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FEMINIST  
ECOLOGIES IN  
CYPRUS: EXPLORING  
A CONTESTED  
LANDSCAPE

*MArch Design Studio Invisible Cities,  
Sheffield School of Architecture.*

*Cith Skelcher*





Figures 1-5 *The Commoning*, Eleanor Moselle







Yiayia mou,  
 How I have missed you!  
 I have booked flights to  
 come and see you in  
 April! I wish you could  
 see your new great grandson  
 but he will be in school  
 by then! Hopefully one  
 day you'll meet. Thank you  
 for sending the box of treats,  
 there's nothing quite like your olives!  
 I hope you're keeping well,  
 Koraly x

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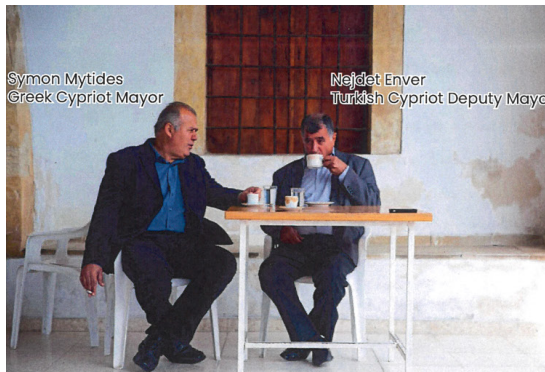
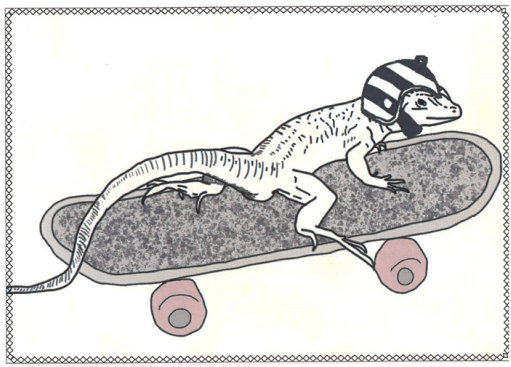
Yiayia  
 ISSOU Street  
 Larnaca  
 CYPRUS

marsh is far too low and the  
 reeds are taking over. So who  
 have they brought in to fix  
 it? Us, the rous. Typical.  
 It's not all bad though. The  
 marsh is getting better again,  
 and they're even building us  
 some nice sheds for the winter.  
 Hope all's good with you!  
 The Cyprus Cous xxv

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 Western Bank  
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Symon Mytides  
 Greek Cypriot Mayor

Nejdet Enver  
 Turkish Cypriot Deputy Mayor

Hey!  
 How have you been?  
 The sand dunes have been  
 pretty crazy here recently,  
 the weather has been getting  
 more & more extreme, I reckon  
 it's all of those pesky humans!  
 I can barely find anything  
 to eat these days. :(  
 But the good news is I've got  
 my new helmet and wheels so  
 I can scale across the  
 compacted sand and stand up to  
 the wheels of scary cars.  
 Love,  
 Scheiber's Lizard x

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FLOOR 16  
 ARTS TOWER  
 SHEFFIELD  
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 U.K.

Greetings from Pyla!  
 Currently the only city in Cyprus  
 with Turkish and Greek Cypriots  
 living side by side. Not only side  
 by side but also in buffer zone,  
 creating a unique area of Cyprus.  
 Working along side of Nejdet,  
 we are striving towards a city  
 all of Cyprus can look to!  
 Your Mayor,  
 Symon Mytides

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What if the architectural object were revealed to be something closer to a thing among other things, operating necessarily in ecological relation, apt to emerge only to decay.

Hélène Frichot, *Creative Ecologies: Theorising the Practice of Architecture* (Bloomsbury, 2018), 7.

