The artist Stefan Brüggemann woke up at his London apartment last Wednesday to Donald Trump declaring he had won the presidency. It was, of course, a lie. "The second I turned on YouTube, I saw him and Mike Pence declare victory," Brüggemann says.

It was a moment that epitomized the political climate in which the Mexican-German artist had launched his latest project, which tackles the interchangeability of fact and deception. On the day of the US election Brüggemann unveiled two neon words – "Truth" and "Lie" – perched on a billboard at the US Mexico border.

At six feet height and beaming in red, white and blue, Truth/Lie can be read in two ways. When viewed from San Diego towards Tijuana, Baja California, it spells "TRUTH"; when viewed from Mexico, the word "LIE" is framed against the backdrop of a mountainous American landscape.

Brüggemann, whose career spans several decades, seeks to highlight how the meaning of two seemingly straightforward words has been diluted in an era of political polarization and ideological chaos.

"The notions of truth and lie have eroded," he says, "and layers of global crises only contribute to this muddling." He hopes his billboard will offer viewers "a moment of reflection" – a "sublime and subtle" experience of encountering the work from either end, regardless of national or political affiliation.

Brüggemann didn't set out to create a work about the border crisis; rather, the location found him. He initially envisioned the work with an urban backdrop, and considered New York, Berlin and Dubai. But when a Mexican curator suggested a three-story building, where Brüggemann learned someone had dug a hole from Mexico to the US more than a decade ago, he realized the setting would speak not only to the political moment, but to the more poetic idea of borders as a symbol of the "limitations and meaning of language".

Speaking about Truth/Lie, he says he enjoys the location's spacious and muted backdrop for the words, which he executed in an Arial typeface. His concept was also inspired by an interest, as he puts it, in laconic thinking, which he describes as "using simple words to convey meaning". He chose neon, a medium he occasionally works with, for its tension between fragility and bold visual impact. "It's just gas and glass, but when neon is there, you cannot look away," he says.

His original plan was to create a rapidly rotating sign that would make the words illegible – a blur of red, white and blue hues. The technical complexities of creating a rotating structure, however, would have delayed things, and the urgency of unveiling it on election day weighed heavier.

The 45-year-old has spent much of his career playing with words, and enjoys subverting both their aesthetic and ideological natures. Some of his recent projects – such as in *Headlines and Last Line in the Movies* series (2016), or his *Beats per Minute paintings* (2017-ongoing) – have involved words lifted from newspapers, smart devices, films and vinyl records.

Brüggemann began his career in London, where he attended art school. He later befriended Malcolm McLaren and became seduced by the city's punk scene. (Brüggemann's own version of punk is scattering hidden typos in his paintings for the sharp eye to spot.)

Born to a German father and a Mexican mother in Mexico City, Brüggemann considers himself a product of the mixed sense of identity that results from globalization. "In Mexico, I have a very German name; in Germany, I am considered Mexican; and, in the UK, I am totally foreign."

And, while he could not participate in the US election, he speaks as someone who, like many around the world, is vulnerable to its far-reaching implications. "The whole world is watching the process because it feels like if the US fails, others will follow up."

https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/nov/14/truth-and-lie-have-eroded-why-an-artist-took-over-a-billboard-at-the-us-mexico-border