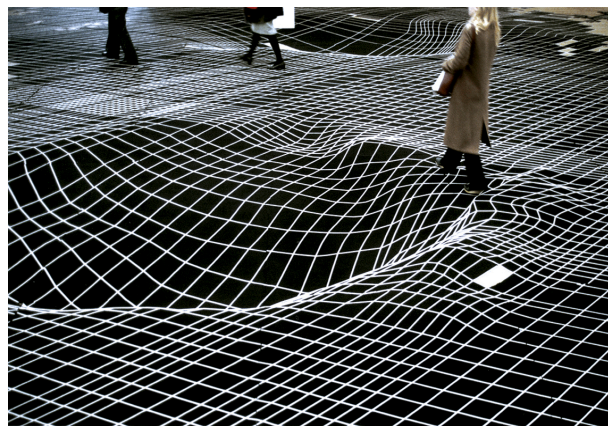


Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla. *Land Mark (Foot Prints)*. 2001-2002



Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla. *Land Mark (Felt)*. 2003

Becca Zajac

Greening of Art

New Environmentalism in Art: Resisting Boundaries

Environmentalism as a modern movement has embodied several meanings since its conception in the 1970s. Conservation environmentalism prevailed until the environmental justice movement was born to include more voices and broaden the goals of environmentalism beyond preservation to include community health and social justice. Since 2020, intersectional environmentalism has become more popular to center voices of BIPOC and marginalized groups. However, even the more evolved, inclusive environmentalisms limit the movement by leaving boundaries between species, landscapes, and political geographies unquestioned. Artists envision newer environmentalisms which illustrate three ideas: bodies are not separate from the land, species are not separate from each other, and mapped boundaries warrant scrutiny. Environmentalism must take place within radically expanded norms if we intend to surmount the climate crisis. People are moved to act when they realize abuses to the land are also abuses to our bodies. Solutions will be more effective and long-lasting when they consider complex human-nonhuman relationships. People will have more autonomy to sustainably govern when political boundaries are rethought and demilitarized.

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla's *Land Mark* (2001-2003), is a civil disobedience campaign consisting of photos, sculptural installations, collaborative design projects, and videos.¹ The purpose of the campaign, based in Puerto Rico, is to resist decades of U.S. military defacement of the island Vieques and disturbance of surrounding waters. I will analyze aspects of *Land Mark*, such as *Foot Prints* (2001-2002) and the geometric floor of the

¹ Mckee, Yates. "Wake, Vestige, Survival: Sustainability and the Politics of the Trace in Allora and Calzadilla's 'Land Mark.'" *October* 133 (2010): 20–48. https://doi.org/10.1162/octo_a_00002.

2003 installation, to show how these artists are powerfully questioning and defying the three boundaries outlined above.

Why must bodies and landscapes be considered together? Michelle Murphy delves into the idea that what goes through the land also goes through us.² We are permeable to the chemicals and toxins injected into landscapes from industrial and military practices. She argues, furthermore, that there is a damage narrative told about marginalized communities who are especially targeted by polluters. This narrative inadvertently labels such communities as doomed by measuring the extent to which they have been poisoned instead of turning attention to those responsible for creating pollution.³ To truly address environmental violence, she asserts that a process of decolonization must occur. I will expand on her vision of decolonization shortly. Joseph Masco's *Mutant Ecologies* also illustrates that what happens to the land also happens to us. He investigates the mostly unknown but permanent impacts of nuclear weapons testing on all living beings on earth.⁴ He argues that, despite what the U.S. nuclear state messages to the public, involvement with radioactive agents cannot be separated from its impacts on human and nonhuman health. A bomb creates more than a crater on the earth or security for an empire, it alters our genes.⁵

Land Mark (Foot Prints) (2001-2002) demonstrates these perspectives and effectively questions the line often drawn between bodies and land. The U.S. military had been testing nuclear weapons on Vieques, an island off Puerto Rico, since 1941.⁶ In 2000, Allora and Calzadilla collaborated with Vieques activists to design protest graphics that were attached to

² Murphy, Michelle. "Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations." *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (2017): 494–503. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.02>.

