

# Rural Landscape in Contemporary Artistic Practice

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## Abstract

This article aims to reflect on a personal artistic practice developed out of the “Rural Landscape” concept, in the context of contemporary visual arts. The production comes from life experience in the countryside, especially related to small-scale family farming in the south of Brazil. This study is based on a *research in art* methodological approach, which aligns artistic practice with theoretical reflection. The creative process analyzed is analogous to the rural know-how of family farming. For this objective, the use of natural materials, such as earthy pigments and natural fibers, is explored in order to produce paintings and drawings. As a theoretical background, Anne Cauquelin addresses the landscape as a cultural construction, while Yi-Fu Tuan discusses the concept of Topophilia, emphasizing the emotional connection between people and places. To define a landscape as rural is also a political position, considering the current context in Latin America, which is dominated by industrialized agribusiness and the devastation of natural resources. So finally, Rancière contributes with reflections on art and politics. As contemporary artistic references, the works of Brígida Baltar, Claudia Hamerski, and Anselm Kiefer help to explore the physical presence of the materials and their possible meanings in contemporary art production. As a result of the research, the analyzed artistic practice operates as an invitation to reflection about the human relations with the natural space, providing a fertile ground for reorganizations of the common way of life.

*Keywords:* landscape, artistic practice, agriculture, visual arts

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## Introduction

Since my childhood, I have observed and lived the know-how of family farming. For me, it is appropriate to incorporate different methods and ways of thinking into my artistic practice, which is the object of this article. My current research *in art* (Rey, 2002), formalized as a discipline of art research (Steyerl, 2010), in my Visual Arts Post-Graduation Program at the State University of Paraná (PPGAV/UNESPAR) between 2024-2026, it has as object the rural landscape and its various representations in contemporary art.

Through a qualitative methodology, permeated by experimentation, the production of my artworks goes through a series of translations. Beginning with experiences, memories, and photographs, a few images are translated to visual thoughts in journals, and those images are developed into projects and final works. The projects usually happen in different formats with different matters, cherishing the organic and handmade materials.

Generally, I use, as an analogy, the rural know-how way of life to construct my self-artistic-pedagogical strategies, which I aim to describe here. The act of cultivating a plant, from its life beginning until the transportation to the market, is full of processes that can be similar to an artistic practice:

- a. Studying is a necessity: Even informally, a field might be studied, observed, lived, and experienced (Tuan, 1990). Before planting something to produce and sell, a small crop test is usually cultivated in the garden. Before an artwork gains its autonomy as an artistic object, it inhabits sketchbooks and exists in the form of studies or projects (Cirillo, 2019). In family farming, there is always a previously planned course, due to the seasons, rainy seasons, or moon phases. Once the cultivation is considered concluded, if successful or not, the farmers can make a register of it, by memory or even written in notebooks, as my father does. So, the very same procedure could be done - or not - one more time. It is through these continuous registrations of procedures in the studio that my artistic-practice-research unfolds.
- b. There is a constant visual analysis: It is in the smallest details that we know if a plant is not doing well enough; without attentive observation, without reading the image of what is seen, day after day, there is no understanding of the process. The practice in the studio is similar: attentive observation of the motifs and the projects themselves is extremely important. When the object of representation is the landscape itself, what kind of visuality is constructed there? How is this visuality built? What are its mechanisms?
- c. There is an awareness of autonomy: The soil is more or less clayey. The plant needs more or less water. It is lacking sunlight on the ground... It is necessary to understand the self-activity (Graw, 2018) of rural space. In a contemporary artwork, and more specifically when it comes to painting or drawing, it is also necessary to understand how the image behaves by itself, to provide what the “work asks for.” And speaking of autonomy, it is worth noting that the conclusion of the meaning of an image happens in contact with the reader-viewer-participant (Barthes, 2004).

Once it is identified, some of the main sources that inspire artistic experimentation and production, it is possible to start looking at the methods and materials used in the creative process. Afterwards, it will be discussed each of the items previously cited.

