

T H E E D G E

ÁLVARO LAIZ

ÁLVARO LAIZ. THE EDGE.

In The Edge Álvaro Laiz embarks on a journey from the Bering Strait to the Atacama Desert, a long journey through time and genetics, man's becoming and his relationship with the environment where he lives.

Álvaro Laiz (León 1981) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work encompasses different expression techniques such as photography, video, sound and writing. Based on investigation, his work deals with narration where traditional culture, nature and technology converge.

In *The Edge* Álvaro poetically combines science and ancestral culture, through disciplines such as genetics and data visualization. Matters related to the Anthropocene and how humans relate with each other and with other species are also addressed in the project.

The geographical route follows the footsteps of the Paleo-Siberian peoples that 20,000 years ago, crossed over from Asia to the Americas through the Bering Strait, thus becoming the first settlers of the Americas and also the ancestors of the peoples who would later inhabit those territories.

The artist has wished to incorporate sustainability in all its aspects to the production of *The Edge*, counting for this with the support of UreCulture, whose mission is to explore art as a catalyst of ecological consciousness.

The Edge has been possible thanks to Museo Universidad de Navarra and Tender Puentes, the project inspired from the museum's collection, the National Geographic Society and the Burroughs Wellcome Fund.

THE EDGE - THE EXHIBITION

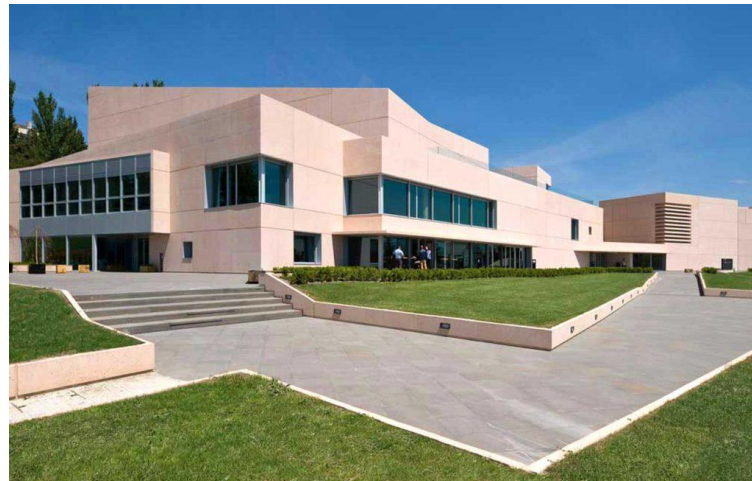
Museo Universidad de Navarra

7 April- 25 September 2022

Álvaro will exhibit for the first time the fruit of the work carried out over the past 6 years with *The Edge* at the Museo Universidad de Navarra in Pamplona, Spain.

The exhibition will include photography, large scale video installation and immersive installations, exhibited in a space of more than 1,000 square meters.

In 2023 *The Edge* will tour other international museums and venues, and later this year Álvaro will continue his research and artistic practice in Chile to complete the project.



●●● Museo
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de Navarra





T H E E D G E

ÁLVARO LAIZ

THE EDGE. ARTIST STATEMENT.

During the last Ice Age, pushed by ice sheets and with temperatures of around minus 60 C, a small group of Siberian hunters migrated towards the North. A frozen territory that for 10,000 years served as a bridge between Asia and America.

This is where the story begins, in the horizon between the known and the unknown; the place where the boundaries of ice, earth and ocean is blurred, an ever-changing place that the Bering Strait inhabitants call Kromka. The Edge. With the aim to better understand one of the most incredible and unknown feats of Humanity -the first population of the American continent- I started to develop a dialogue between science and art; evolutionary biology and imagery.

