The eruv is a collage drawing in space made with wire and urban materials. The talmud describes the eruv in terms of post and lintel construction, the architectural form most common in the time and place in which it was written. While a picket fence easily outlines the limits of someone’s property, the Tractate Eruvin assumes an arrangement less common today, of a mews in which several houses form a common courtyard. This courtyard can be seen as a shared space, but if there are any openings from the mews to another street the talmud’s rigor requires clarification and offers a solution: build a doorframe around the opening. In this way everyone within the mews can clearly see its limit. In contemporary practice, wooden lintels have been replaced by wire ones. As long as the wire is taut and passes directly over the posts, it does not have to touch them, and supports nothing. Indeed, the Talmud accepts a fence composed solely of these “doorways.”

But as an assemblage made of wire, fence, brick, etc., an eruv refers to other art historical ideas of sculpture and collage. Catherine de Zegher, former director of the Drawing Center in New York, writes: “Cubist collage stresses both the flatness of the two-dimensional plane and the literal construction of reality... As drawn outlines combined with the edges of cut papers, imaginary and real contours fused in a single place, provoked a tension in the surface.”1 Similarly “imaginary and real” limits are united to form an eruv’s boundary.

Within this assembled boundary, the eruv creates a legal fiction that blends multiple homes into one family unit. The word “eruv” means “blending” and refers to the extended family and communal meal. It allows people to carry children and food over to friends’ houses to share the joy of the Sabbath as if living within one home. One common belief sees the eruv as a loophole that loosens tight religious restrictions, but this view overlooks the community an eruv can create. Rabbis were always aware that we are, after all, people with human relations. The eruv negotiates between religious restriction and human experience and the Talmud balances the strengthening of community with rigid law.

For this reason de Zegher’s writing can illuminate one further aspect of the eruv. She writes with regard to wire artworks, “In this new conception of drawing, with interdependency stressed [between line and ground] and not subservience, and with the recognition that a single mark can articulate and change the background itself—the order of our social reality—drawing becomes a rare ‘open’ space in our contemporary world...”2 The eruv-cum-drawing does not merely delineate a boundary that defines within and without, it overlays another social structure upon a neighborhood.

My work considers the maps of these urban environments. I use thread to emulate the wire that is used to complete an eruv, and sew through the paper to suggest the way the eruv line weaves in and around a neighborhood. The silhouettes of the maps that I choose help show the ingenious problem solving required by expanding neighborhoods and geographic challenges. I’ve also found that eruvin constellate around urban centers.

Venice Eruv (2007) shows the canals that must be navigated as city streets pass over water and under buildings. It includes the historical ghetto and extends as far as Piazza San Marco. Five Towns Eruv (2010) shows different eruvin nesting close to each other. These patterns reflect local demographics. Manhattan Eruv, Three Times (2011) and Rockland Eruv (2011) show the way these spaces change over a

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1 Catherine de Zegher and Cornelia Butler, On Line (New York: Museum of Modern Art, NY, 2010), 27.

period of time. As the eruv grows, the map reflects the challenges to its placement and the choices consequently made.

In 2010, I installed *The Residents of Chelm visit the Mexican War Streets*, for “Gestures 14,” an exhibition at the Mattress Factory in the Mexican War Streets neighborhood of Pittsburgh. I used one continuous looped line of wire and permanent marker as an artistic eruv; the line’s twists and turns copied architectural details, wooden moldings and decorative eaves characteristic of the historical district around the museum. I also drew on the windows of the gallery, my lines overlapping the distant views. The view from one window included a chair that was sometimes in position and sometimes not. I imagined the inhabitants of Chelm, the village of fools from Yiddish folklore, trying to construct an eruv in modern-day Pittsburgh. In my imagination the drawn line was created by the relentless hammering of coarse wire around doors and up walls, obsessively wrapping buildings to ensure the eruv’s continuity.

Through this work, I have grown to appreciate the rigor and delicacy of an eruv’s regulation but also the ingenuity it requires. More broadly, Jewish Law continues to be a fulfilling source of subject matter. While some regard law as more constraining than liberating, it is in many respects the exact opposite. To determine the location and extent of this space for creativity within law is fast becoming my current project.