

## **Visual Ecology for Galleries and Museums: Antonio Guerra and the Renewal of Landscape Photography**

### **Ecología visual para galerías y museos: Antonio Guerra y la renovación de la fotografía de paisaje**

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#### **Abstract:**

Antonio Guerra (Zamora, 1983) is a young photographer whose body of work displays remarkable coherence across a wide range of themes, skilfully combining aesthetic contemplation with incisive conceptual inquiry. Trained in the era of post-photography (Joan Fontcuberta), his multidisciplinary artistic installations invite viewers to reflect on landscape as an ideological construction, while simultaneously promoting a respectful engagement with nature. Through a medium traditionally linked to mass reproduction and ubiquity—according to Walter Benjamin’s renowned theories—his work evokes “auratic” experiences in galleries and museums, reminiscent of the conceptual and contemplative effects characteristic of Land Art. In order to reveal both the continuity and the innovation in this artist’s practice, this study examines both the evolution of landscape in traditional art forms, as well as the integration of photography within the broader realm of contemporary artistic production.

#### **Resumen:**

Antonio Guerra (Zamora, 1983) es un joven fotógrafo con una trayectoria de admirable coherencia en su variedad de propuestas temáticas, que combinan magistralmente la contemplación estética con una aguda indagación conceptual. Formado en la era de la postfotografía (Joan Fontcuberta), sus instalaciones artísticas multidisciplinares invitan al espectador a reflexionar sobre el paisaje como construcción ideológica a la vez que estimulan un acercamiento respetuoso a la naturaleza. A través de un lenguaje tradicionalmente vinculado a la reproducción masiva y a la ubicuidad, según las famosas teorías de Walter Benjamin, se consiguen efectos de experiencia «aurática» en galerías y museos, que recuerdan al estímulo conceptual y contemplativo provocado por el Land Art. Para mostrar la tradición y la novedad de este artista, se analiza tanto la evolución del paisaje en las artes tradicionales como la integración de la fotografía en el contexto de otras creaciones artísticas contemporáneas.

**Keywords:** Post-photography; Installations; Land Art; Museums and Galleries; Aura; Landscape.

**Palabras clave:** Postfotografía; instalaciones; Land art; museos y galerías; aura; paisaje.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose and Methodology

Although the starting point for this article is to showcase the work of artist-photographer Antonio Guerra, its methodology is grounded in a critical review of the very concept of landscape throughout the history of Western art. By seeking a synthesis that enhances our understanding of Guerra's recent contributions, the article also retrospectively highlights key aspects that clarify the evolution of the landscape genre in the modern era. This evolution is shaped both by the influence of the historical avant-gardes and by more recent technological and cultural transformations, which have pushed photographers toward conceptual and multidisciplinary territories, thereby expanding the field of photography itself.

### 1.2. The Art of Landscape

One of the most significant theoretical developments in modernity and postmodernity concerns the landscape genre. Its importance extends far beyond art criticism, art history, or symbolic representation: landscape occupies a central position in philosophical debate and permeates all spheres of social life and contemporary political discourse.

Long before environmental awareness assumed prominence, it was generally accepted—at least in the Western world—that the landscape genre held an active stance toward nature, whether in observing it or in representing the human construct we call “landscape.” In the very philosophical origins of the term, both the notion of *Chóra-χώρα* (the demiurge's spatial material, according to Plato) and *Hyle-ύλη* (the articulation of space grounded in human experience, according to Aristotle)<sup>1</sup> presuppose that landscape involves a subjective and transformative vision of nature, whether as something contemplated or something recreated in an image.

We cannot speak with certainty about the Greek representations of landscape, which is why it is widely accepted in academic circles that the pictorial rendering of landscape in Western art emerged as an independent genre in seventeenth-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example Georg Simmel, (2013) *Filosofía del Paisaje*, Madrid: Casimiro.

century Holland (Berque, 1995, pp. 34–35)<sup>2</sup>. Gombrich places this Northern “discovery” on a par with the painters of the Roman countryside—such as Poussin and Claude Lorrain—whose works shaped the collective imaginary of the picturesque landscape in the West. Their influence eventually extended to the design of seemingly natural English romantic gardens, which would later be widely imitated around the globe (Gombrich, 1997, p. 397).