## From and About the Landscape

The interest in the landscape in my artistic research comes from memories and personal experiences. As part of a rural-based family, which has been working on the land for generations, I take this into account in my artistic practice. This relationship with the land (or the rural landscape), could it be described as topophilic, from the concept of “Topophilia” by Tuan (1990), which means the “the human love of place” (Tuan, 1990, p. 96) and “all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment” (Tuan, 1990, p. 93). Gaston Bachelard also writes about this concept as the definition of valorization and protection of spaces, even the imagined ones. According to him, this is the process of determining “the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (Bachelard, 1994, p. XXXV).

In consonance with Tuan (1990, p. 113), “environment may not be the direct cause of topophilia, but environment provides the sensory stimuli, which, as perceived images, lend shape to our joys and ideals.” Thus, as in artistic practice, this mentioned space provides encouragement for creating images in the studio, based on studies of planes, compositions, shapes, colors, and perspectives found outside. In this moment, it occurs the translation to visual languages of the elements that once were part of the rural space occurs, which can be considered, according to Claval (2005, pp. 17–18), the environment that hangs between nature and the space shaped by man's manipulation.

The multilinguality of artistic research implies that artistic research is an act of translation. It takes part in at least two languages and can in some cases create new ones. It speaks the language of quality as well as of quantity, the language of the singular as well as the language of the specific, use value as well as exchange value or spectacle value, discipline as well as conflict. (Steyerl, 2010)

During my theoretical research around the concept of landscape inside art historiography, it could not be noticed many writings including the concept of rural landscape. This terminology could be used as a subgenre of landscape, as “urban landscape” is largely used to determine and explain all representations of the city (Brissac, 2019). When a landscape is not marked as “urban,” it returns to the wide-ranging domain of “landscape,” no matter if it is bucolic, imagined, dystopian, or maritime; they are all “just” landscapes.

It is not common to name a landscape as rural because the commitment in this term goes ahead to a merely aesthetic field, which was constructed by urban society (Berque, 2023), reaching a symbolic bond: it is not contemplative; it is functional and related to labour. Roger writes (2007): “Today’s ‘rural people’ could not be equated with Petrarch’s shepherd, nor with the good Savoyard of Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, or Cézanne’s peasants.” (pp. 30–31, translated by the author),<sup>1</sup> since the landscape is this socio-cultural construction. Today, it is also necessary to understand the new representations of landscapes demarcated as rural, since there are diverse experiences of space, society, and nature. Therefore, my artistic practice does not just work on rural space representation, but also suggests, analogously, a methodology based on the know-how of family farming, which will be described next.

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<sup>1</sup> Original citation: “Los ‘rurales’ de hoy no podrían asimilarse al pastor de Petrarca ni tampoco al buen saboyano de Horace Benedict de Saussure o a los campesinos de Cézanne” (Roger, 2007, pp. 30–31).

