

## **BORDER BARRIERS: A DIFFERENT LOCKDOWN**

**Pamela Dodds**

When Toronto went into Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in March 2020, I was in the studio beginning a new body of work in copper plate etching. My previous work has been primarily in linocut and woodcut. A core inspiration has been the complexities of human relationships and my curiosity about how human beings succeed or fail to engage across barriers, whether emotional or historical, intimate or societal. A political perspective has always underpinned these explorations of intimacy and relationship. In new work, I would address the societal factors, rather than the personal factors, that affect individuals and interactions. My perspective had shifted towards global events, leading to a shift in medium, subject matter and imagery.

Using the facilities at Toronto's well-equipped print shop, Open Studio, the large hotplate for applying hard ground, the rosin box for aquatint, the acid baths to etch the plate, I began the work in intaglio, creating tones and textures, so different from relief impressions. And then, in March, the city shut down. Businesses and schools closed, my teaching gigs ended, and Toronto's pedestrian-crowded sidewalks and traffic-jammed streets became eerily deserted. Open Studio closed too and, with that, my access to the facilities for etching.

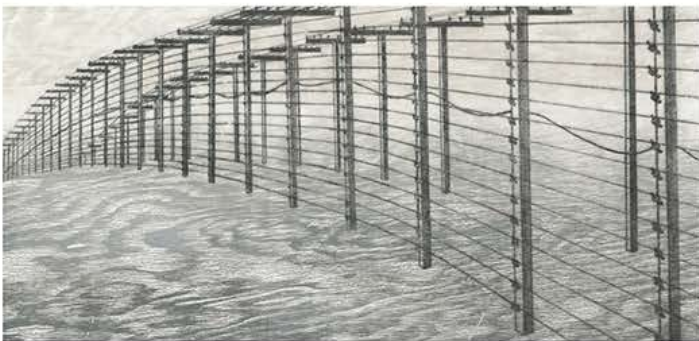
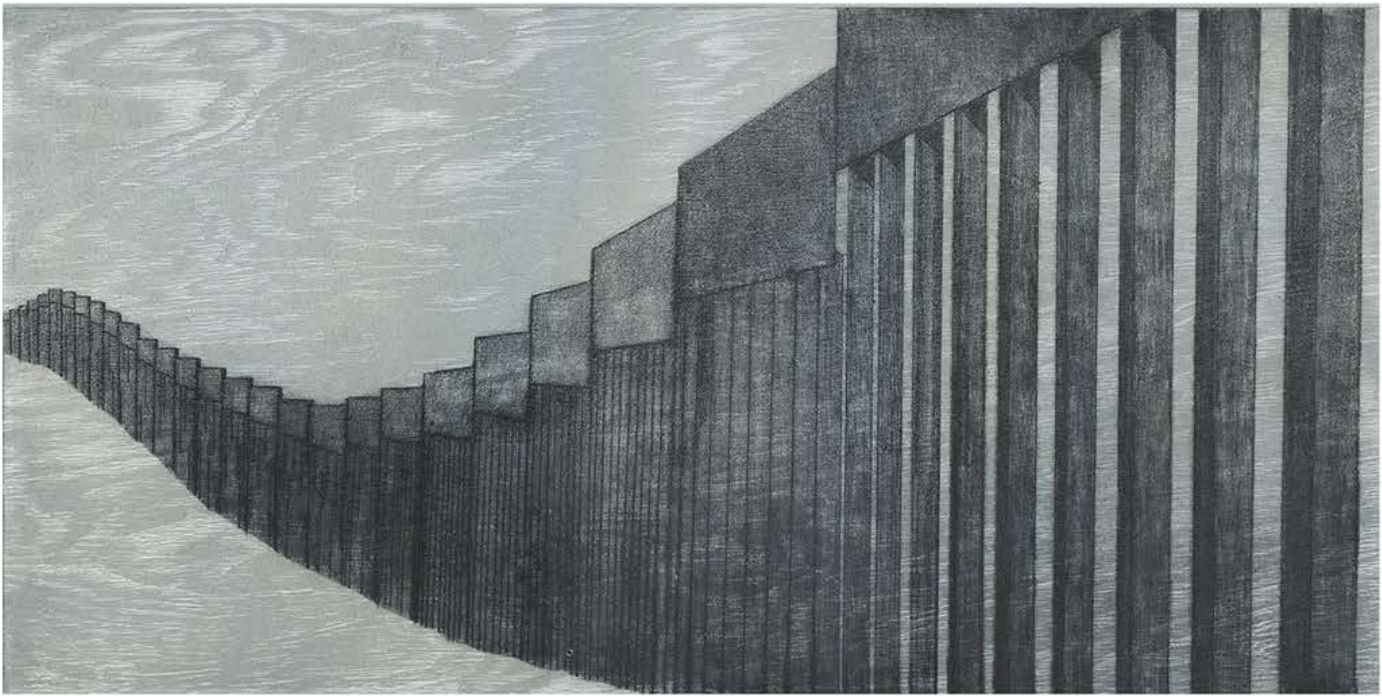
The pandemic lockdown meant that etching was out of the question, but fortunately, I had a home studio with a small press. Printing would still be possible. Experimenting with materials at hand, my thoughts turned to drypoint. I felt drawn to this direct method of