Studio Invisible Cities has this year been exploring the idea that architecture is contingent, and part of a broader and richer ecology. We have been working in the context of Cyprus, a complex and contested island. Situated politically and culturally within the European Union yet geographically located near the states of Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt, the island has been and remains between west and east, with its strategic location making it subject, over the centuries, to occupation by a number of world powers, including Britain.

Philosophical thinking from the seventeenth century onwards casts nature as an object of study, a blank place to explore and a force to be controlled. During the British colonial period, the media of art, custom and language were used as instruments of ‘civilisation’ and, as late as the early-twentieth century, the British both violently and insidiously exported their particular brand of ‘nature perfected’ through literature, landscape painting and garden design to the island of Cyprus, transforming its landscapes.

As Tiffany Kaewen Dang writes: ‘As a discipline, landscape not only reflects social and political power relations as a symbolic aesthetic medium; it is itself an instrument and agent of power.’<sup>1</sup> In this context, the studio asks: *How can we begin to intervene within a contested landscape?*

Our starting point was to critique ‘landscape as an idea’ within our local context in Sheffield. We investigated key landscape types – garden, park, allotment, common – analysing their histories, the versions or visions of nature they espouse, and the politics and methods of survey and design that made them. Drawing on Hélène Frichot’s book *Creative Ecologies* we worked together to develop a set of counter methods for reading these landscapes to reveal hidden or latent ecologies.

Figure 6 *Migratory Stories, Postcards from Cyprus*, Invisible Cities Studio: Mia Gaines, Harry R Lord, Eleanor Moselle, Sofia G Sergiou, Jasmine Howarth, Razvan Ivanov, Ella Murrell, Colombine Vaillaud, Shunshun Zhang, Fenella Pakeman, Aisha Khan, Amy Crellin.

<sup>1</sup> Tiffany Kaewen Dang, ‘Decolonising Landscape’, *Landscape Research*, 46:7 (2021): pp. 1004-1016 (p. 1008).

Preparation for our visit to Cyprus in November 2022 continued through a number of conversations, initially with Emma Cheatle, who shared ideas from her emerging research into migratory stories of the un/common local ecologies in Cyprus, introducing us to her collaborator Angela Kyriacou Petrou, from the University of Nicosia. Esra Can and Emre Akbil shared tools and tactics that they had developed through their 'Hands-on Famagusta' project, designed to support practices of commoning as a 'transformative framework in negotiating urban contestations.'<sup>2</sup> The stories and insights shared by our friends and collaborators from the island, both personal and political, challenged us to rethink our flawed assumptions about Cyprus, to engage with its complexities and to reimagine our role as designers.

Building on diverse and collective methodologies of design practice such as mapping, ethnography and creative writing, the students searched out stories of resistance, creativity, joy and ambition. From the wider territories of the British Airforce base RAF Akrotiri to the more compressed landscape of the UN instigated Green Line in Nicosia, students explored and situated themselves within Cyprus' flora and fauna, its borderlands and horizons, its complex histories, infrastructures and institutions.

The initial ambition behind the studio was to explore the notion that 'good architecture' does not begin and end with a building, that informed decision making and design sees architecture as part of a broader and richer ecology. Working within Cyprus' contested landscapes has opened up rich seams of possibility. In seeking to learn, rather than to solve, the projects and approaches that have emerged from the studio have been joyful and diverse.

2 Esra Can, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/architecture/postgraduate/phd/phd-research-students/esra-can> [accessed 28 June 2023].





Hi,  
I'm writing to you from the Akrotiri marsh! It's not a bad life here for a Cyprus cow. It's strange thinking about the olden days, humans relied on us for everything! They wouldn't have been able to put food on the table without us. Then the machines come and they had no time for us anymore. But now they're messed up big time - all their fancy machines and big harvesters have caused havoc, the water level in the



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1 / 2

Hi!

We are cats wandering around the 'dead zone', though we don't really have an idea of what 'border' is. We just go around and do whatever we want! We like being close to people, so looking forward to seeing you in Cyprus!