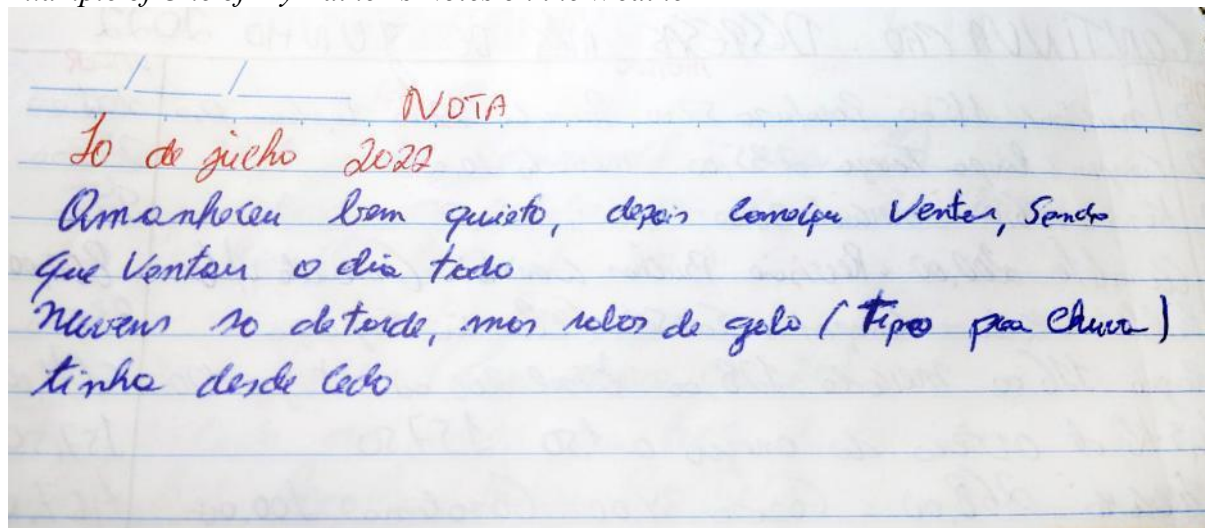
## *Studies and the Creative Process*

Once some stimuli for creating have been identified (life, affection for the place, experiences, perceptions, emotional memories), it is possible to approach the steps and the materials used in the creative process. It is at this point that the relevance of studies (and not academically saying) is noticed as valuable for any artistic production.

After years and years of cultivating a range of vegetables on the same piece of land, my family has already developed its own “studies,” even if informal, of the operations that are feasible there. Through experimentation, observation, and lived experience, this knowledge was built. My parents know which part of the land is adequate for each crop, as they also know how to plant according to the moon phases. These are the results of many experiences and examinations on the land over the years. I grew up observing my father writing down his modest notes, as seen in Image 1. In his notebooks, almost like a diary, he writes about what he had done on the farm that day or how the weather was. So, a few moments later, he is able to check the development of any “experiment.”

**Figure 1**

*Example of One of My Father's Notes on the Weather<sup>2</sup>*



Source. Created by the author, 2025

When dealing with research in visual arts (research where the object comes into being at the same time the researcher is engaging with it), it is important to first highlight the effects of one of the unavoidable procedures in the academic setting: the translation of visual language into textual language. The artwork always seems subordinated to words: in this case, it must be “translated” into verbal discourse (Cattani, 2002, p. 37). In other words, even if processes and finished works are carefully described here, it is emphasized that the totality of the works will never be fully exposed, because in the transition from presence to verbalization, there will be losses and/or misdirections (Cattani, 2002, p. 37). After all,

The artwork is developed through gestures, procedures, and processes that do not involve verbal language and do not depend on it. Its instrument is plastic: supports,

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<sup>2</sup> Own translation: “June 10, 2022. It started very quietly in the morning, then the wind picked up and blew all day. Clouds only appeared in the afternoon, but 'rooster tails clouds' (the kind that suggest rain) had been visible since early on.”

materials, colors, lines, shapes, volumes. The result is an object, present in its physicality, independent of any discourse, including that of the artist. (Cattani, 2002, p. 37, translated by the author)<sup>3</sup>

Aware of the incompleteness of this form of presenting the works, the records of the creative process become useful for their understanding and genealogical analysis, as well as for their eloquence as part of visual knowledge production. Following, there is a discussion about the work documents (Cirillo, 2019), which archive methodological processes, materials used, and also include photographic records.

Firstly, some documents are used as part of a poetic-visual laboratory. Cirillo calls documents (2019): sketchbooks with notes, loose sheets, notebooks with textual annotations, and some digital files. There is, therefore, a variation between fixed and mobile supports, according to the taxonomy of artistic process documents proposed by Cirillo (2019, p. 24). In these graphic environments, the first experimentations stemming from the landscape emerge, whether through observation, memory, or creation, as shown in Figure 2.

### Figure 2

*A5 Sketchbook Opened, Graphite on Paper, 2024*



Source. Created by the author, 2025

It is in these documents that happens the records of a creative process, such as from a technical point of view, or as a problem-solution point of view. The sketchbooks are spaces where visual problems are presented and explored toward possible formal and conceptual