³ Murphy, "Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations," 496–497.

⁴ Masco, Joseph. "Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico." *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (2004): 517–50. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2004.19.4.517>.

⁵ Masco, "Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico," 521.

⁶ Yates, "Wake, Vestige, Survival: Sustainability and the Politics of the Trace in Allora and Calzadilla's 'Land Mark,'" 22.

shoe soles and imprinted on the sand at Vieques (through the act of trespassing). The designs included text in both Spanish and English, such as “No more chemical and biological weapons on our land,” “Warning: civil disobedience will continue” and “Fuera la marina de Vieques.”⁷ These messages were observed by the military, and the trespassing triggered sensors that temporarily ceased testing on the island.⁸ In both its concept and implementation, the intervention relied on a meshing-together of body and land. In *Foot Prints*, the artists and activists successfully protested forced participation in a “mutant ecology via the bomb” — they would not tolerate the harmful effects of continued nuclear testing on their bodies and those of future generations.⁹ Furthermore, they engaged in the type of decolonization urged by Murphy by standing up for potential future life when constructs of military and infrastructural history stood in the way.¹⁰ In 2003, the Navy officially vacated Vieques due to a combination of civil disobedience and pressure from the media and legislature.¹¹

When a separation of bodies and land is broken down, artists, environmentalists, and social activists can better advocate for a more sustainable, non-colonial way of life and defend nonhuman lives with vigor. Why consider species as interconnected? Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing are anthropologists who argue for stronger relationships between humans and nonhumans for the sake of community resilience and resistance to capitalism. Tsing makes a case against human exceptionalism, the idea that humans stand apart and alone from all other beings, because life on earth hinges on strong interspecies relationships.¹² At the same time, Haraway implies that

⁷ Baum, Kelly. “Supplement: Reading Land Mark.” Essay. In *Nobody's Property: Art, Land, Space*, 84–87. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

⁸ Yates, “Wake, Vestige, Survival: Sustainability and the Politics of the Trace in Allora and Calzadilla's ‘Land Mark,’” 30–31.

⁹ Masco, “Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico,” 520.

¹⁰ Murphy, “Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations,” 497.

¹¹ Yates, “Wake, Vestige, Survival:... ‘Land Mark,’” 36.

¹² Tsing, Anna. “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species.” *Environmental Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2012): 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3610012>.

radical transformation towards a more inclusive society can be set in motion without the support from a majority.¹³

Foot Prints and the victory of 2003 demonstrate the power of a select few to cultivate a landscape that has living potential for multiple species. In a review of their work, Aaron Bobrow observes, “*Land Mark (Foot Prints)* did not claim Vieques in the name of mankind, or even a homogenous local community. [...] What *Land Mark (Foot Prints)* left on the beach (for a moment, at least) was the choreography of ‘one world in which many worlds fit.’”¹⁴ In other words, *Foot Prints* aimed to make space for all forms of life on Vieques. Some images stamped on the ground included birds in flight; this was a simple urge for the U.S. Navy to consider that their operations were not only endangering the livelihoods and families of people, but also suppressing ecological diversity and innocent beauty. Including notions of species interconnectedness in the campaign strengthened *Land Mark*’s argument for a demilitarized landscape; the land exists for everyone, not only people, and especially not only militaries.

Why does a new environmentalism also require questioning political boundaries? States and their borders are not commonly organized around their ecosystems. Many boundaries instead result from long histories of settler-colonialism. Consequently, contiguous ecosystems are fragmented by differing policies and land uses. It is first necessary to be aware of the artificial boundaries which govern over people and environmental processes. From there, it is possible to envision new modes of organization and critique contradictions in boundary enforcement and encroachment. Artist Peter Fend imagines a future where states rethink their geographical allotments in terms of water resources. Fend conceptualizes “saltwater polities,” territories that

¹³ Haraway, Donna. “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.” *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–65. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615934>.