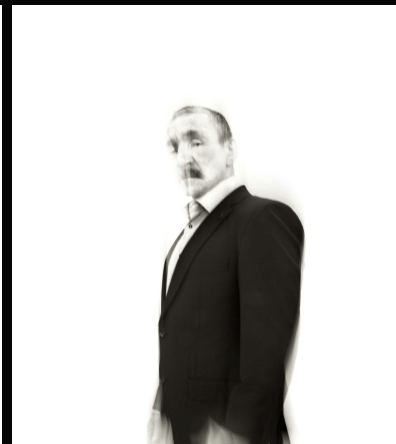
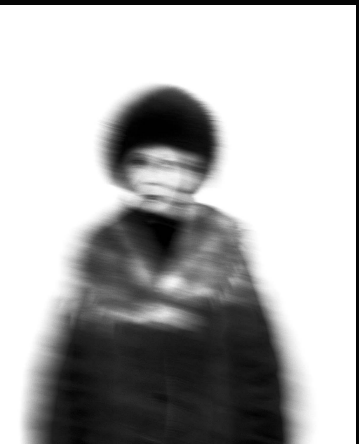
The artistic research that resulted from this dialogue draws a map throughout hundreds of generations in the search of forms of alternative perception; and that which is common each and all of us: our collective memory.



RELATIVE INFORMATION

2017-2022, series of 25 portraits, 130 cm x 152 cm, injection of pigments on hahnemühle barita paper © Álvaro Laiz







RELATIVE INFORMATION

How can we imagine an event that took place over 14,000 years ago? This was the main challenge I addressed when I was conceiving this project, however it would not be the only one. Thematically and formally my roots lie with the phenotypic photography of Laurent, Curtis or Clifford. Besides being a unique documentation of 19th Century, the work of these photographers is an example of virtuosity given the technical difficulties their work was subject to. Their approach to portraiture responds to the customs and manners of the canon of their period; they tried to document the subject as truthfully as possible. Nevertheless, their representations were influenced by their own feelings, mental constructs, styles and their own system of values, typical of the final years of the nineteenth century.

My context however is very different. Two hundred years later we live in a global village and are now more aware than ever that the power of image and representation cannot be and must not be carried out in a unidirectional manner. Many minority groups have been the subject of stereotypes, of the search for exotism, or directly the lack of empathy by documentarians, artists and scientists. Fortunately, these power dynamics are slowly but steadily changing through the work of indigenous artists and scientists, among others, who are capable of narrating not only their own histories, but also contribute on a global scale with their views and systems of value.

Leaving totally aside any documentary pretentiousness, and understanding and accepting the subjectivity of my work, I have fought hard to stay away from those stereotypes and to get closer to the supra-individual. That which is common to each and all of us. Imagined visual languages, or visual language for which we recently have a memory, are an integral part of this premise. As the time of exposure dilates, the figure transforms itself, deprived of time and space, entering a mirror game of a specific reality: the collective memory.

These portraits that are part of *The Edge* go one step further than the literal representation of a reality. They draw a map traced out throughout hundreds of generations until today. And this is where the two disciplines -science and art- combined in this project converge, transforming a collection of data and points with no apparent connection into a narration about how a small group of humans were able to colonize a continent thousands of years ago.

THE CAVERN

Four-channel video installation, 1080 x 1920 cm and Dolby Atmos sound installation © Álvaro Laiz





THE CAVERN, Four-channel video installation, 1080 x 1920 cm and Dolby Atmos sound installation © Álvaro Laiz

THE CAVERN

*“Our ancestors are here. Our descendants are here.
They are all here right now”
— Peter Sellars*

There is a type of memory previous to any human language, spoken or written. Encoded and transmitted through rituals. Ceremonies that establish axes along which relationships of vertical resonances -with the gods, the cosmos and time- or horizontal resonances- in the social community- can be experienced. Rites based on the repetition of magic gestures that alter reality and connect with the divine. These rituals create somatic memory, an embodied identity and social mutual understanding. Ritual dancing is perhaps the most genuine and ancient form of expression of this type of memory.

There is another type of collective memory whose echo resounds from much farther depths and which only a few can envision. The existence of a transpersonal memory, capable of being transmitted from generation to generation, immune to the death of an individual is closely linked to a transcendent feeling which is present in all religions. It incorporates our individual histories and also that of humankind. Ironically, its existence was finally demonstrated in a lab, not in a temple. This is one of the keys to what is concealed in our origins as a species, but also it is a map that unveils the past with which to look at the future. This other type of collective memory that I am describing is our genetic memory.

