent here and there are high electrified fences around the motorways. On top of this, the French police evict the temporary encampments, sometimes several times a day: grinding and levelling the tents to the ground. There is little hope left and frustration rules here.

**10** A group of young men from South Sudan, are cooking dinner together in a tent encampment hidden under one of the bridges in the centre of Calais. France, 2021 **11** The Baroque St. John the Baptist Church at the Béguinage in the centre of Brussels, turned into a temporary shelter for migrants and migrant women. Belgium, 2021 **12** An abandoned warehouse in the suburb of Grande-Synthe inhabited by a group of migrants from Vietnam. France, 2021 **13** A group of Kurdish refugees are charging their phones in an informal camp in the suburb of Grande-Synthe. France, 2021 **14** Young migrants from Iranian Kurdistan are making coffee. One of the many informal encampments around Dunkirk. France, 2021 **15** Maximilian Park, a meeting place for migrants in the centre of Brussels. Belgium, 2021

## Spain / Canary Islands

The shortest distance between the African coast and the Spanish Canary Islands is 100 kilometres. But there are those who set sail not from Morocco or neighbouring Mauritania, but from Guinea, almost 2,500 kilometres away. It is sometimes 12 days in the open ocean, in a crowd of others on a small boat, a patera. Twelve days without shelter from the sun, in soaked clothes, in high wind. Twelve days of burns and abrasions. Twelve days of hunger, sometimes a broken engine, seasickness and drinking salt water. In early 2021, one in five boats that set sail for Europe had sunk. Survivors were temporarily placed in hotels, beach resorts and schools before being moved to soaked tents in camps. Many climate refugees arrive via this route, as droughts and floods in Africa combined with conflicts and the still colonial economies are the most common reasons for flight. Someone somewhere is forced to leave their home due to climate change every 1.3 seconds across the world.

**16** Young migrants from Senegal and Morocco staying at the empty Holiday Club Puerto Calma hotel, in Puerto Rico town. Gran Canaria, 2021 **17** Abandoned in the port of Arguineguin, the boat (patera) that brought 42 people, including 10 children, from Morocco the day before. Gran Canaria, 2021 **18** Mohammed (19) and Abdul Karim (21) from Morocco, in an informal refugee camp in Las Raices. Tenerife, 2021 **19** The Colegio León camp in the town of Las Palmas, intended only for migrants from Morocco. Gran Canaria, 2021 **20** A group of teenagers from war-torn Mali watch surfers catching waves. A municipal beach in Puerto de la Cruz. Tenerife, 2021

## Spain / Spanish-Moroccan Border

Melilla and Ceuta are two Spanish enclaves in North African territory. The end of an African route that for some means years on the road and the beginning of the European Union. All you have to do is get through a 6-metre high triple fence, guarded by hundreds of border guards positioned every 20 metres. Impossible? There is no fence or wall that can stop those fleeing from danger. People try to cross the fence in groups, under cover of darkness, using ladders. Sometimes they circumnavigate the border by sea. Sometimes they try their luck in and under trucks, buses, ferries and boats. Many of them are still children or unaccompanied minors. Many are discriminated against members of the LGBT community. The EU pays huge sums of money each year to Morocco for possibly holding up migration, for obstructing the route and for taking the people pushed back to the southern border of the country. This is a kind of "outsourcing" of the migration issue to countries that have little to do with human rights: Morocco, Libya or Turkey.

**21** One of the many encampments inhabited by migrants employed in Almeria's horizon-long greenhouses, popularly known as the Sea of Plastic. Due to the recession, the authorities have for years turned a blind eye to the slave labour conditions throughout the region. Spain, 2019 **22** Every night, teenage migrants living on the streets of Melilla, a Spanish enclave in north Africa, make risky attempts to board ferries bound for ports in the north. Spain, 2019 **23** Every day, thousands of people cross the borders between the Kingdom of Morocco and the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, carrying all kinds of goods. The authorities in both countries "turn a blind eye" to the sanctioned smuggling that supports entire families on both sides of the border. Spain, 2019 **24** Parcels filled with uncleared goods can far exceed the weight of the people carrying them. Very often, the transport of goods across borders is the business of elderly people who are unable to take up other gainful employment. Spain, 2019 **25** Mohammed (32) fled Morocco after his partner was arrested. A detention order was also issued for him. Today, he is living in a temporary "house" on the Spanish side of the border. Thousands of people apply for refugee status because of persecution on the grounds of their psychosexual orientation every year. Spain, 2019 **26** Melilla in the north of Africa. A complex system of high fences, monitoring cameras and razor wire fences stretches along the Moroccan border. The European Union gives tens of millions of euros every year to the Moroccan dictatorship to outsource border "protection". Spain, 2019

## Greece / Island of Lesbos, Thessaloniki, Athens

We know the most about camps on Greek islands in Europe. Photos from the waters between Turkey and Greece have moved us since 2015, reminding us that no one takes their loved ones on dangerous boats unless they have to. Over the years, the situation has only changed for the worse: fewer boats may be heading out towards Greece, but none are arriving. The Greek army, in cooperation with Frontex, is effectively taking care of this by using illegal pushbacks at sea. Meanwhile, those who ended up in camps on Lesbos, Chios or Samos years ago find it impossible to get used to hunger, disease, militarisation, fires and misery. A few manage to make it to the mainland, where they often go from a migrant crisis to a crisis of homelessness on the streets of Athens or Thessaloniki. People spend years fighting the system: trying to send their children to school, rent a flat or find a job. The countries of the Union have forgotten that they have promised to support Greece by taking in at least some of the refugees from the camps in Greece.

**27** Muhammad Reza (10, pictured), Arash (12) and Muhammad Erfan (10) from Afghanistan are showing their scars. The boys have spent the last few months in Moria, a refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos known for its inhumane conditions. During one of the many riots, someone plunged a knife into Reza's neck. Greece, 2020 **28** Ritsona refugee camp north of Athens. Greece, 2021 **29** Victoria Square in the centre of Athens. Up to a dozen new families arrive here every day. After many months, sometimes even years, of waiting for documents in formal camps and detention centres, homelessness is the next step on the never-ending road to normality. Greece, 2020 **30** Olive Grove, an informal encampment around the now closed Camp Moria, on the Greek island of Lesbos. Greece, 2019 **31** Radwan (30), one of the many young migrants from Morocco seeking refuge on the streets of Thessaloniki. Like many young men from the North African coast, he has no chance of legal residence in any European country. He has to operate outside the system and seek help in unofficial clinics run by NGOs. Greece, 2020 **32** Elaionas refugee camp on the outskirts of Athens. Greece, 2020 **33** A valley on the island of Lesbos, far from farms and pastures, where the island's authorities bring everything that the sea throws up: thousands of life jackets, torn dinghies and smashed boats, refugees' toys and personal belongings. Greece, 2019 **34** Elaionas refugee camp on the outskirts of Athens. Greece, 2020 **35** Fereshte (17), fled violence and fundamentalism in Afghanistan. She found refuge in the Malakasa camp north of Athens. She organised education for young girls for many months there. Greece, 2020 **36** Larissa refugee camp south of Thessaloniki. Greece, 2020 **37** Najm (33), fled Iraq's Basra before the war. Despite childhood cerebral palsy, he reached the island of Lesbos in a wheelchair. Greece, 2019 **38** Jalal Molla (4), Alaa Jajo (6), Mangal Mina (5), Malfa Mai (3), some of the many names of children buried in a refugee cemetery hidden on the island of Lesbos. Greece, 2019