scratching an image onto the plate, a less process-intense method like woodcut and linocut. In fact, I found drypoint suited my temperament and imagery. It could provide a particularly visceral impression. With daily life cancelled and movement restricted, and with government relief soon in the offing, an expanse of space and time opened before me. The early pandemic times arrived with disorienting challenges and troubling uncertainties, and yet, the lockdown had brought me to the right medium for my work, and the time and space for focused creation.

The event that had crystalized the new direction of my new work had emerged in the headlines several years earlier, a different kind of lockdown, one that has seriously affected certain populations directly and others insidiously, the Refugee Crisis of 2015. This migration of people into Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries had been steadily rising for several years. In 2012, Greece built a barbed wire fence on its border with Turkey, a primary migration route into Europe. Images appeared in the news of desperate and destitute families stranded





behind fences. As people sought alternate routes, more European countries, including Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Hungary and Slovenia, built fences and walls and increased surveillance. Then, on another continent, building “The Wall” on the US-Mexico border became a political rallying cry and controversy.

Since the early 2000s there has been an exponential rise in the building of border barriers throughout the world to control the movement of people, from about 15 to more than 70 today. I see this phenomenon of wall building on the borders of countries and territories, as a concrete manifestation of the current social and political extremism and divide. Fear, distrust, misconception and ego manifest as racism, tribalism, nationalism, populism. A particularly tragic barrier looms in the form of the concrete walls and high-tech fences that separate Israel/Palestine. In my pandemic bubble, I created a drawing of this wall and, reviewing documentary photos on the web, made drawings of the US-Mexico barrier and others, including the Greece-Turkey barrier, the Spain-Morocco barriers that surround

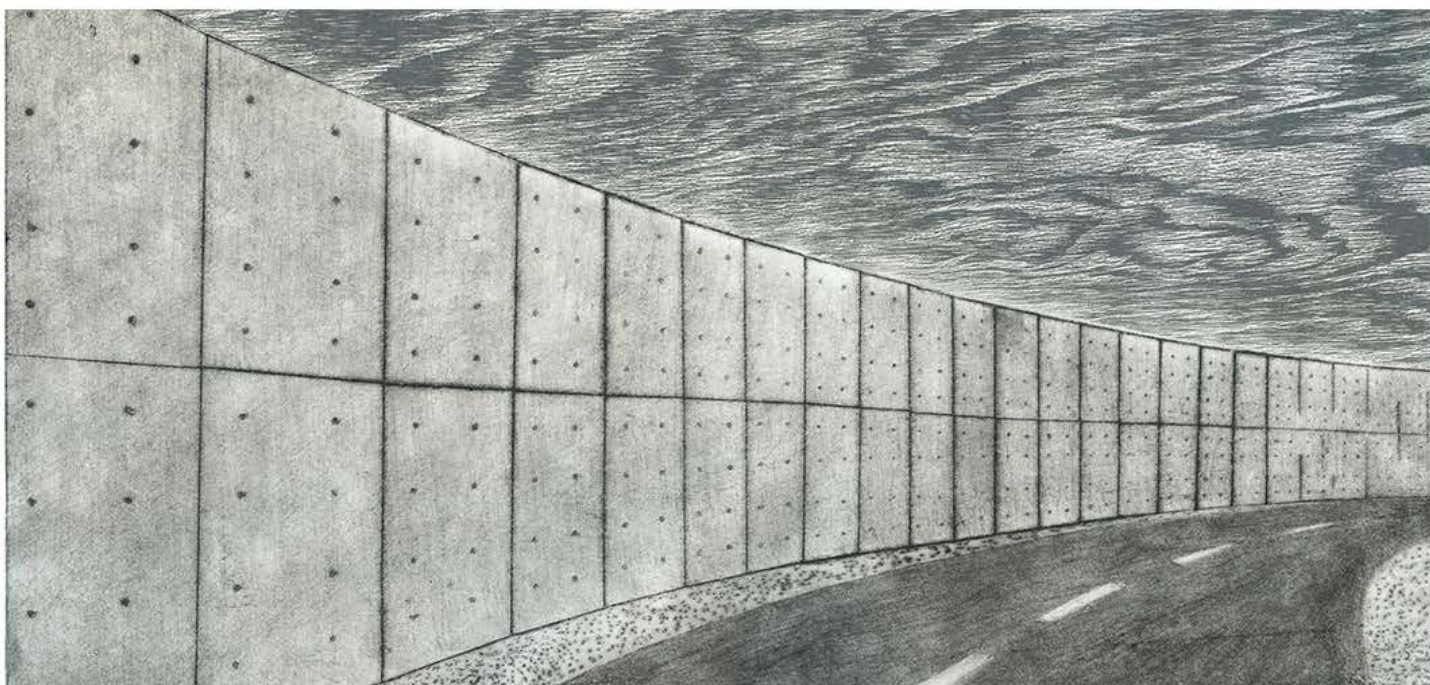
the North African Spanish territories of Ceuta and Melilla and the India-Bangladesh barrier.