In Siberian traditions, as in many others in North and South America, ecstasy is reached through sound and recurrent rhythmic movements; communication with spirits is established by means of vibrations generated through these rituals. The installation consists of two interdependent components -visual and sound- each related with a type of specific memory and inspired by these very principles. Through the combination of these two different disciplines, this series explores human perception and the passage of time and their relationship with memory, both cultural and biological.

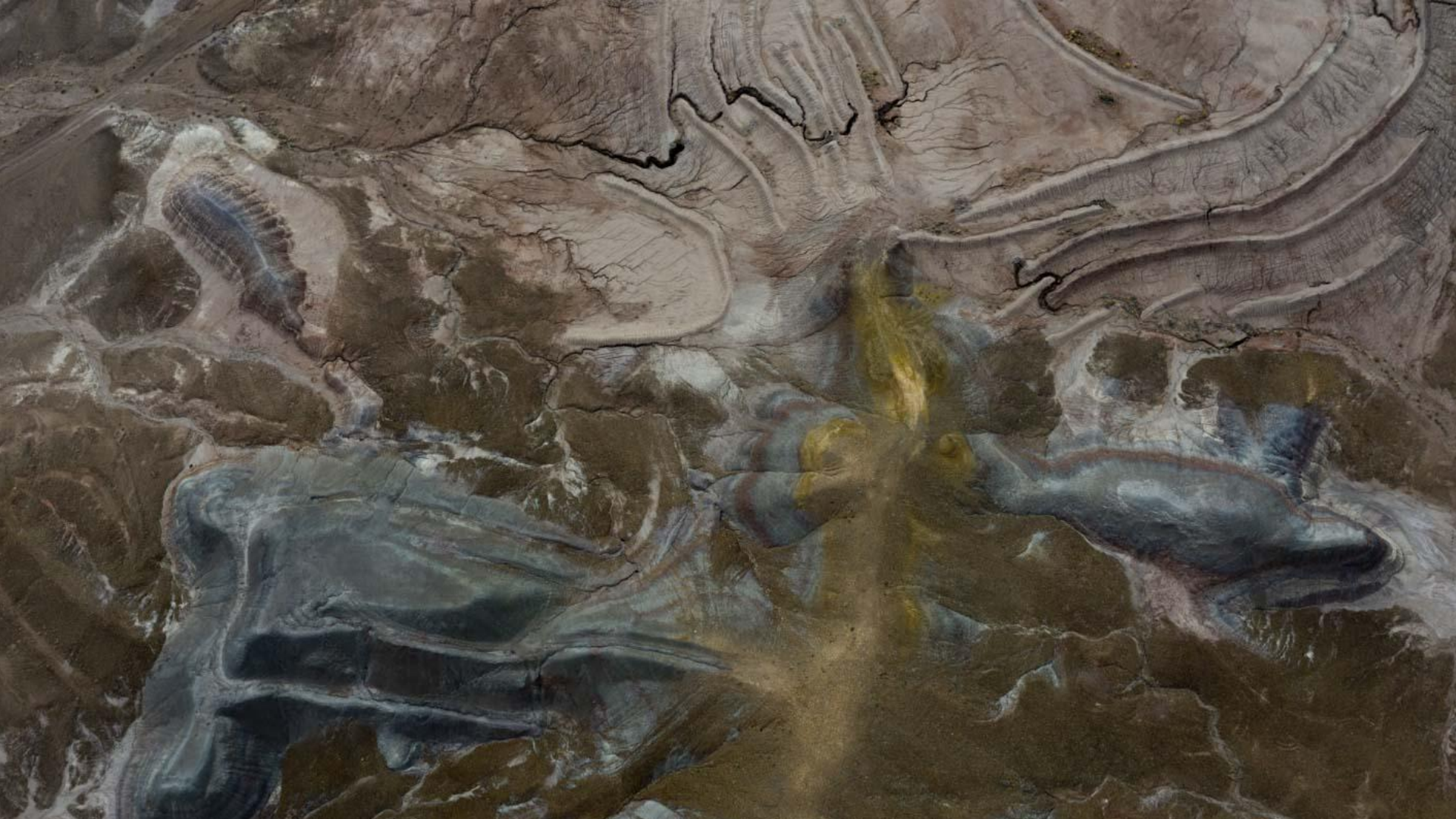
MAPS OF THE INVISIBLE

Three-channel video installation with sound, 12 min © Álvaro Laiz









MAPS OF THE INVISIBLE

*“The road seen, then not seen, the hillside
hiding then revealing the way you should take,
the road dropping away from you as if leaving you
to walk on thin air, then catching you, holding you
up (...)”*

— *David White, extracto de PILGRIM.*

Although each tribe of the native American people has a series of distinct attributes in terms of symbolism, language and culture, they all share a system of animistic beliefs which are deeply rooted in the worship of the earth.

We can only imagine what those first humans felt when they walked across the frozen plains in the Arctic tundra, or found themselves deeper and deeper into the impenetrable forests of Central America. What we do know is that their life experience, their way of thinking and feeling was the result of the deep and physical contact with their environment.