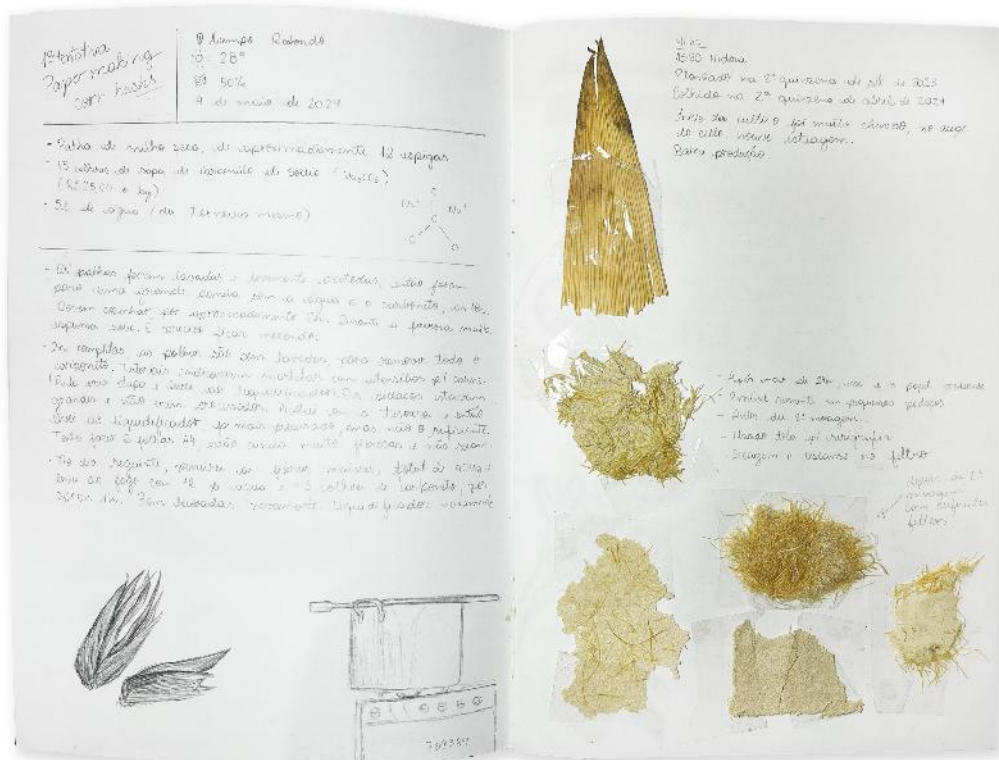
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<sup>3</sup> Original citation: “A obra se elabora através de gestos, procedimentos, processos, que não passam pelo verbal e não dependem deste. Seu instrumento é plástico: suportes, materiais, cores, linhas, formas, volumes. O que resulta em um objeto, presente em sua fisicalidade, independente de todo e qualquer discurso, inclusive, do próprio artista.” (Cattani, 2002, p. 37)

solutions, “these archives are shown to be reservoirs of the creative mind, recorded sensitive experiences of the creative subject, which may or may not be [re]used in artworks.” (Cirillo, 2019, p. 26, translated by the author).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3**

*Artist's Notebook. Notes on the Process of Making Corn Husk-Based Paper*



Source: Created by the author, 2025

In my documents, it is possible to find memory drawings, observation drawings, and a few free drawings, which are means for improving narratives and visual thoughts. The notes, when based on the drawings, have comments about graphic expressions, the elements, or artistic/theoretical references. When the notes are isolated, they register “recipes” or procedures, as in Figure 3.

Regarding the materials, I use the most common ones in artist’s studios, as graphite, ink, watercolor, to alternative materials, such as earth in its state found in nature. The soil had already been a pictorial element in my work, used for the (literal) representation of soil in landscapes. Initially, it is collected with affection, exploring the different colorations found on my family’s land; then it is sieved to remove what we call *terão* (large clumps), burned in a wood-fired oven to eliminate microbial biomass, followed by further sieving, using progressively finer mesh screens to produce an increasingly fine powder. Once the soil has been transformed into a kind of granular pigment, it is mixed with various binders to create my own palette of oil, gouache, or watercolor paints.

<sup>4</sup> Original citation: “Verifica-se que esses arquivos são reservatórios da mente criadora, são experiências sensíveis do sujeito criador registradas, podendo, ou não, ser [re]operadas em obras.” (Cirillo, 2019, p. 26).