I chose a format, an image size of 8 x 16 inches, for the drawings that would allow for a detailed foreground view of the structure, while also highlighting the vast length of these barriers. I explored mark-making, developing lines with a variety of tools, creating textures using different grades of sandpaper. I sent away for a couple of roulettes. I made the decision to use PETG plastic instead of metal, which was available and affordable. I tested the properties of different inks.

The prints emphasize the severity of the barrier architecture by omitting visual representation of the specific surroundings. Instead, a relief under-print of wood grain texture evokes an impression of land and sky and an allusion to the natural world and wildlife, which these walls also disrupt. I chose a rag paper of a cement grey colour, referencing the materials of wall-building. In order to maintain a full range of value, the relief wood grain pattern and then the drypoint image of the barrier are printed on white washi (Japanese paper). The print is then pasted, via chine collé, onto the larger grey paper. In some prints, an additional relief layer is printed in grey. Cut from a roll of window screen, this impression serves to represent chain link fencing.

The pandemic has been disorienting and frightening. For people with children, or illnesses, or cramped or poor living conditions, or frontline work, it is an overwhelming and endless crisis. As in the rest of the world, the pandemic has disrupted people faced by border barriers and has exacerbated illnesses and deaths. These structures continue to be upgraded with motion sensors, infrared cameras,



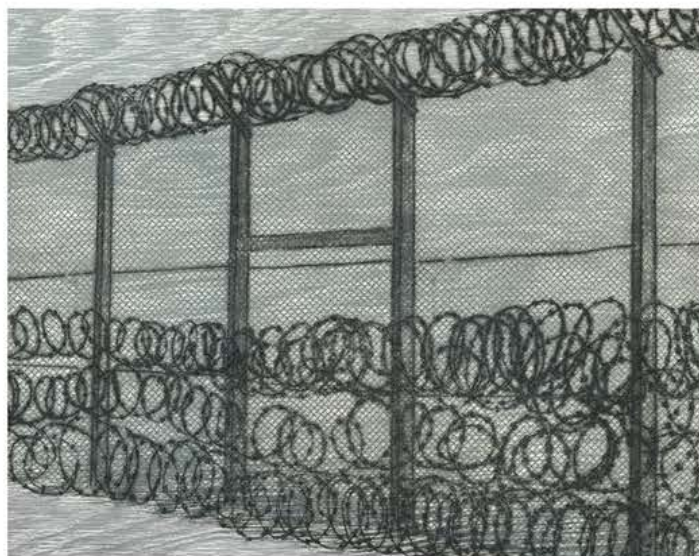


military patrols and aerial surveillance. Governments have regulations and protocols to control and process immigration legally. These are restrictive, prohibitive, and historically and systemically racist and xenophobic. They do not provide flexibility for large numbers of people urgently on the move. Many countries are experiencing labour shortages. While corporations freely ship raw materials, parts and products from country to country across the globe, and take advantage of the lowest wages in the poorest countries for their factories, workers of every capacity, from laborer to professional, are up against a wall, shut out from opportunities to escape danger and chaos and to thrive as productive members of society.

The pandemic has peeled back the reflective surface of society, laying bare the inequities of the world, inspiring protest and demanding change. As I research, draw and print the fences and walls of the world, I reflect on the core inspiration for my work that asks what sort of strength, courage and fortitude does it take to reach across the gulf of estrangement between two worlds, between two people, between me and you?

