A Levitating Territory: Landscapes in Suspension

Written by IMPASTO MAG · Follow · 8 min read · 9 hours ago

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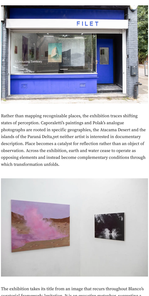
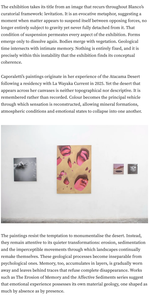
There is a long tradition in Argentine art of turning to landscape as a means of thinking through identity, memory and belonging. From the nineteenth-century construction of the pampas as a national imaginary to contemporary ecological practices that question the politics of land, landscape has rarely functioned as neutral scenery. It is a site where histories accumulate, disappear and re-emerge.

A Levitating Territory, presented at FILET Space in London and curated by Adela Blanco, enters this conversation from a distinctly contemporary perspective. Bringing together the work of Argentine artists Maja Capurdiehl and Vicky Polak, the exhibition proposes landscape not as something to be represented but as something to be inhabited, physically, emotionally and imaginatively.

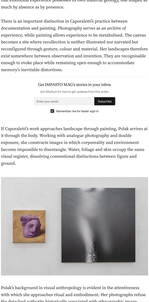


Rather than mapping recognizable places, the exhibition traces shifting states of perception. Capurdiehl's paintings and Polak's sculpture challenge the boundaries between the human and the non-human and the idea of the Pastoral. Although set within artist's interested in documentary description, Place becomes a catalyst for reflection rather than an object of observation. Across the exhibition, earth and water cease to operate as opposing elements and instead become complementary conditions through which transformation unfolds.



The exhibition takes its title from an image that recurs throughout Blanco's curatorial framework: levitation. It is an evocative metaphor, suggesting a moment when matter appears to suspend itself between competing forces, no longer entirely subject to gravity yet never fully detached from it. That condition of suspension permeates every aspect of the exhibition. Forms emerge only to dissolve again. Bodies merge with vegetation. Geological time intersects with intimate memory. Nothing is entirely fixed, and it is precisely within this instability that the exhibition finds its conceptual coherence.

Capurdiehl's paintings originate in her experience of the Atacama Desert following a residency with La Wayaka Carved in 2021. Yet the desert that appears across her canvases is neither topographical nor descriptive. It is remembered rather than recorded. Colour becomes the principal vehicle through which sensation is recalled, where complex internal formations, atmospheric conditions and emotional states to collapse into one another.



The paintings resist the temptation to monumentalize the desert. Instead, they remain attentive to its quieter transformations: erosion, accumulation and the imperceptible movements through which landscapes continually reshape themselves. These geological processes become inseparable from psychological ones. Memory, too, accumulates in layers, is gradually worn away and leaves behind traces that resemble geological sedimentation. Works such as The Erosion of Memory and the Affective Sediments series suggest that emotional experience possesses its own material geology, one shaped as much by absence as by pressure.

There is an important distinction in Capurdiehl's practice between documentation and painting. Photography serves as an archive of experience, while painting allows experience to be metabolised. The canvas becomes a site where recollection is neither illustrated nor narrated but reconfigured through gestures, colour and material. Her landscapes therefore exist somewhere between observation and invention. They are recognisable enough to evoke place while remaining open enough to accommodate memory's inevitable distortions.

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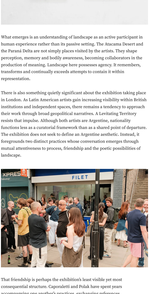
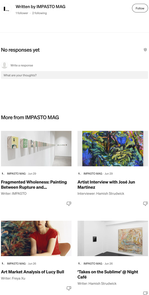
If Capurdiehl's work approaches landscape through painting, Polak arrives at it through the body. Working with analogue photography and double exposure, she constructs images in which corporeality and environment become impossible to disentangle. Water, foliage and skin occupy the same visual regime, dissolving conventional distinctions between figure and ground.



Polak's background in visual anthropology is evident in the attentiveness with which she approaches ritual and embodiment. Her photographs refuse the detached authority historically associated with ethnographic image-making. Instead, they privilege immersion. The camera becomes less an instrument of observation than one of participation, entering into dialogue with the landscape rather than standing apart from it.

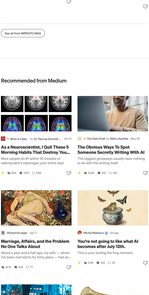
The use of double exposure is particularly significant. More than a formal device, it destabilises the photographic documentary status by allowing multiple temporalities to coexist within a single frame. Bodies become transluscent, vegetation assumes anthropomorphic qualities and the Delta itself appears less as geography than as a living archive. The resulting images possess a quiet ambiguity that recalls the work of Ana Mendieta, whose own practice understood the body as inseparable from the environment and temporarily inhabiting. Yet Polak's photographs remain distinctly her own, rooted in the waterways of the Rio de la Plata and shaped by an ongoing engagement with memory as both personal and cultural inheritance.

The decision to exhibit these two projects together is neither illustrative nor thematic. Their dialogue unfolds through material concerns that gradually reveal deeper affinities. Capurdiehl works through density, layering pigment until landscapes seem to emerge from within the surface of the canvas. Polak, by contrast, constructs images through transparency, allowing forms to overlap until boundaries begin to dissolve. Earth encounters water; opacity meets permeability; colour sits beside monochrome. Rather than cancelling one another out, these opposing material conditions establish a shared visual rhythm.

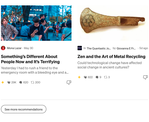


What emerges is an understanding of landscape as an active participant in human experience rather than its passive setting. The Atacama Desert and the Parana Delta are not simply places visited by the artists. They shape perception, memory and bodily awareness, becoming collaborators in the production of meaning. Landscape here possesses agency. It remembers, transforms and continually extends attempts to contain it within representation.

There is also something quietly significant about the exhibition taking place in London. As Latin American artists gain increasing visibility within British institutions and independent spaces, these works contribute to a broader shift in their work through broad geopolitical narratives. A Levitating Territory resists that impulse. Although both artists are Argentine, nationality functions less as a curatorial framework than as a shared point of departure. The exhibition does not seek to define an Argentine aesthetic. Instead, it foregrounds two distinct practices whose conversation emerges through material attentiveness to process, friendship and the poetic possibilities of landscape.



That friendship is perhaps the exhibition's least visible yet most consequential structure. Capurdiehl and Polak have spent years accompanying one another's practices, exchanging references, photographing one another in their studios and developing a visual language through sustained dialogue. This history never becomes sentimental, but it informs the generosity with which the works curate. The exhibition feels less like a juxtaposition of individual practices than an extended conversation conducted through different mediums.



The most compelling aspect of A Levitating Territory is ultimately its refusal to separate the physical from the emotional. Landscapes become states of consciousness; bodies become repositories of geography; natural processes become metaphors for inner transformation without ever collapsing into coincidence. The exhibition proposes that territory is not merely something we occupy but something we carry, continuously reshaped by memory, movement and encounter.

In an era increasingly defined by environmental precarity, migration and fractured relationships to place, A Levitating Territory offers neither wayfinding nor certainty. Instead, it asks what forms of knowledge might emerge when we allow ourselves to remain, however briefly, suspended between what has been and what is still becoming.

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