Photography’s early claim to serve as a “mirror with memory” of reality (as Daguerre himself described it, Lemagny, 1992) directly challenged the idea of landscape as a construct that reduces nature to dominant mental and cultural paradigms. Unlike other modes of representation, photography was considered technically objective, scientific, and therefore truthful. For decades in popular culture, “landscape” and “nature” appeared to merge into a single, deceptive construct, reinforced by the prestige of science.

It is illuminating, however, that the supposed “truth” of photography—unmasked by Joan Fontcuberta in many of his essays (e.g., *El beso de Judas*, 1997; *Ciencia y fricción*, 1998; *Orogénesis*, 2007)<sup>3</sup> well before the advent of digitization and AI-driven photography—did not apply to pioneering landscape photographers such as Gustave Le Gray or Carleton E. Watkins. They approached nature in a consciously subjective way, drawing upon the pictorial traditions of their time, which straddled Romanticism and Realism (Naef, Stuffman & Christadler, 1993).

By the late nineteenth century, in the movements that preceded the photographic avant-garde, this subjective vision of landscape photography became widespread,

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<sup>2</sup> Augustin Berque, in *Les Raisons du paysage*, identified four criteria he deemed indispensable for discussing the existence of “landscape” within a given culture. These include: the presence in the language of one or more terms denoting the concept of “landscape”; the appearance of literary works that commemorate the aesthetic qualities of a particular space; the existence of pictorial representations of locales; and the development of gardening driven by aesthetic rather than purely utilitarian considerations. In the West, these criteria did not coalesce until the Renaissance and were only codified as an autonomous concept of landscape in seventeenth-century Holland—although in China they had already been established many centuries earlier.

<sup>3</sup> When Joan Fontcuberta speaks of “landscapes without memory” in connection with his 2007 series *Orogénesis*—an exhibition that examined the interplay between the traditional genre of landscape and the use of new technologies—he reaffirmed his argument against the misguided quest for that memory-laden mirror of nature heralded by the earliest daguerreotypes. Yet at the same time, he was also seeking a measure of clarity amid the confusion and blindness surrounding the very values that allowed photography to shape the modern gaze and enlighten our thinking (Martín de Madrid, 2020, pp. 96–105).

aligning with other representational arts that were already focusing more on personal expression and on the aesthetic value of the finished image than on the natural referent itself. For example, the Pictorialist photographers (the term *pictorialism* comes from “picture” in English) emulated the formalist and subjective approach to depicting nature characteristic of Impressionist and Symbolist painters.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the importance and conceptual primacy that landscape enjoyed as an autonomous genre in the nineteenth century—both in painting and in photography—it lost relevance during the historical avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. Interest in nature receded, sometimes viewed merely as a decorative vestige of the old regime to be surpassed, or even “fought with the machine” (Maderuelo, 2008, p. 12). Duchamp spoke dismissively of the “stupid landscape painter,” and this same condescension extended to the photographers of the disparaged Pictorialist movement. The city and industrial production rose to prominence in the works of the most influential avant-garde painters, photographers, and filmmakers (Latorre & Jiménez, 2021).

The revival of the natural landscape in Western art was gradual; one could argue that it did not fully return to centre stage until the late 1960s. This time, landscape was no longer confined to a framed image: it was sculptors—rather than painters or photographers—who led the shift back to nature, following a radical transformation of post-figurative sculpture.<sup>5</sup>

In October 1968, Robert Smithson organised an exhibition titled *Earthworks* at the Dwan Gallery in New York, featuring artists such as Walter de Maria, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Michael Heizer, and Dennis Oppenheim. The show included photographs of interventions carried out directly on the land, along with

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<sup>4</sup> During his 1886 lecture, “Photography; a Pictorial Art,” delivered at the London Camera Club, Peter H. Emerson championed a form of photography that sought to render reality directly, eschewing scenographic artifices or composite techniques, much in keeping with the theories of the Impressionist painters. Consequently, he preferred to refer to this style of photography as “naturalistic” (Emerson, 1886, pp. 138–139).

<sup>5</sup> In 1979, Rosalind Krauss’s article “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” made clear the change in direction this art form underwent starting in 1960 with the emergence of Minimalism and Land Art. Ever since, a vast literature has documented the expanded reach of abstract sculpture and its connection with nature. In this article, we will focus particularly on Javier Maderuelo’s research, which offers a superb synthesis of the prolific reflections on landscape in contemporary art.

proposals and models of planned works. Writing for the *New York Times*, Grace Glueck described it as heralding “a return to landscape,” albeit under assumptions starkly different from those that had once guided the realist painters of the Barbizon School or the early landscape photographers Gustave Le Gray and Carleton E. Watkins, along with their successors in turn-of-the-century Pictorialism.