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Hi Susan,

Not moving out of the buffer zone was one of the best decisions I ever made. The street has transformed into a lush garden paradise, my neighbours are quiet and the UV are kind enough to bring my shopping. All that said, I really do miss having you close by - hopefully the boys will stop fighting soon.



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Love Annie

Hi Susan,

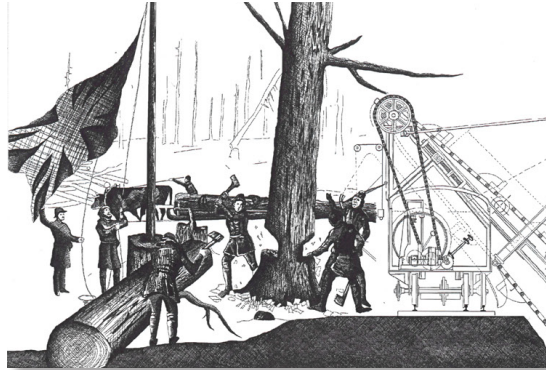
Not moving out of the buffer zone was one of the best decisions I ever made. The street has transformed into a lush garden paradise, my neighbours are quiet and the UV are kind enough to bring my shopping. All that said, I really do miss having you close by - hopefully the boys will stop fighting soon.



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Love Annie



We've taken over!

For years these humans restricted us. Now, only thoughts dressed to look like us come by. I has been almost 50 years since we were last restricted. The things they left have begun to fall apart making our takeover that much easier! All nature is welcome here! Sincerely,

The Buffer Zone's  
 Flora and Fauna

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Rest of Cyprus  
 ALL Streets  
 ALL Postcodes  
 CYPRUS

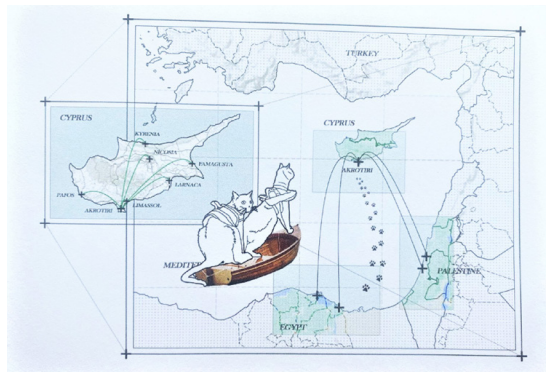
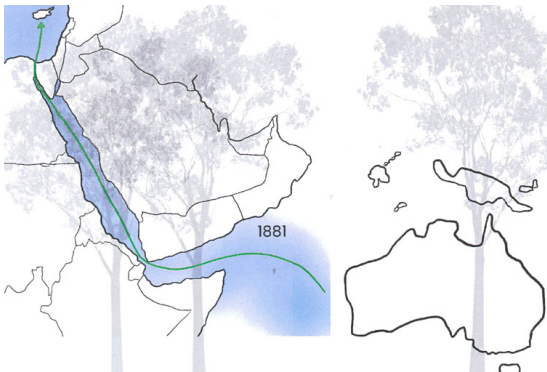
WE HAVE NOT BEEN TREAT WELL, RAPID EXPANSION OF TOWNS, INDUSTRIALISATION, COPPER MINING. INTENSIVE CULTIVATION, HAS CREATED A STRAIN WHICH HAS KNOCKED OUR EQUILIBRIUM OF KILTIR. BRITISH PRESSURE FOR GREATER PRODUCTION HAS LEAD TO THE OVERSEER OF WHAT WE PROVIDE. WE HAVE NOW PASSED OUR 'PEAK' POINT WITH ALL OUR NATURAL RESOURCES. NOW, WE PROTEST. WE WILL NO LONGER GIVE ANYMORE WITHOUT THE PROMISE OF SOMETHING IN RETURN.

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THE ENVIRONMENT



Success!