Just as our steps leave footprints while we walk, we are the product of the paths we take. Walking is the experience that connects humans as inhabitants or as a constituent part of nature.

Maps of the Invisible invites us to consider our relationship with our most immediate environment and our most remote past through a series of journeys carried out on foot, from the Bering Strait to Tierra de Fuego.

POSTCARDS FOR TOMORROW

Simultaneous installation of several slide projectors

© Álvaro Laiz



POSTCARDS FOR TOMORROW

“We all become indigenous of a place when we act as if the future of our children matters to us, when we look after the earth as if our lives, material and spiritual, depend on this.”

— Robin Wall Kilmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

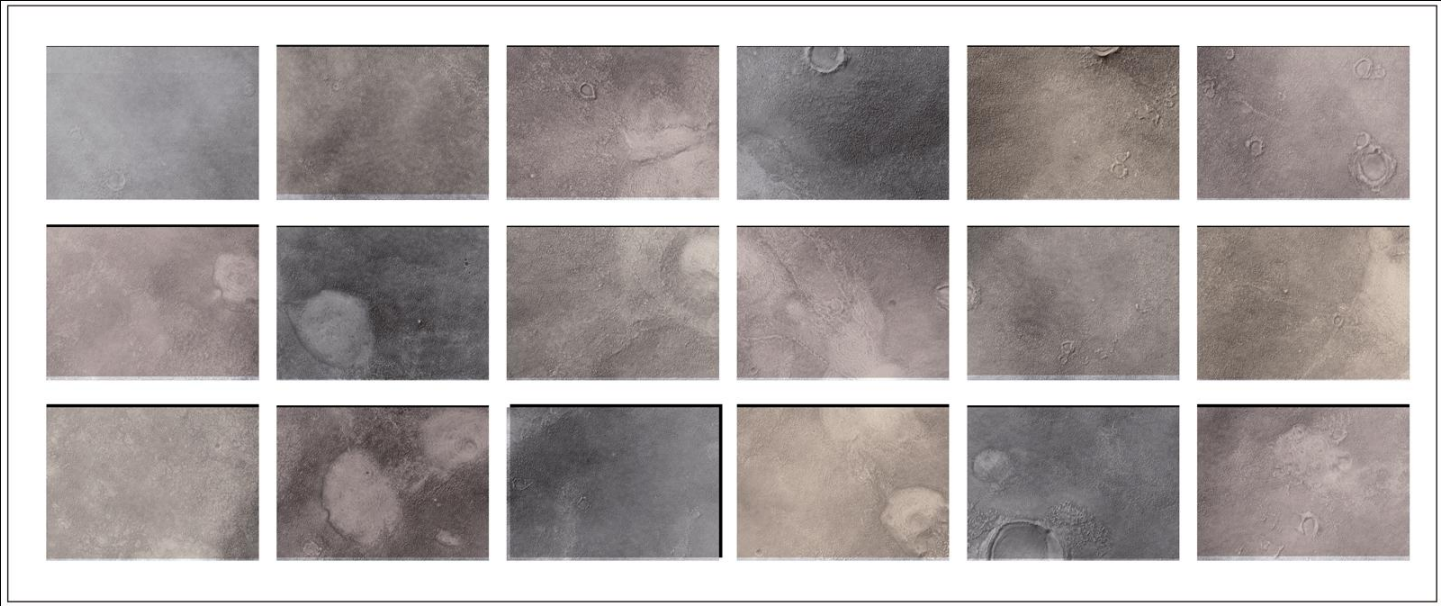
Blue Marble is the title NASA gave to the first complete photograph of the planet Earth. It was taken in 1972 by the crew of the Apollo 17 spacecraft. It presents the entire planet in a way that no map had ever been able to draw, floating in the immensity of nothingness, with the darkness of the cosmos around it. It was a change in our conception of our role in the universe without precedent. The image of our small and vulnerable planet became the first global icon of environmentalism. For a second, we stopped considering ourselves the masters of creation and became the navigators of a small drifting boat in the depths of space.