¹⁴ Bobrow-Strain, Aaron. “On Allora & Calzadilla, *Land Mark (Foot Prints)* (2001–2).” In *Critical Landscapes*, 128–130. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019.

organize themselves in terms of their watersheds, where economic business depends on the materials and processes offered by the landscape.¹⁵ Rethinking political boundaries requires questioning the authority of states themselves. James Scott is critical of nation-state organization and explores the harmful effects of mapping and simplification required to justify state power.¹⁶

These ideas can be applied to *Land Mark* and its context. When Puerto Rico is not subject to hostile occupation and disruption by the U.S., it is a viable saltwater polity. But the U.S. state depersonalized Vieques to justify its boundaries as suitable for encroachment and its land suitable for weapons testing. *Land Mark* asserts that Puerto Rico's boundaries are worthy of respect by other nations. It condemns the decades of U.S. military occupation and the tools it used to perpetuate abuses on the land. In October 2003, Allora and Calzadilla participated in a group exhibition titled "Commonwealth" at the Tate Modern in London.¹⁷ The floor of their exhibition was an expansive felt carpet inlaid with geometric designs; a black-and-white lattice mapped Vieques's bombing field onto the floor. The Navy's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data of the island's physical terrain, purchased by Allora and Calzadilla, was the primary reference for the carpet's design.¹⁸ In contrast to the ground-level perspective utilized in *Foot Prints*, the carpet's design called attention to the opposite, above-ground view the U.S. military held during its operations. Additionally, the floor's design allowed spectators from London to get a sense of the cratered landscape even from far away. It brought the bomb field to them, further transcending boundaries between states. The floor illustrates what damage can occur when boundaries are crossed by hostile forces, but even more so represents the ability for land to be reclaimed by those who care about it.

¹⁵ Crary. "Peter Fend's Global Architecture." *Arts magazine*. 55 (1981): 152.

¹⁶ Scott, James C. "Introduction and Chapter 1." Essay. In *Seeing like the State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, 1–52. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

¹⁷ Cubiñá, Silvia Karman. "Allora and Calzadilla: Their Floors." *Art Nexus* 3, no. 55, January 2005.

¹⁸ Yates, "Wake, Vestige, Survival: ... 'Land Mark,'" 36.

Environmentalism must take place within radically expanded norms if we intend to surmount the climate crisis. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla are not the only artists who embody a new environmentalism by questioning commonly accepted boundaries; however, I look to them because they have expressed commitment to complicating and broadening mainstream environmentalism.¹⁹ They have been successful; their collaboration with Vieques activists over several years called attention to the U.S.'s harmful practices and ultimately contributed to the Navy's departure from the island. *Land Mark* is a powerful campaign because it presents bodies and land as inseparable, imagines inclusive species relations, and recognizes the influence of political boundaries on our environment. *Foot Prints* mobilized those whose health and livelihoods were affected by weapons testing and brought their presence to the forefront of the Navy's attention. Their trace was imprinted on the sand, impossible to be ignored. Such action reveals the pervasiveness and personal nature of political and environmental violence and provides an example to follow around the globe. *Foot Prints* connects bodies and land to personalize environmental issues. Furthermore, *Foot Prints* frames sustainability as a multispecies issue by implying the status of humans and nonhumans alike as endangered. The intervention itself demonstrates the responsibility of humans as the agents of disaster to disrupt the systems we exist within for the sake of many forms of life. The exhibition carpet confronts the complexities of political boundaries by defending Puerto Rico's borders in opposition to violent intrusion of the US. The artists critique a simplified aerial perspective that removes life from consideration of military practices. Ultimately, by refusing normalized boundaries, *Land Mark* calls for mass mobilization in the form of artistry and civil disobedience to refuse systems of power that subdue autonomy and sustainable ways of living.

¹⁹ Smith, Stephanie, and Jennifer Allora. "Interview: Allora and Calzadilla." Essay. In *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art*, 39. New York (NY): Independent Curators International, 2005.

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