### 1.3. Installations and Ready-Mades

In *El espacio raptado* [The abducted space] (1990), Javier Maderuelo offered a thorough examination of the transformations in sculpture since 1960, arguing that sculpture was entering into competition with architecture, a discipline to which it had previously been subordinate. One of the most significant developments that allowed sculpture to be compared with architecture was the shift in scale. Another was modernity’s expanded freedom in the choice of materials and techniques—iron, concrete, synthetic resins, polymers, and so on— together with riveting, gluing, welding for assemblages, and other industrial fabrication methods that had become firmly established. The increase in scale also responded to new demands arising from urban art and, above all, from the reinvention of landscape art through land art.

In this newly expanded—though not limitless—field, sculpture’s possibilities multiplied. Postmodern artists filled this broader territory while exercising considerable freedom in their choice of media—photographs, books, wall drawings, mirrors, or sculpture itself. We might note, too, that this evolution of sculpture—alongside abstract movements like Constructivism and De Stijl—was heavily influenced by the concept of the *ready-made*. As Rosalind Krauss has argued in *Lo fotográfico: Por una teoría de los desplazamientos* [The Photographic: For a Theory of Displacement] (2002, p. 76), the ready-made is inherently photographic and indexical. Just as the arts emulated “the photographic,” so too did the photography of the new topographic landscapists<sup>6</sup>— who continue to exert substantial influence—seem to follow in the wake of the

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<sup>6</sup> “*New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*” was a groundbreaking exhibition of contemporary landscape photography held at the George Eastman House (Rochester, New York) from October 1975 to February 1976 (cf. Jenkins, 1975).

*ready-made*. These photographers championed so-called “non-places,” industrial ruins, humanised or simply forgotten landscapes that the traditional landscape genre (prior to the avant-gardes) had largely overlooked.

Although the alliance between photography and land art is almost inevitable for documenting these interventions, documentary photographs were not generally viewed as genuinely artistic or as true landscapes—except in the case of Robert Smithson, who deemed the “non-site” crucial as a museum-based complement to the natural “site” (Holt, 1979). As Simón Marchán (1988, p. 217) has observed, without audiovisual mediation, the work could not exist for viewers. Yet the documentation provided by these recording media was highly fragmentary, leaving aspects unresolved and thereby requiring the viewer to complete the artistic experience in the actual territory, which the piece would occupy for the duration of its existence. The art was the intervention upon the terrain itself, hence the term *land* or *earth art*.

By distancing themselves from traditional exhibition spaces and venturing into nature, many land-art practitioners asserted an attitude opposed to consumerism—a stance shared by various avant-garde movements of the time reacting against Pop Art. In this sense, land art directly contested the capitalist system that confines artworks to commercial venues or to the veneration of their “aura,” as outlined in Walter Benjamin’s well-known ideas.

It was not until the late twentieth century that the photographs, videos, and maps documenting the making of land art—or attesting to its past existence—were commercialised and exhibited in galleries and museums. This marked a curious introduction of the “banal” photographic and cinematic into conventional exhibition venues—something Boris Groys predicted at the close of the millennium (1999, p. 85):

Thus, the only opportunity for art that depicts what is normal lies in the museum. Outside, everything is visually thrilling and successful, enticing the masses with the same old myths (alien invasions, apocalyptic stories of redemption, superhuman heroes, etc.): all of them fascinating and edifying, but devoid of anything genuinely new beyond what was already in the archives and collections of traditional art. To find the banal, omitted by the media because it does not

interest the general public, we must visit contemporary art museums. The presence of photography in museums is particularly revealing in this regard: the more a museum focuses on modern art, the more willing it is to exhibit photographs of everyday subjects that lack any overt formal aesthetic merit.<sup>7</sup>

As we shall see, although Antonio Guerra's work is indeed connected to this interventionist landscape tradition of land art, it diverges markedly from the original principle of fleeing into nature to escape the museum and the market. On the contrary, Guerra brings that "intervened" nature into the gallery, and does so not simply for commercial reasons but primarily for aesthetic—and, indeed, ecological—purposes. Before continuing, it is worth briefly introducing the artist who serves here as our paradigmatic point of reference.