There are many wetlands for us here! With in a few years we will be as big as ever. The people didn't like us at first but now adore us! Apparently we helped rid this country of a disease! Hope you can come visit one day!

yours Truly,  
 The Eucalyptus  
 Tree

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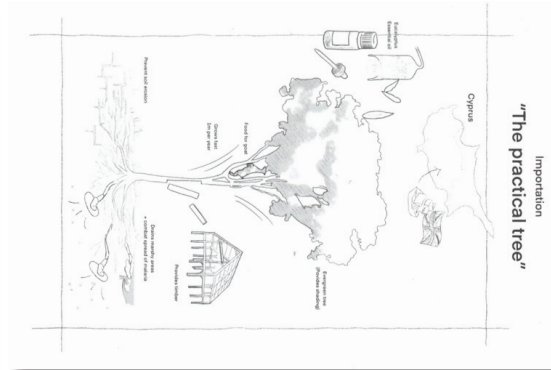
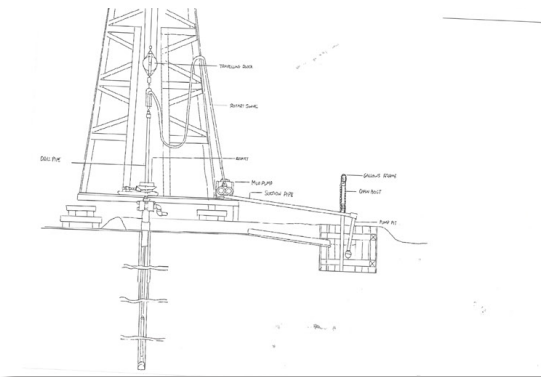
Eucalyptus Family  
 East Arnhem Region  
 Northern Territory 0822  
 Australia

Meow ...  
 Meow! Meow!  
 \* You might need a  
 cat language translator

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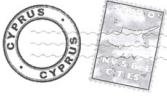


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CYPRUS HAS SUFFERED FROM WATER INSECURITY FOR DECADES WHICH HAS CREATED AN ISLAND OF WATER-PREPARERS HOWEVER, WITHOUT PROPER EDUCATION AND OTHER INDUSTRIALISATION PROJECTS THE WATER IS DISSAPPEARING- UNTIL INDEPENDANCE IN 1960, THOUSANDS OF BOREHOLES WERE DRILLED IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WHICH RESULTED IN DEPLETION OF GROUND WATER RESERVES ESPECIALLY IN THE MAIN WATER-BEARING AREAS DUE TO OVER PUMPING .

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Hey Mom!

I've had new growths again this month! You'd be so proud of me. I really like it here. Humans keep telling me how nice I smell. I found my purpose! I help the local humans withir economy, all they need are my leaves! I'm also planning to donate my body for them to build new homes once I die.

Your leafie xx

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Hello!

I'm missing my Australian home! I feel guilty that I'm threatening the lives of all these native species and taking their water. People are using my branches to illegally trap songbirds and I can't do anything about it. I don't feel welcome here, please take me back home!

sending love,  
Acacia Tree x

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Teia sou!

I hope you enjoyed the food on your travels.

Despite the divide of our land, the Cypriotes still share a mutual love of me. The recipes have been passed through generations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, connecting people throughout the island and beyond.