Today, almost 50 years later, technology offers us a new and closer view of that blue marble. And it doesn't speak very highly of our species either as an owner, or as a guest. According to the United Nations, the world has lost 420 million hectares of forest since 1990. Although the rate of deforestation has fallen over the last decade, our efforts may not be enough. Global Warming, Desertification, Extreme Climate Events... What will our planet look like in another 50 years?

Postcards for Tomorrow is the result of extensive documentation work on environmental justice and large-scale impact on the American continent, with more than 400 documented cases from its northern limit in the Bering Sea to its southern boundary in Tierra de Fuego.

HORIZON PARADOX

Aerial image of Ares Valli (Mars) divided into 18 sections emulsified with mineral pigments collected during fieldwork in Asia-America. Transported coal.
140 x 354 cm



HORIZON PARADOX

“We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; [...]; where we had thought to travel outwards, we shall come to the centre of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.”

— Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*.

On July 4th 1997, the spaceship Mars Pathfinder landed on the Ares Valli region on Mars, placing a rover for the first time on the Martian surface: Sojourner. The human exploration of the Red Planet had started.

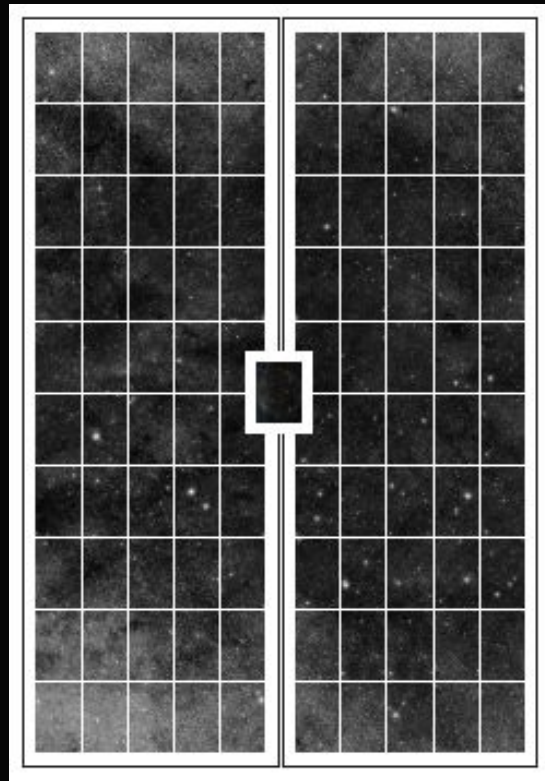
A territory is a place where culture is imprinted, traces and footprints left behind by those who inhabit it, but it is also a space whose boundaries are delimited by the unknown. And it is in this context that the Horizon is contemplated as a symbolic space to situate the future, but also the past in permanent tension with the present. The history of humankind can be interpreted from the perspective of a continuous migration. Throughout this symbolic horizon, time and time again we travel the path of our ancestors. And also, that of our descendants.