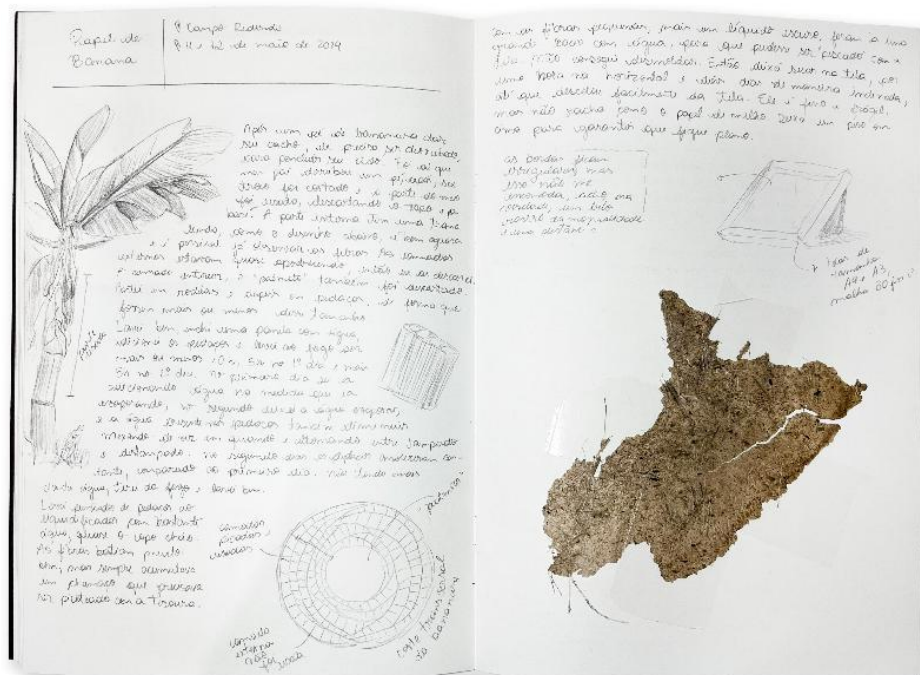
During this process, it is usual to have mistakes and accidents. It is through them that new ideas appear, not only about technical aspects but also about how the artwork is composed. Mistakes and unexpected events can help the artist understand better what they want, often by realizing what they do not want, which shows up as flaws or errors (Salles, 2006, p. 146). It is valid here to consider that

At the low levels of consciousness the artist experiences undifferentiated or unbounded methods of procedure that break with the focused limits of rational technique. Here tools are undifferentiated from the material they operate on, or they seem to sink back into their primordial condition. (Smithson, 1996)

With the materials, shaped by gestural actions, already prepared, a question arises: What will the support be? All the manual work done so far “calls for” support that aligns with the artistic proposal. Considering that individuals engaged in creative processes are often profoundly immersed in their work, they tend to remain receptive to new encounters (Salles, 2006, p. 155), I found the answer in my surroundings: to use the abundance of fibers (cellulose) to serve as surfaces. This marked the beginning of a journey into studying the composition and production of paper. The handmade papers were produced from banana fiber, corn husk, and bamboo shoot, as shown in the image below:

**Figure 4**

*Artist's Notebook. Notes on the Process of Making Banana Plant–Based Paper*



Source. Created by the author, 2025

Some of these handmade sheets of paper have a material potential on their own: fibers overlap, accumulate, and spread out, creating textures and color variations. With these results, and through constant reflection about the work itself, it becomes possible to observe how materials and images behave on their supports, pointing to a space where an artistic production comes to be inscribed, which can also be, simultaneously, the space of its making/existing (Fervenza, 2009, p. 70).

### ***“Looking at” and Autonomy***

Closely monitoring a plantation to provide what it needs happens simultaneously to understanding the autonomy of nature’s actions (or its responses to human actions) (Azam, 2020). According to Bosi (2018), it is through vision that the body becomes acquainted with the world, as knowing implies being permeated and inhabited by the wandering images of a luminous cosmos.

The attention given to a crop is also applied when reading artistic images. Regarding this, Bachelard points to the essentiality of presence and the present moment when reading an image. For him, a poetic image is not subjected to impulse but is the result of its own dynamism, with phenomenological determination and subjectivity, which exists even before thought. Even if an image is imagined, it is lived. He writes:

In order to clarify the problem of the poetic image philosophically, we shall have to have recourse to a phenomenology of the imagination. By this should be understood a study of the phenomenon of the poetic image when it emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul, and being of man, apprehended in his actuality. (Bachelard, 1989, p. XVIII)

While looking closely at my journals and aware of the autonomy of the images, I developed a project named “landscape-time,” composed of 56 drawings on A4 paper, made with handmade charcoal. The charcoal sticks are made from the pyrolysis of *Pinus elliottii* twigs. These twigs are used as fusains to explore lines, hatching, and shading effects. Every single day, I draw the same broccoli into a different sheet of paper. Sometimes from observation and sometimes from photographs. From one sheet to the next one, there are almost no differences, but when looking at the group, it is possible to understand how time passes and affects the plant itself, and also affects the drawing making.