## **2. Antonio Guerra's Photographic Installations**

Born in Zamora in 1983, Antonio Guerra is a young artist whose array of thematic and multidisciplinary proposals displays remarkable coherence. Rather than focusing obsessively on the fragility of the environment, Guerra's work highlights the artifice inherent in the landscape and the ways in which human interventions in nature have recently multiplied, largely due to digitization and the mass consumption of images—including landscapes—on the internet. Countering this trend, Guerra's photographic practice invites a visual-ecological approach through photographic installations reminiscent of land art. Below, we will briefly examine some of his more recent projects, in particular those produced since 2015, when he exhibited his landscape series *Less time than place* at the Domus Artium DA2 Museum in Salamanca. All of this work can be viewed on the artist's website.<sup>8</sup>

### **Ninguna ruta marcada (2016–2020)**

In *Ninguna ruta marcada* [No marked route], Guerra reflects on the myth of the road trip as a liberating and unprecedented exploratory experience, contrasting

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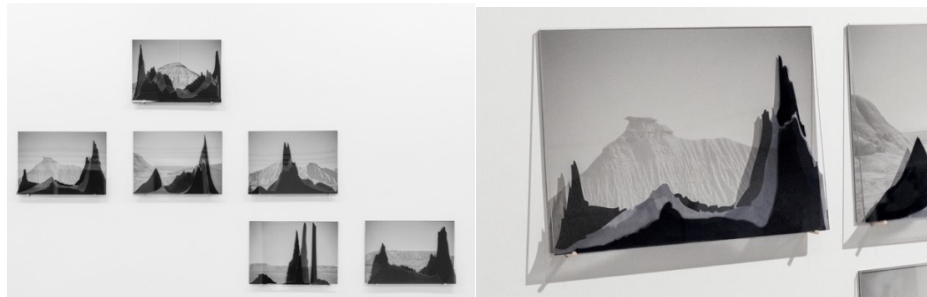
<sup>7</sup> Translated by Jorge Latorre. With the advent of digitization, Groys also explores photography in the digital age (Groys, 2008). For more on photography and museums, see also Limón (2011).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.antoniguerra.eu> (accessed 2/09/2024).

it with today's highly simulated experiences enabled by geolocation technologies. Drawing on the imaginary of mid-nineteenth-century photographers who documented the American West, and on the popular "road movie" culture that emerged after World War II, Guerra updates these mythic narratives for the post-photographic era. In the artist's own words:

This project aims to make visible a series of questions: How does technology influence the way we travel and our mode of representing the environment? How do we currently conceive of travel and its imaginary? How do we articulate this new relationship with place and territory? To what extent has the screen turned a 'new, open territory' into a single, predetermined 'marked destination'? (Guerra, 2023)

As noted by the exhibition curator, Nerea Ubieto (2023), in her McLuhan-inspired text "El medio es el paisaje" [The medium is the landscape], these works combine analogue and digital, past and present, the virtual and the material, production and appropriation, as well as the direct image and its technical translation.



F1. Ninguna Ruta Marcada, 2019-2020. *Conquistas*: 6 photographs, 24 × 33 cm each.  
Printed on paper + acrylic printing.  
<https://www.antoniguerra.eu/conquistas.html> © Antonio Guerra.

In the *Conquistas* [Conquests] series of landscape collages, Guerra superimposes histograms from digitised photographs by Timothy O'Sullivan and William Bell, printed on acrylic, onto his own images inspired by such landscapes [F1]. Beyond its conceptual reflection, the resulting work possesses a beauty reminiscent of Joan Fontcuberta's landscape projects—such as *Orogénesis*, discussed earlier. Likewise, the video and the photographs of blurred film stills from classic road movies evoke the same sense of an initiatory journey, typical of a heroic era that now seems superseded by the proliferation of technology and geolocators [F2]:



Over the course of various trips along secondary roads, I photographed the landscape as seen through my car window, with the GPS in front, obstructing my view and offering a new perspective on reading the territory. At a glance, we see both the real environment and its technological representation. The landscape appears out of focus, underscoring the technological device's dominance over the natural environment. (Guerra, 2023)



F2. Ninguna Ruta Marcada, 2019-2020. This work consists of 48 photographs in total, arranged as two murals of 24 images each. Dimensions of each photograph: 110 × 55 cm. <https://www.antonioguerra.eu/territorios.html> © Antonio Guerra.