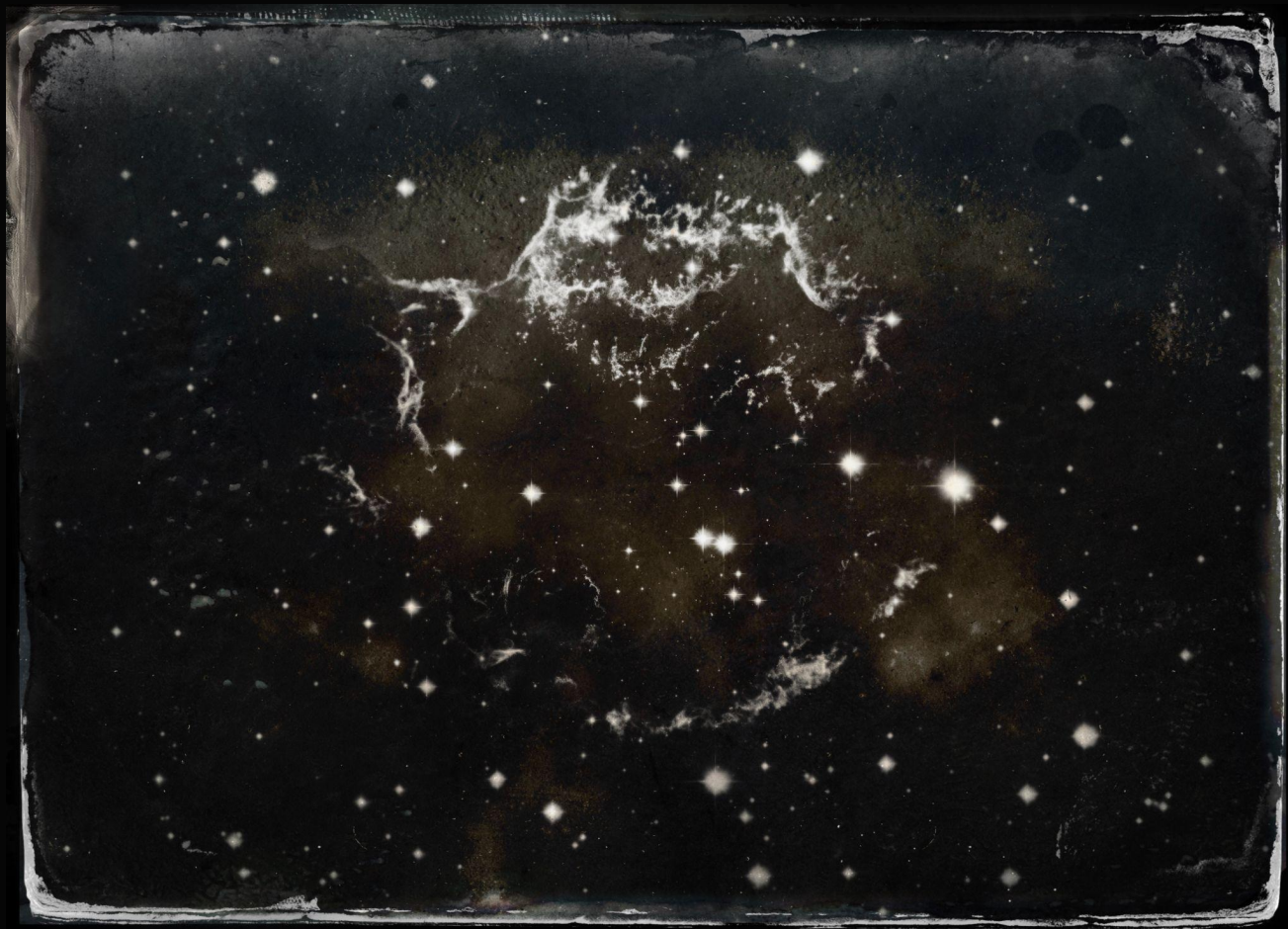
Horizon Paradox reflects on our indisputable necessity to explore beyond limits. It reflects on the implications of this necessity for us, our environment and upon the apparent contradiction that it raises for the future of our species. Our drive to move towards an unreachable destiny.