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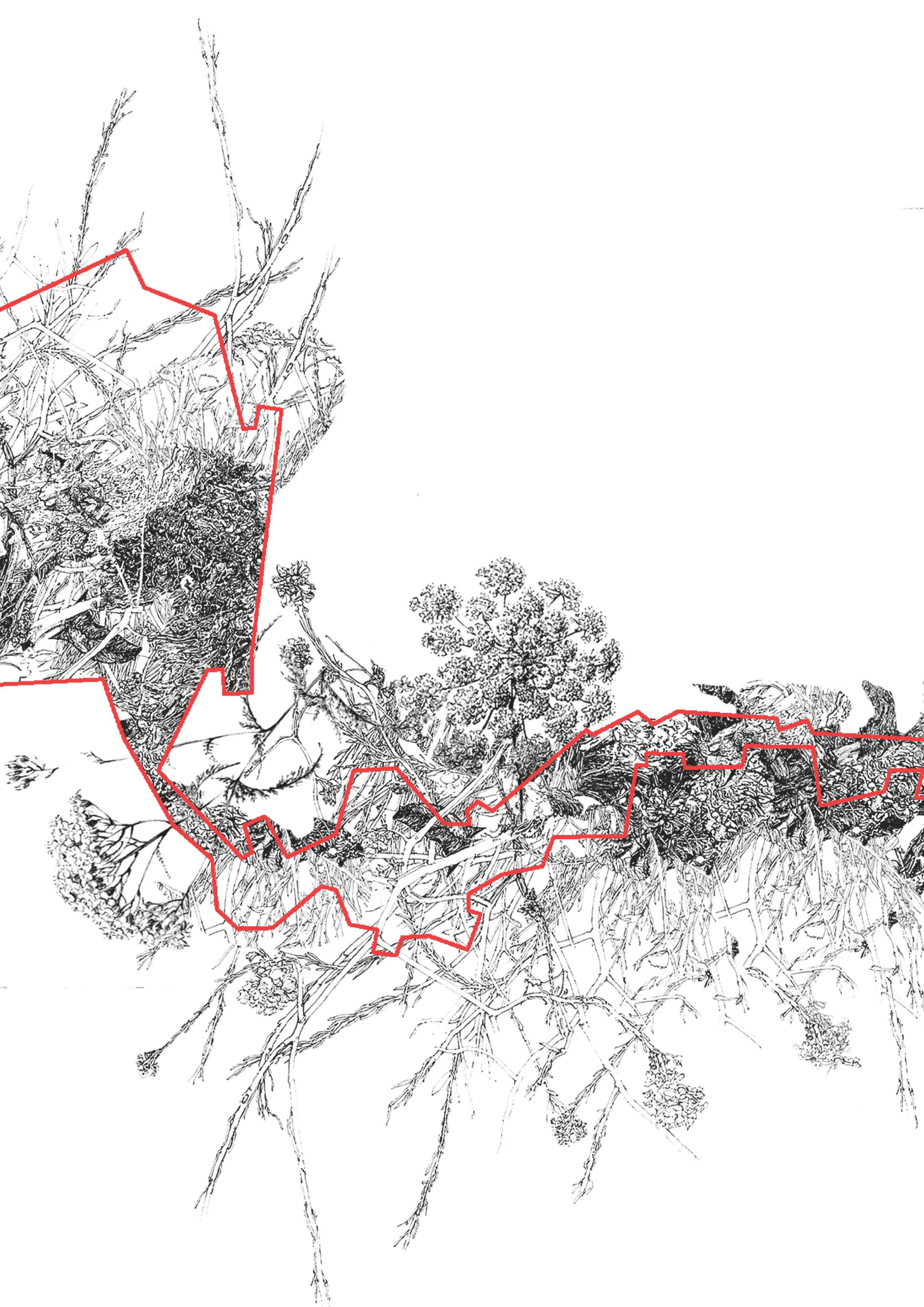


