

Rome, 24th January 2020

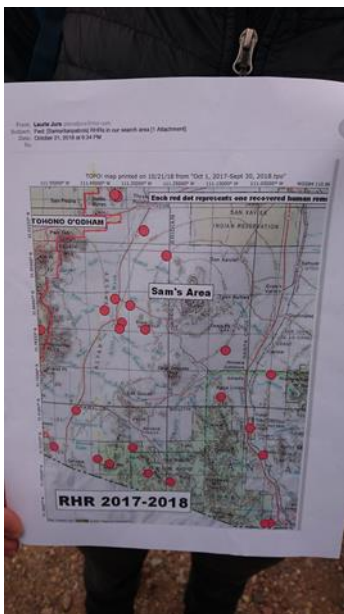
Remembering

Just as the Mediterranean Sea gives up bodies, so too does the Sonoran Desert, on the US/Mexico border. Other deserts may undulate with red waves of sand; this one is spiked with cactus, scattered with rocks and overlooked by mountains. It is an eerily beautiful landscape, deadly in its aridity.



Those who live on its edges and walk its trails know well that others attempt to cross this place out of necessity, often ill-equipped and unfamiliar with the terrain. Every now and then, the wild scrub is witness to that, harbouring evidence of desperate journeys which have ended in death.

Red dots mark these sites on maps produced by the local medical examiner. However, a local conceptual artist, Alvaro Enciso¹, is working to honour those whose bones have been found in the desert itself. Every Tuesday Alvaro makes a pilgrimage to the desert to collect and to plant. He is collecting materials and planting crosses.



¹ <https://www.instagram.com/aencisoart/>

Alvaro's decision to use the cross as a symbol was carefully considered. The cross is not intended to ascribe faith to the lost migrants, nor to use their deaths to proselytise. Here, the cross represents a place of encounter, where paths cross, where death (horizontal) meets life (vertical), recalling the cross as an instrument of death and suffering, used by (Roman) authorities to kill and to deter.

Migration policy across the world includes those elements of death and deterrence. If that were not so, migrants, like any other person whose life is at risk, could count on rescue from sea and from desert. They cannot. The lives lost are less valuable, it seems, than the political point being made.

At a workshop at the 2020 Common Ground on the Border arts festival in Sahuarita, Arizona, a group of us worked with Alvaro on the crosses, each bearing a red dot as a link to the maps which trace the sites. Some, too, incorporated objects scavenged from the desert, that unsought resting place.



It is often impossible to determine who has died, for the desert is not kind to the dead. Bodies are carrion for the animals who live there and it may be years before remains are found. The remains of over 3,000 have been gathered since 2001, as have countless objects such as clothing, backpacks and shoes. As we walked to pay our respects at some of those memorials, we heard poetry and songs also found on scraps of paper at some resting places: cries unheard in the barren landscape.

We may not know their names but we can make them more than statistics. The act of remembering reminds us that these are people, not numbers, every individual lost matching someone missing from a family and a community many miles away.

Alvaro's project is called *Donde Mueren Los Suenos* (Where Dreams Die).