FLOWS OF DEEP TIME

*Aerial image of Ares Valli (Mars) divided into 18 sections
emulsified with mineral pigments collected during fieldwork
in Asia-America. Wet collodion plate.*

140 x 354 cm





FLOWS OF DEEP TIME

Wet collodion plate.

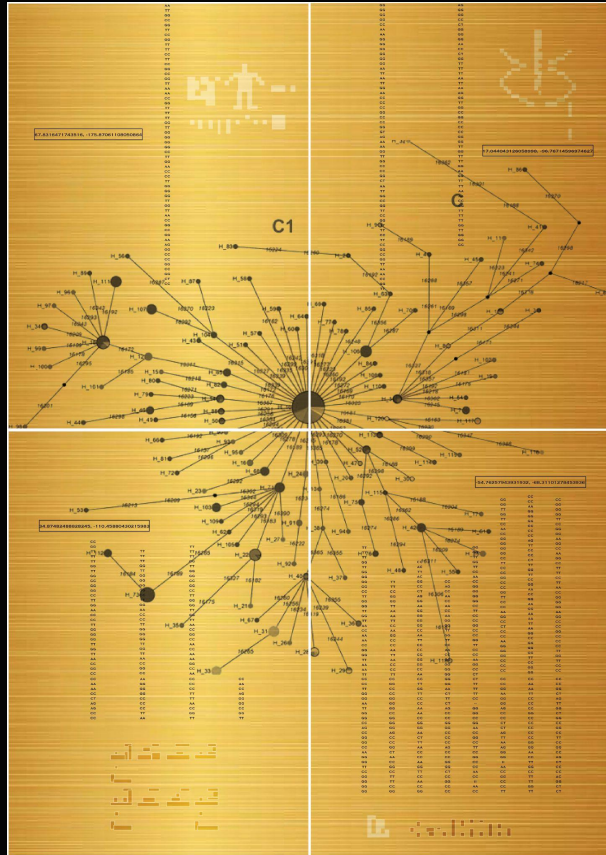


Wet collodion plate (detail)

FLOWS OF DEEP TIME

Time and identity are strangely united. To understand who we are implies a reflection on time, and in turn, to understand time signifies to reflect on ourselves. Our perception of both is directly connected to memory, the ability that allows all those dispersed processes across time be connected to form one continuous temporal thread. This is the way we exist in time: our own. For a human who lives less than a century it is hard to leap into so-called Deep Time. That time whose relevance is not measured in years, not even in centuries but in thousands of years. On a geological timescale, or in this case, a cosmic scale.

The series Flows of Deep Time is a response to the need of positioning ourselves in time. Sunlight takes 8 minutes to reach the earth. Moonlight only takes one minute. When we look at the sky what we are seeing are, literally, stamps of the near past. Sailors and explorers were guided by the stars for thousand years, so one evening while I was watching the Polar Star from a cliff near Monument Valley in the Navajo Nation this idea was born. This idea was formalised around a series of images of galaxies, stars and constellations captured by the Hubble telescope -in a range between 500 and 30,000 light years- and expressed using the wet collodion technique. Their objective, in conversation with the portraits, is to provoke a formal and conceptual dialogue between past and present, identity and time.

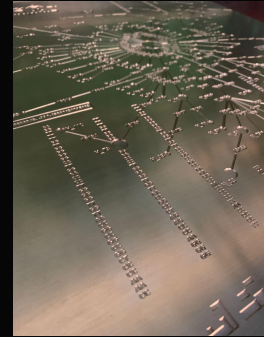


STRANGE TOOLS I

Laser engraving on brass.

Relational maps of Haplogroups A and C

21 x 29,7 cm (each one) 42 x 59,4 cm



STRANGE TOOLS I

“Technologies organize us; properly understood, they are evolving patterns of organization(...) It is not a matter of gathering new data; it’s a matter of seeing how the data you already have—your own experiences, observations, beliefs, etc.—hang together.”