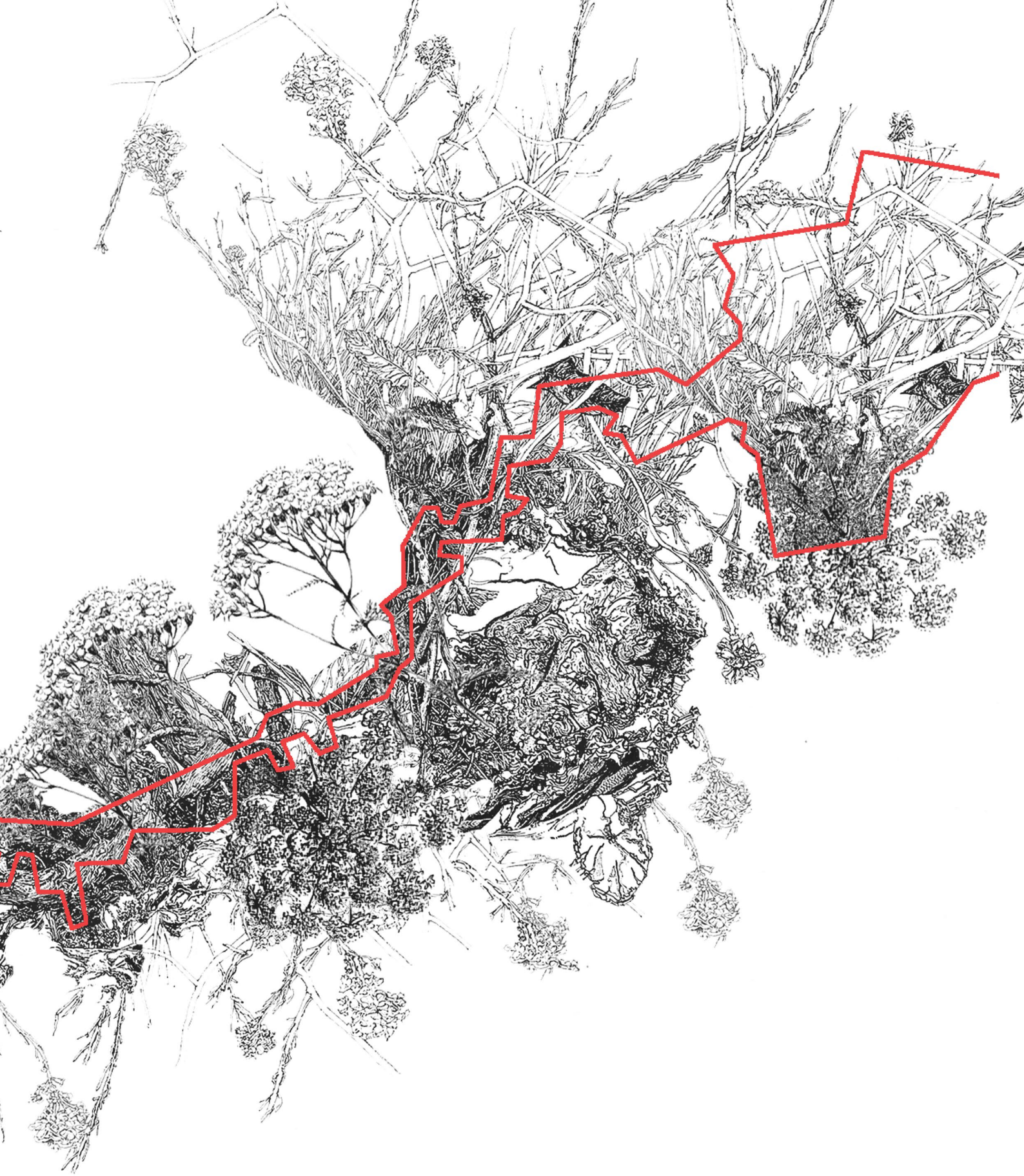


Figure 7 (left) *Nurseries for Nicosia*, Ella Murrell

Figure 8 (right) *Stitching the Buffer Zone*, Ella Murrell

Figure 9 (next page) *Rewilding the Buffer Zone*, Jasmine Howarth





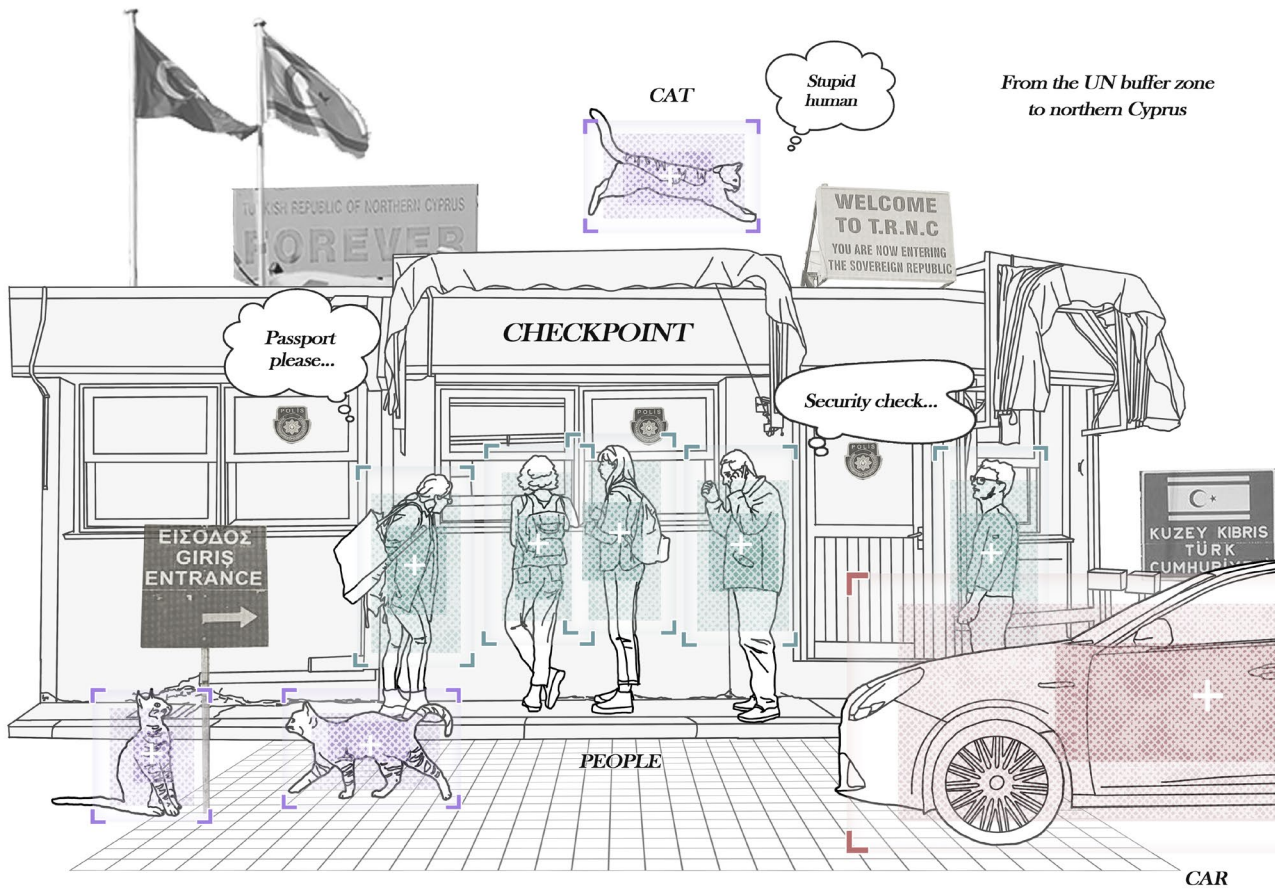


Figure 10 *Crossing the Border*, Shunshun Zhang





Figure 11 *Networks of Care*, Fenella Pakeman



Figure 12 *Mapping Acts of Resistance*, Harry Lord



Figure 13 *The Commoning*, Eleanor Moselle



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Cith Skelcher is an architect trained at Cambridge University. She is a university teacher at Sheffield School of Architecture where she has led the MArch programme and taught her design studio 'Invisible Cities' for five years.