These reflections recall Guerra's earlier piece, *Comportamiento para un simulacro* [Behaviour for a simulation] [F8], which explores a conflict inherent in the photographic image itself. The painter René Magritte had addressed this tension in *La clef des champs* [The field key] (1936), underscoring the idea that the landscape exists only as a copy of its representation. In Guerra's work, this longstanding Surrealist meditation is adapted to the new conditions of the post-photographic era. As Fontcuberta (2020, p. 6) points out:

What matters is not that photography becomes dematerialised into bits of information, but rather how these bits of information enable its rapid circulation. Google, Yahoo, Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, MySpace, Second Life, eBay, PayPal, Skype, etc. have transformed our lives and, in turn, the life of photography. In fact, "post-photogr@phy" is nothing other than photography adapted to our online existence.

Indeed, Guerra's *Mapa Borgesiano* [Borgesian Map] [F3] transports us to many of the reflections Fontcuberta advanced in his own photographic works, themselves deeply inspired by the Argentine writer-philosopher Jorge Luis Borges, as Laura Bravo (2003) has shown.



F3. Ninguna Ruta Marcada, 2019-2020. Mapas: <https://www.antonioguerra.eu/mapas.html>  
Expanded image. *Mapa Borgesiano*. Laser-cut metal with automotive paint. 120 × 75 cm each.  
© Antonio Guerra.

### **Comportamiento para un simulacro (2017–2018)**

In this photo-sculptural installation, Guerra highlights the multiple layers in the concept of a “ruin”—its historical and stratigraphic dimensions—and invites viewers to consider the models by which contemporary landscapes are constructed, the processes that transform them, and how they are perceived through photographic imagery [F7]. This line of inquiry likewise informs his more recent public exhibitions, *De continuo lo inestable* [Continually unstable] (2021–2023) and *Elevar la tierra, desaparecer* [Raise the earth, disappear] (2022–2023). The former was created at the abandoned ochre mines of Sabinar (Alicante). According to Guerra:

(...) You can see the ruins of buildings, the shifted earth, and the traces of excavations. Many of the mine shafts are covered with trees that climb up in search of light. Observing this led me to understand the significance of light penetrating those cavities, which gave rise to the project. By suspending, at various depths within these shafts, trays holding photographic paper along with rocks, ochre pigments, and other elements, I activate the landscape. These shafts become a sort of “camera obscura” that captures the light, exposing the paper. The site’s conditions—its morphology, size, angle of sunlight—determine how the images are generated. I’ve named this image-making process “Ochralumen.” The work is completed by a piece documenting the procedures and actions employed to create the images. (Guerra, 2023)



F4. *De continuo lo inestable*, 2023. *Ochralumen* transferred via pigment-based inks to Hahnemühle paper and steel. Dimensions: 140 × 42 × 6 cm each. Photograph illustrating the process. Dimensions: 80 × 60 cm. © Antonio Guerra.

This series [F4, F5, and F6] recall an earlier project entitled *Cielo Abierto* [Open Sky] (2019–2020), carried out at the Corta Pastora open-pit mine in Santa Lucía de Gordón (León). In that work, Guerra examined the impact of mining on both the landscape and the community at one of Spain’s last open-pit mines, then on the verge of closure. Pieces such as *De continuo lo inestable* [Continually unstable] speak to this complex social reality with direct repercussions for the landscape:

After researching the mining archives of León, Asturias, and Huelva, I collected hundreds of documents and photographs of life in the mines (work, landscapes, group portraits, etc.). I used these 35 mm and 6×9 negatives to “seal” cracks in a screw conveyor, subjecting the images to a process of invisibility akin to what is happening in the mining landscape today. The lives of the individuals captured in these photographs are harnessed to close the fissures of this extraction apparatus. (Guerra, 2023)



F5. *De continuo lo inestable*, 2021-2022. Archimedean extraction screw (wood), an ancient piece of equipment. 35 mm negatives from archival mining documentation in León, Asturias, and Huelva, plus acetates and prints on twill. © Antonio Guerra.



