

Under Seal

The Sealed Border Between Sovereignty and Submersion

by Arslohgo



Arslohgo, "Under Seal", Digital composition, 4961 × 3508 pixels, CMYK color space, 300 DPI.

Arslohgo's "Under Seal" operates with remarkable semantic complexity, emerging from the superimposition of a seascape and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection seal. The title unfolds its layers of meaning through the tension between English homophony and German translation possibilities: "Under Seal" as legally sealed, classified, or beneath the official emblem meets the visual presence of the sea, evoking both the English ocean and the German verb for seeing.

Institutional Drowning: The Eagle Submerged

Through the transparent overlay of the government seal onto churning ocean waves, the work constructs a zone of indeterminacy. The official emblem—with its eagle symbolizing American sovereignty—is literally submerged, undergoing a kind of institutional drowning. The waves do not merely break as physical force through the image but symbolically breach the authority of the state seal itself.

The seal's transparency reads as a deliberate strategy for making power structures visible while simultaneously revealing their fragility. The Department of Homeland Security appears like reality's watermark—present but not fully graspable, authoritative yet eroded by natural forces. The Latin motto, originally reading “Semper Vigilans” (Always Vigilant), becomes illegible through wave distortion, losing its protective function.

Under Sea-l: The Neologism as Border Critique

Particularly revealing is the reading of the compound “Under-Sea-l”—a fusion of “undersea” and “seal.” This neologism points to the permeability of supposedly impenetrable borders. The ocean, as the ultimate space of fluidity and movement, undermines the static authority of the border seal. The brownish-green water colors do not suggest an idyllic seascape but rather liminal waters—possibly border rivers or coastal regions where categories of land and water, national territory and international waters, dissolve into each other.

The Anthropocene Border: Rising Tides and Post-Territorial Futures

Within the Sea Series context, Arsloho develops a critical iconography of border regimes in the Anthropocene. The work anticipates an era when rising sea levels will literally submerge the cartographic certainties of nation-state boundaries. The piece thus operates as a prophetic document of a post-territorial future, where seals of state authority are washed away by history's tides.

The ambiguity of the German “Robbe”—the marine mammal—alongside the English “seal” opens another interpretive layer: the sea creature navigating between elements becomes a metaphor for migration and border crossing. “Under Seal” thus becomes an argument for recognizing the fundamental porosity of all borders—whether geographic, political, or semantic.

Under + Sea + l. The eagle drowns. “Semper Vigilans” dissolves in the waves. The seal that classifies, the seal that swims, the sea that sees: three readings, one watermark. Homeland Security's emblem becomes a transparency—authority made porous by the force it was never designed to contain.