

## ***Migrations***

Installation by DOEprojekts — Deborah Adams Doering & Glenn N. Doering  
Sheen Center for Thought and Culture, NYC, February 23 – April 9, 2017

Our international borders can feel more restrictive than ever. From Brexit, now separating the United Kingdom from the more fluid European Union, to broiling rhetoric and policy in the United States on severely restricting the entry of refugees and building a Mexican border wall, there are strong movements toward isolation.



*Global Waving*, 2017,  
akua ink on paper,  
130" x 60"

*There*, 2017, cut paper,  
21" x 14"



Yet it's also an era of a freer exchange of ideas across the world enabled by technology and the increasing accessibility of the internet, where collaboration between people in different time zones has in many ways never been easier. And in both cases, we are experiencing a world in flux.

Through the work of DOEprojekts' *Migrations* at the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture, these two aspects of contemporary borders are blurred. The collaborative duo behind DOEprojekts — Deborah Adams Doering and Glenn N. Doering — have a multimedia, participatory approach to engaging an audience on the local level with these complex global issues. How we define ourselves within a place, or how it defines us, can feel immediate; the actual limits of what is considered a nation, and if we are part of it, can often be abstract.

A United Nations report in 2013 calculated that since 1990, the number of international migrants had leapt from 150 million to 230 million. More and more of the world is on the move, and that means our culture along with our ideas of society are altering through new relationships and conflicts. In the early 2000s, we've also seen the emergence of new nations. East Timor claimed its independence in 2002, Kosovo in 2008, and South Sudan in 2011, while Serbia and Montenegro separated in 2006.



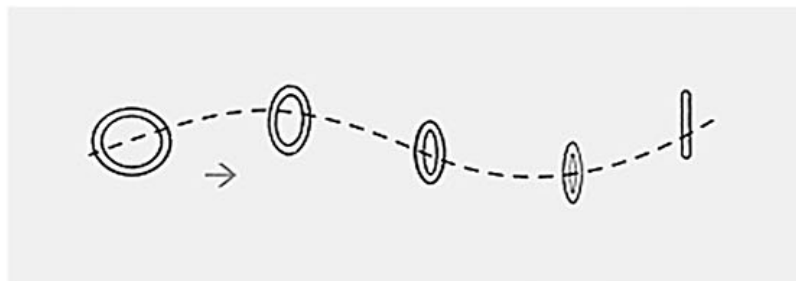
*Hot Buttons: Evacuee • Displaced Person • Alien, 2016, watercolor, on paper, 15" x 20"*

The “Hot Buttons,” DOEprojekts’ hand-cut stencil and print works, visualize the various ways a person can be defined when passing between these oscillating borders: expatriate; immigrant; refugee; evacuee; displaced person; alien. Another reads: pilgrim; colonist; pioneer. And yet another reads: artist; agitator; activist.

While all these words are familiar, and likely evoke some image in the imagination, seeing them linked together asks for a reevaluation of which we consider synonyms, and which as secluded states of being. And turning the words into objects reduces some of that labeling power. As does the participatory element of them, involved in past DOEprojekts exhibitions, where anyone can take wax crayon rubbings of these words, and carry them away into another movement.

In all of DOEprojekts’ work, you perceive repeating symbols, the “coreforms.” Collisions of zeros and ones, they bring an undertone of computation and technology into the work, which sometimes hints at its interactive elements. Every art has its iconology, its systems, but this deliberate establishment of a visual language emphasizes the movement between the pieces, and their connection. In the central works of *Migrations* — the five “Migration Maps” — the two-foot-in-diameter, hand-embroidered textiles morph these coreforms into cartography. Each of these tapestries is a globe, but with a different continent at its center, and the coreforms ripple across the borders, obscuring them, even obliterating them, in currents of patterns.

All of this would be interesting on its own, yet what distinguishes the work from succumbing to its own sequestration within the gallery walls is its tactile link to other creators.



*Coreforms by DOEprojekts*





*Migration Maps*, 2017, embroidery on cotton, each map approximately 24" x 24"

The embroidered "Migration Maps" are designed by DOEprojekts in New York/Chicago, then stitched by members of the Rwandan women's art/craft collectives called Savane Kabuye and Savane Kigali<sup>1</sup>. There is the migration of the women's hands over each flowing stitch and a sense of time, as a single map takes months to finish. Then there is the journey of the map back to the United States, where it started as an idea before it was made into an artifact. Furthermore, as the collectives in Africa include women from *both* sides of the bloody 1994 Genocide against the Tutsis, there is yet another level of connection evoked in the work, even if it's not visible to the eye.

Similarly DOEprojekts' "Global Waving" art works warp flag iconography into our migratory forms. Using the coreforms as these primal symbols, and turning each flag into an elongated triangle, DOEprojekts involves its audience in building new identities from the fragments. Recognizable icons of national identity are suddenly displaced, rearranged, and reconsidered. Instead of geopolitical meaning, the flags become unstuck from their place and time.

Creating a border means defining a threshold, designating in a liminal space when one place ends and another begins. In the *Migrations* installation, the coreforms are installed in a migratory path on the windows looking over Bleecker and Elizabeth Streets, so even for those who don't enter the gallery, there's something of it publicly visible. The coreforms and their shadows may be remembered by people walking by, the curves and intersecting circles and lines carrying on this movement into a non-physical realm.

<sup>1</sup>Savane Kabuye and Savane Kigali women's art/embroidery collectives were introduced to DOEprojekts by Juliana Meehan through her traveling exhibition "Pax Rwanda," which supports the work of these Rwandan artists.

*Hot Buttons: Artist • Agitator • Activist*, 2016,  
ink on synthetic paper, and ink on paper,  
each approximately 11" x 15"



Wax rubbings are created from DOEprojekts' stencils by participants who "migrate" the works to other places.

Whether the maps that shift our Western view to position a different continent at center, or even this simple extension of the exhibition into the street, each aspect of *Migrations* asks viewers to think about how our borders are human-made, a theme reinforced through the migrations of materials and ideas that

have shaped the work. There's only so much an art installation can do to break through this, of course, and no matter how powerful art is, it still can feel small against any bureaucratic change to our borders. Yet experiences like *Migrations* encourage a fresh perspective, a consideration of how one border can look skewed from either side.

The Berlin Wall, the Israeli West Bank barrier, the Line of Control between India and Pakistan, or any other separation has always been disenfranchising toward people on both sides, limiting movement and exchange. *Migrations* encourages us to think about the borders forming and dissolving in the 21st century, their potential for change, and above all how even as just one person in a bordered place, you can experience empathy.

*Essay by Allison C. Meier*

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