F6. *Elevar la tierra, desaparecer*. 2021-2022. Six production and printing devices, pigments, and printing powders. UV ink on acrylic. Photographs of arboreal structures in the Gossan–Copper tailings pond in Huelva. Acrylic and liquid. Dimensions: 47 × 26 × 25 cm. © Antonio Guerra.

Notably, Guerra created many of these pieces while simultaneously exhibiting earlier work under the title *Horizonte de Sucesos* [Event Horizon] at the Instituto Leonés de Cultura in 2020—a year when COVID-19 severely restricted the interactive aspect of the show. In this case, the limitation did not stem from remoteness or inaccessibility, as is common in land art that deliberately leaves museums and urban spaces behind, but rather from the impossibility of leaving one's home at all.

Although physical mobility came to an abrupt halt (at least in the most developed countries), virtual interconnectivity grew exponentially, rendering the distinction between “near” and “far” largely irrelevant. This interconnectedness created new opportunities but also new tensions, making us more aware of how various political, economic, ideological, scientific, technological, sociocultural, and environmental decisions can have sweeping consequences for both people and the natural world.

In this context, Antonio Guerra’s work appears as an invitation to recognise the accelerated transformation of reality brought about by our consumerist habits—whether physical or hyperconnected. Simultaneously, it heralds our longed-for return to museums and galleries, where we may discover a kind of visual ecology born of direct, shared engagement with artworks and with the people who come together to enjoy them in these spaces.

### **3. Antonio Guerra in the Classical and Modern Landscape Tradition**

#### **3.1. Nostalgia for Ruins**

With regard to the deterioration of nature, Guerra’s work takes up themes such as the ruin reinterpreted in the contemporary world. Here, mountains and forests operate as symbols of the past, prompting us to recall what they once were—and are no longer. Photography reinforces its documentary status, suffused with nostalgia, in the sense described by Susan Sontag (2006, p. 32):

Ours is a nostalgic age, and photographs actively promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Almost anything that is photographed acquires a certain pathos by virtue of being photographed. Something ugly or grotesque can be moving because the photographer’s attention has dignified it. Something beautiful can engender sadness because it has aged, decayed, or simply no longer exists. All photographs are memento mori.

The nostalgia thus emerges from the pain of being unable to return to sites that once provided human beings with a better life. In this sense, ecological crisis has found in art a powerful instrument for raising awareness.



F7. Installation shot from *Comportamiento para un simulacro*. © Antonio Guerra.

In *Comportamiento para un simulacro* [Behaviour for a simulation] [F7] Guerra brings into the museum space images of overlapping structures that could be either the edifices of the ancient world or the collapsed remains of contemporary buildings. Crumbling monuments, these ruins hark back to the photographs taken by early travellers like Francis Frith, whose albums on Egypt and Palestine stirred in affluent viewers precisely the sense of nostalgia Sontag describes. At the same time, ruins connect us with the memory of landscapes from bygone eras. Hence, in Antonio Guerra's photographs, ruins appear alongside images of quarries—abandoned or in use—and of mountains and forests. These are themselves stone and wood: materials art employs to construct its simulacra.

Like ruins, the body is another major topic in contemporary art, one with deep connections to landscape (Santamaría, 2015). Guerra insists upon a bodily commitment between viewer and artwork. In some of his series, such as *Ver de acción* [View of action] or *Less time than place*,<sup>9</sup> he explicitly references the body situated in natural environments. A female figure rests in a foetal position surrounded by stones, recalling the primordial image of the nest as a womb—or, after death, a return to Mother Earth.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.antonioguerra.eu/less.html> (accessed 2/09/2024)

In another image, a hand holds what appears to be the summit of a mountain; elsewhere, someone walks along a path that emerges in the middle of a field. In another photograph, we see a forest acting as the backdrop for a scene of a woman walking barefoot among posts made of tree trunks, evoking the notion of a vanished forest. All of these images clearly appeal to the senses and to the idea of placing the body “within” the landscape. For although landscape as a genre was traditionally highly visual, it has now shifted toward a fundamentally corporeal encounter between humans and territory (Breton, 2014).