#### **Figure 5**

*Claudete Luginieski. “Landscape-Time” (2025), Handmade Charcoal on Paper. 56 Sheets of A4 White Paper*



*Source.* Created by the author, 2025

Claudia Hamerski is a reference artist for this work. She also uses charcoal and graphite pushed to their extreme density on surfaces, as is seen in Figure 6. Hamerski (2022) pays attention to the vegetation that grows between walls and sidewalks and translates it into



large-scale drawings. She creates representations of the urban landscape without drawing a single building or road, instead, through absence and emptiness. The white space in her drawings is filled with what suffocates the vegetation that stubbornly insists on growing.

**Figure 6**

*Claudia Hamerski. "Fissura, Rua 24 De Outubro, 200" (2017), Graphite Pencil Drawing on Montval Goop Paper, 145 x 100 cm*



Source. <https://www.claudiahamerski.com/2013--2014?lightbox=dataItem-jntap7az2>

Emerged in an intense production of materials and supports, a few characteristics from the studies stand out, indicating, therefore, the autonomy of a creative practice. The soil, for example, more and more assumed its expressiveness as pictorial matter. To the studio were brought different colors and granulations of soil pigment collected around the farm. Altogether, they present themselves as able to make insightful imagery constructions. And yet, its use may convey the specificities of a certain time, a sense of plasticity, and spatial context. After all, as Didi-Huberman (2015) suggests, encountering an image also means encountering time itself, and our present can suddenly be both captured and revealed through the experience of looking.

"Untitled" (2025), presented in the following image, is one of the examples of works developed from the research within the studio. During the process of preparing paints from soil pigments, there are gradual sievings until achieving the finest powder. Samples were collected from the successive siftings, resulting in different granulations that were stored. The samples, standing on the floor studio within glass jars, "were claiming" for experimental use. So, I started to apply them on canvas, in soft gradients and spots, with different pigmentary porosities. Now, it is possible to see that the soil is no longer soil, it is painting.

**Figure 7**

*Claudete Luginieski. "Untitled" (2024). Earth on Canvas, 30 cm x 40 cm*



*Source.* Created by the author, 2025

This work may somehow lead us to Gerhard Richter's blurred landscapes, as Figure 8 (Schmidt, 1999), or to Robert Smithson's site and non-site procedures (Smithson, 1996). But the fact is that in this visuality, the landscape is invoked by the absence of precisely what was once considered its invention: perspective (Cauquelin, 2007). There is no linearity; these are pictorial masses behaving on a surface. Yet their different densities and colors construct an above and below, a sky and earth, a near and far. All characteristics are present in the conventional notions of a landscape.

**Figure 8**

*Gerhard Richter. "Grünes Feld (Green Field)" (1969). Oil on Canvas., 99 x 125 cm*



*Source.* <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Grunes-Feld--Green-Field-/BDF1FD28EE7A0B9C34B4CB1F8B3DE975>

Inspired by Brígida Baltar, a Brazilian artist who recently passed away, the work “Fragile Mountains” (2025), seen in Figure 9, is made from coffee filters used during the distillation of soil pigments. These filters were arranged to display and highlight the different shades of earthy colors. Their shapes remind us of the common way children represent mountains in their first landscape drawings.

**Figure 9**

*Claudete Luginieski. “Mountains” (2025). Soil Pigments on Coffee Filters*



*Source.* Created by the author, 2025

Brígida, for years, used brick dust from the house where she lived with her mother when she was young in her art projects. By creating and recreating paintings and installations (Figure 10) from this very same dust, she explored both the affective and pictorial potential of the material.