### Artist Information

In her printmaking and painting practice, Pamela Dodds explores the complexities and challenges of human relationships through a feminist lens. Her work is exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in Canada and the USA, and recently in Spain, Norway and the UK. Her work has been reviewed in publications and blogs including Art New England, Boston Globe, Cleveland Scene, Collective Arts Journal and Globe and Mail. She has been an invited speaker at Ontario College of Art and Design University, University of Ottawa, and Kwantlen Polytechnic University and employed as a master printer and



educator. She has been awarded residencies and fellowships in Canada, USA and Europe, and has received grants, including from the Ontario Arts Council and Gottlieb Foundation. Her work has been purchased for collections such as Capital One Bank, Ontario, Boston Public Library, MA, Purdue University, IL, Cleveland Museum of Art, OH. She lives and works in Toronto.

pd1studio@gmail.com

pameladodds.net, facebook.com/pameladodds.visualartist, instagram.com/pameladoddsstudio/

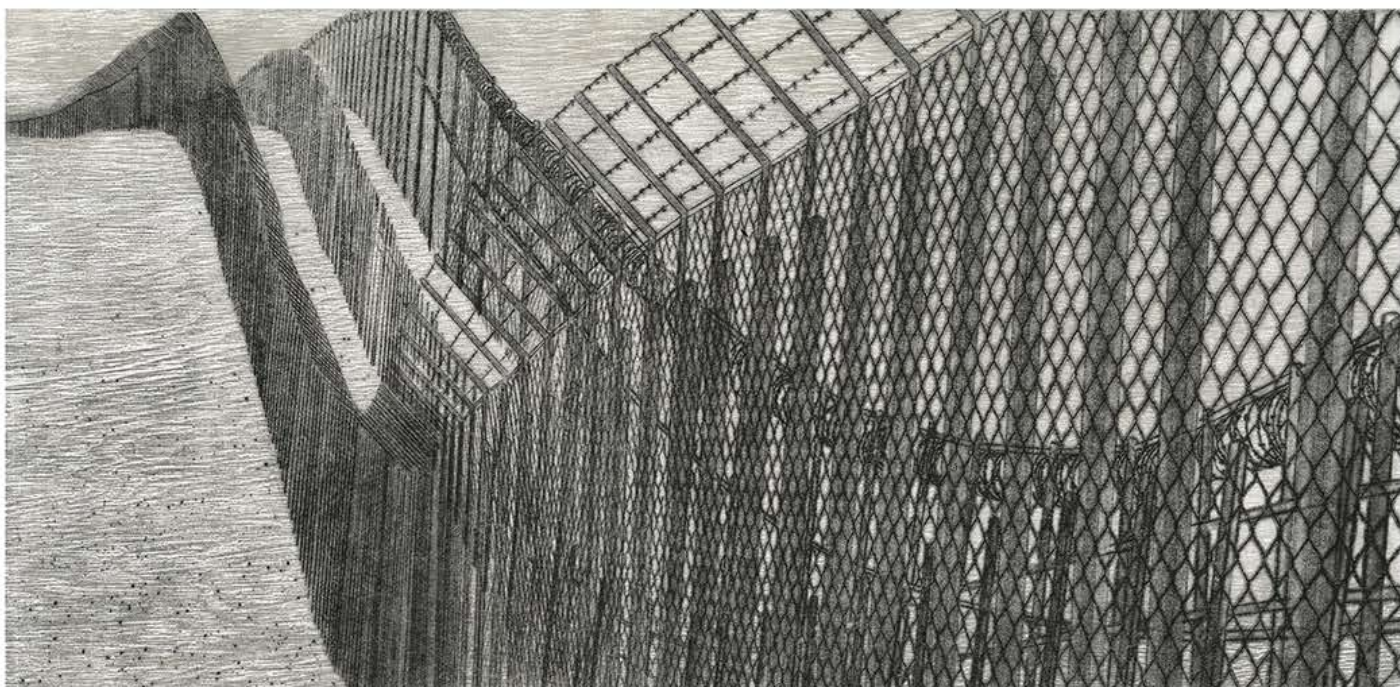
This project is supported by The Ontario Arts Council.

### Image Documentation

*Israel-West Bank, Palestine Separation Barrier*, dry point & relief print on paper, 8" x 16", 2020

*Turkey-Syria Border Barrier*, dry point & relief print on paper, 8" x 16", 2021





*USA-Mexico Border Barrier (at Tijuana)*, dry point & relief print on paper, 8" x 16", 2020

*Uzbekistan-Afghanistan Border Barrier*, dry point & relief print on paper, 8" x 16", 2021

*Argentina-Paraguay Bridge Barrier (at Posadas)*, dry point & relief print on paper, 8" x 16", 2021

*Hungary-Serbia Border Barrier*, detail, dry point & relief print on paper, 2020

*Spain-Morocco Border Barrier (at Ceuta)*, dry point & relief print on paper, 8" x 16", 2020

*India-Bangladesh Border Barrier*, detail, dry point & relief print on paper, 2021

*Latvia-Russia Border Barrier*, dry point & relief print on paper, 11" x 19", size includes paper, 2021