Among many other installations, the gallery features several piles of photographic prints<sup>10</sup> that visitors can pick up and carry away, suggesting the process of depletion brought on by nature’s own erosion, as depicted in these photos. This is, therefore, a symbolic installation of the same direct, visual, and consumerist action humanity exerts upon the landscape. These installations invite parallels with Perejaume’s considerations in *Desescultura* [Unsculpture] (1991), which gave rise to an entire genre within sculpture. Perejaume made a cast of an existing cavity in a quarry, had a stonemason carve it in marble, then inscribed the word “Desescultura” on it and returned it to the quarry, effectively returning the piece to nature. It thus simultaneously references the genesis of sculpture and the excesses of human manipulation of the landscape—sculptural in Perejaume’s case, photographic in that of Antonio Guerra.



F8. *Comportamiento para un simulacro 8*, 2017-2018. Colour photograph, 100 × 140 cm. Mural installation carried out at the Porma Reservoir (León) during the 2017 drought. © Antonio Guerra.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.antonioguerra.eu/simulacro.html> (accessed 2/09/2024).

### 3.2. The Landscape Imitates Art as the Traveler Follows the Map

In Guerra's work, one finds a constant interrogation of the logic of "recognition" in perceiving the landscape—a logic defended by certain theorists at the end of the last century, such as Milani, Berger, and Roger. The latter argued that a "territory" (or country, *país* in Spanish) becomes "landscape" (*paisaje* in Spanish) through the mediation of the artistic gaze, in a process of "artification" that operates in two phases: first, *in situ*, when the artistic code is directly inscribed upon the physical terrain; and second, *in visu*, when art offers visual models to the collective eye (Roger, 2007, pp. 21–22; see also Arroyo, 2018). Confronted with these images, the viewer—far from experiencing an aesthetic emotion—finds themselves led to what the French sociologist Bernard Kalaora (1993) termed *cultural consummation*.

In the "Mapas" series from *Ninguna ruta marcada*, Guerra employs photography in a way comparable to Perejaume's "*desesculturas*," introducing a concept of "*desfotografía*" [unphotography] that restores truth to a landscape through intervention. That is, by adopting a gaze that questions the very photographic image and rekindles a sense of wonder in the viewer, Guerra challenges the mere *cultural consummation* commonly associated with notions of landscape or the mythic journey (the "Borgesian map" series).

Many of these pieces by Antonio Guerra reveal what we might call "the impossibility of seeing." Rather than merely presenting the viewer with an intellectual game that prompts a discourse around the artwork, his pieces first function as a sensory challenge that thwarts the typical, discursive response so prevalent in contemporary art. Logical thinking is thus disrupted, shifting the act of *understanding* (etymologically also implying the sense of "grasping") toward the act of *contemplation*, which entails respect, release, or "letting be" what one observes. Consequently, the eye is compelled to abandon its intellectual dimension in favour of the sensory. For in these works, it is not only language but also looking that plays a vital role in aesthetic appreciation—a gaze that retains a truth which vanishes the moment it is named.



Thus, Guerra's proposal relies not only on speaking but also on seeing, which disarms the viewer. As Josep Quetglas notes, "Truth resides in something as unstable as the gaze" (2021, p. 11). To truly see, the viewer must adopt a physical, even intentional, stance before the work. There is always an unbridgeable distance between the viewer and the piece which must also be acknowledged, as "seeing means accepting that which separates" (Quetglas, 2021, p. 17). This recognition is the essence of wonder.

Indeed, wonder or discovery is essential if one is to experience a genuine aesthetic encounter, as Lyotard (1998, pp. 185–186) suggests when linking such an experience to the idea of landscape as "the other," discovered after a journey:

There is landscape whenever the mind is displaced from one sensible realm to another, while preserving—at least in memory—the sensory organization pertinent to the former. The earth as viewed from the moon by a terrestrial observer; the countryside for the city-dweller, the city for the farmer... This *dépaysment* [literally "exile" or "estrangement"] would be a condition of landscape.

In our time, the overabundance of simulacra and reproductions of landscapes—along with the rigidity of written discourse that merely reaffirms what is already known about them—dulls the spontaneity of perception. This spontaneity, inherently unstable, is what enables discovery and allows the traveller, "exiled" from their familiar environment, to be truly astonished by a new landscape.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe observed that wonder is the highest state a traveller can attain. Yet in our era of geolocation, which restricts the possibility of discovery—a condition Antonio Guerra so vividly captures—we see echoes of the imaginary project conceived by Albert Speer during his confinement in Spandau Prison, where he was held from the Nuremberg trials until 1966. Using maps and travel guides sent by benefactors, Speer would walk the prison courtyard, taking notes as though he were traversing the world. As quixotic as his grandiose blueprint for the Nazi capital, "Germania," this project now seems to find its parallel in the way most hyperconnected individuals engage with the landscape today.