**Figure 10**

*Brígida Baltar. “Sala Brocada” (2010). Drawing in Brick Powder Using a Paper Stencil, Variable Dimensions.*

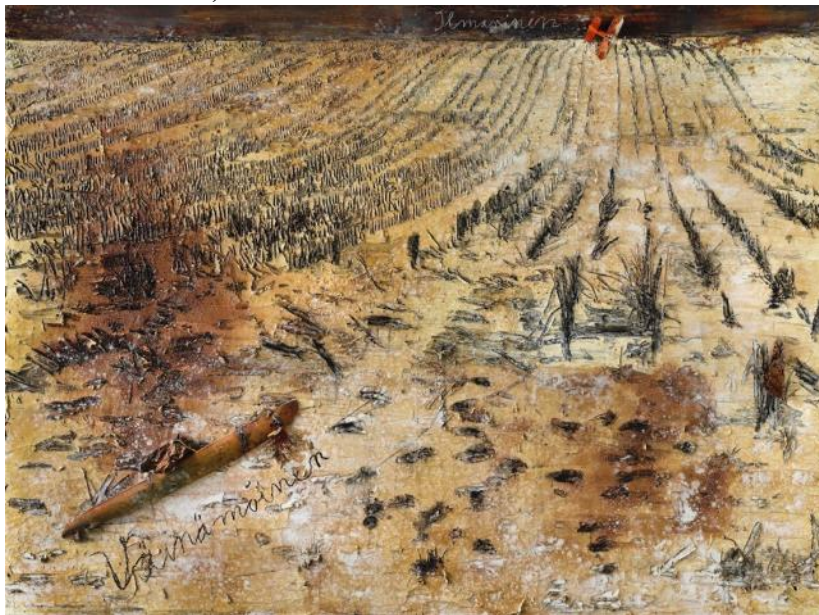


Source. <https://brigidabaltar.com/pt/obras/#>

Other artists have also explored the earth as material and research object. One of the most notable artists who used soil, and who coincidentally works with landscape, is Anselm Kiefer (Figure 11). Even though his production stems from a very specific historical context, post-war Germany and the Nazi and Holocaust aftermath for his homeland, questions about the permanence of art, painting, and landscape were no different in his time.

**Figure 11**

*Anselm Kiefer. “Väinämöinen Ilmarinen” (2018). Emulsion, Oil, Acrylic, Shellac, Rope, and Lead on Canvas, 280 x 380 cm*



Source. Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation, copyright: © Anselm Kiefer

Perhaps not for the artist, but I see soil in his works as a political element, just as in mine. It is through the quality of the earth that humans settled and established boundaries of power,

which were and still are generators of conflict. Here, we see the union of the aesthetic, symbolic, political, and sensitive in the lived experience of the world. Through the artistic use of earth as a sign, “a new cut of material and symbolic space” is operated (Rancière, 2010a) through the sensitive.

## **Conclusion**

The creative practice and the *research in art* presented here emerge from observation and contact with family farming and transcend a simple representation or novelization of rural everyday life. It sought to incorporate experimental practices that dialogue between the world’s materiality and the rural space. This rural space, can be configured as a life space, expressed through specific productive practices based on know-how, aligned with local ecosystem dynamics; through symbolic practices that reinforce solidarity among individuals; and through customary institutional practices of collective management and sharing of natural resources (Barrera-Bassols & Floriani, 2016, p. 11).

This line of thought and methodological approach presented here seeks to bring up a reflection about our relationship with the natural environment, the power dynamics in agrarian contexts, the industrialization of rural areas, and the devastation of natural resources, as well as the transformation and conception of the rural landscape. It inserts and recovers a collective historical memory: whether through the act of sharing affections tied to rural life, or to the landscape in its artistic and cultural conception. Once the work is in the world, “it is necessary to wait for this image to come to life for others. Then, the work of art will have joined together these separate lives” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 79).

Even without explicit political messages, the works presented in this article operate as an invitation to suspend space and time, offering a fertile ground for reflecting on possible reorganizations of common life. In alignment with Rancière (2010b), the artistic language proposed here is, in its essence, a political act insofar as it reconfigures sensibilities, proposes symbolic ruptures, and broadens the perception of the rural as a place of life, resistance, and creation. It is therefore possible to affirm that “art is only the way in which the anonymous ones we call artists, by maintaining themselves constantly in relation with a practice, seek to constitute their life as a form of life” (Agamben, 2019, p. 13).

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The author declares that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.



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