— Alva Nöe, *Strange tools: Art and Human Nature*

Our species is estimated to be approximately 200,000 years old. Human language is considered to be at least half. The paintings and engravings of rock art are traces of that remote past. Messages sent thousands of years ago have remained frozen in time, and also practices linked to the development of language that allowed primitive humans to develop the capacity for symbolic thought.

The discovery and use of technologies that encode and preserve information gave humans the ability to transcend time, acquire the ability of self-reflection and project their identity into the future.

In the year 26974, almost eighty millennia after those first drawings in a cave, the constellation of Hercules will receive the first message sent from planet Earth with information about human beings that ceased to exist as such long ago. The Arecibo Message, as this pictogram sent in 1974 from the Arecibo radio telescope is known, will have taken 25,000 years to reach its destination and in case it a receiver capable of decoding it was found, it would be another 25,000 years before finding an answer.

Strange Tools addresses the influence of language-and the technologies that encode it-and how they reorganize our relationship with reality by weaving new synapses, generating new thoughts and creating new realities.





ÁLVARO LAIZ

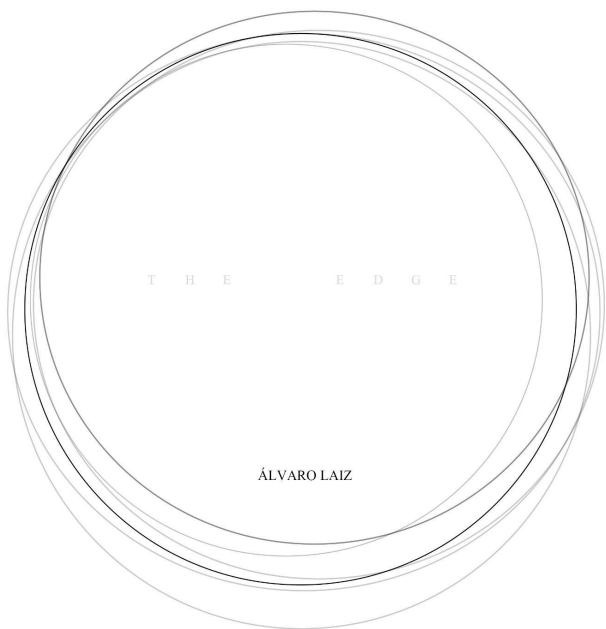
Álvaro Laiz (b.1981) is a multidisciplinary artist working with photography, text, video and sound. His research-based work deals with narratives where traditional culture, nature and technology converge.

In 2017 he published his first book *The Hunt* (Dewi Lewis/RM, 2017), a reconstruction of a Moby-Dick-alike story of man against nature's most fearsome and efficient predator in the Boreal Jungle: the Siberian tiger. It was presented at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2017 and selected by the British Journal of Photography as Best of 2017. Álvaro's work has been recognized and funded by a number of institutions including Sony World Photography Awards, World Press Photo or Magnum Foundation. Since 2020 he is a National Geographic Fellow.

His work, both photography and large scale video installation, resides in public and private collections such as Museo de América or Fundación INELCOM, curated by Vicente Todolí, and have been exhibited in museums and art fairs such as Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne (MAC/VAL) in Paris, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC). His editorial clients include National Geographic, New York Times, Traveller or Forbes among others.

"For Álvaro, the artistic practice and way of living resemble a kind of labyrinth. The concept of the unknown and the element of surprise of what awaits you is the invitation to enter. Once you are inside, research, self-discovery, awareness, analysis and exploration, all feed into the development of the story; and when you get out of the labyrinth, the perception of that story is never the same. The Labyrinth is a metaphor for self-awareness, change and evolution, either by inviting you to consume the story or by subtly addressing personal experiences. In this journey of discovery and self-discovery, the movement is always quiet and slow, allowing viewers to come into the scene and let things happen. A labyrinth can aesthetically shape the way of seeing."

Maria Teresa Salvati



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Beyond the Edge / UreCulture

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The Edge was possible thanks to the support of the Museo Universidad de Navarra, the National Geographic Society and the Burroughs Wellcome Fund.