Antonio Guerra takes this contemporary traveller's condition as his point of departure and suggests other possible alternatives. In *Ninguna ruta marcada*, within the section "*II Territorios*," he presents a series of photographs taken from inside a vehicle, in which the GPS map outlines no particular route, and the background landscape is blurred. The aim is not only to depict how new technologies shape our experience of place, but also to create a Smithsonian-esque *non-site*—one that no longer depends on an actual *site* or reference point in the landscape. Thus, Guerra highlights the loss of genuine travel experiences and meaningful engagement with the natural world, increasingly eclipsed by technological distractions. Simultaneously, he creates a fully autonomous photographic installation that does not depend directly on the landscape as its referent. As with his other series, this autonomy is driven not by the requirements of a museum-oriented art market, but by the intrinsic nature of the installation's "visual ecology," as he explains:

(...) I strive to ensure that the function of each medium is fully justified. I have no interest in a mere shift to three-dimensionality when it is forced, lacks a clear necessity within the discourse, and relies solely on formal gimmicks that merely emphasise the literalness of the work. (Guerra, 2022)

Ultimately, Antonio Guerra's multidisciplinary creative proposals prompt a contemplative physical presence, in the original sense of *contemplari* (from *cum templum*, to be in a temple in a reverent, reflective stance), within the special spaces that are museums and galleries. His installations act as more than windows onto the landscape: they retain the capacity to astonish even as they also critically explore the conceptual and cultural artifice implicit in the very concept of "landscape."

#### 4. Conclusions

Antonio Guerra's work operates within the realm that Joan Fontcuberta aptly describes as *post-photographic*. This term not only addresses the technological shift—where reality is no longer merely recorded or inscribed but rewritten in pixels—but also emphasises the evolving attitudes of artists and audiences toward

the shared visual culture we continuously recreate within a global community of users. Guerra's work, with its reflective depth, calls on us to step back from the noise and visual pollution of our hyperconnected virtual world. This distancing aligns with what can be termed *visual ecology*, an approach that finds its ideal expression in the museum setting, where the complexity of this new photographic-installation paradigm can be fully appreciated.

Although Guerra continues the tradition of *land art* and the *ready-made*, he also explores processes and aesthetics that trace back to the origins of photography. Fontcuberta's concept of *post-photogr@phy* (*La Cámara de Pandora*, 2011)—a type of photography that is “written” rather than merely “inscribed” or “recorded” onto a physical medium—echoes the original etymological meaning of photography in Greek, “writing with light.” This idea inspired titles such as William Henry Fox Talbot's renowned album *The Pencil of Nature*,<sup>11</sup> which references both the natural world as observed and its pictorial representation. Consequently, when our approach to nature is governed by a deliberately subjective, reflective, and artistic perspective—one that inherently involves human manipulation of creative materials and the natural environment from the moment the “observed” is transformed into “landscape”—the distinction between painting and photographing the landscape becomes minimal.

Antonio Guerra's installations evoke a rich artistic tradition of landscape photography, drawing on the work of artists who have explored “humanised” topographies and “non-places.” Through Guerra's guidance, we embark on a journey through reimagined landscapes, uncovering how even the most unassuming corners of the world—presented as industrial ruins or debris—can take on a pristine, almost untouched quality. This journey requires no departure from the museum space; instead, it calls for a close and immersive exploration of each installation, engaging deeply with its diverse media, textures, and interfaces.

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<sup>11</sup> Published in facsimile between 1844 and 1846 with salted paper prints made from paper negatives, it measured 15.2 × 20.3 cm. Cf. reproduction created from a copy by Mathilde Fox, the photographer's daughter, held at The Metropolitan Museum of New York (Credit Line: Gift of Jean Horblit, in memory of Harrison D. Horblit, 1994). See <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/267022> (accessed 2/09/2024).

By the end of this journey, we gain a broader, more inclusive understanding of the landscape genre and become increasingly aware of how audiovisual representation technologies shape both our sense of self and our notion of travel. Above all, we realise that exploration inevitably involves the destruction of what is discovered—even though art, like the Phoenix, can make it rise from the ashes, transfigured into thought and beauty.

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