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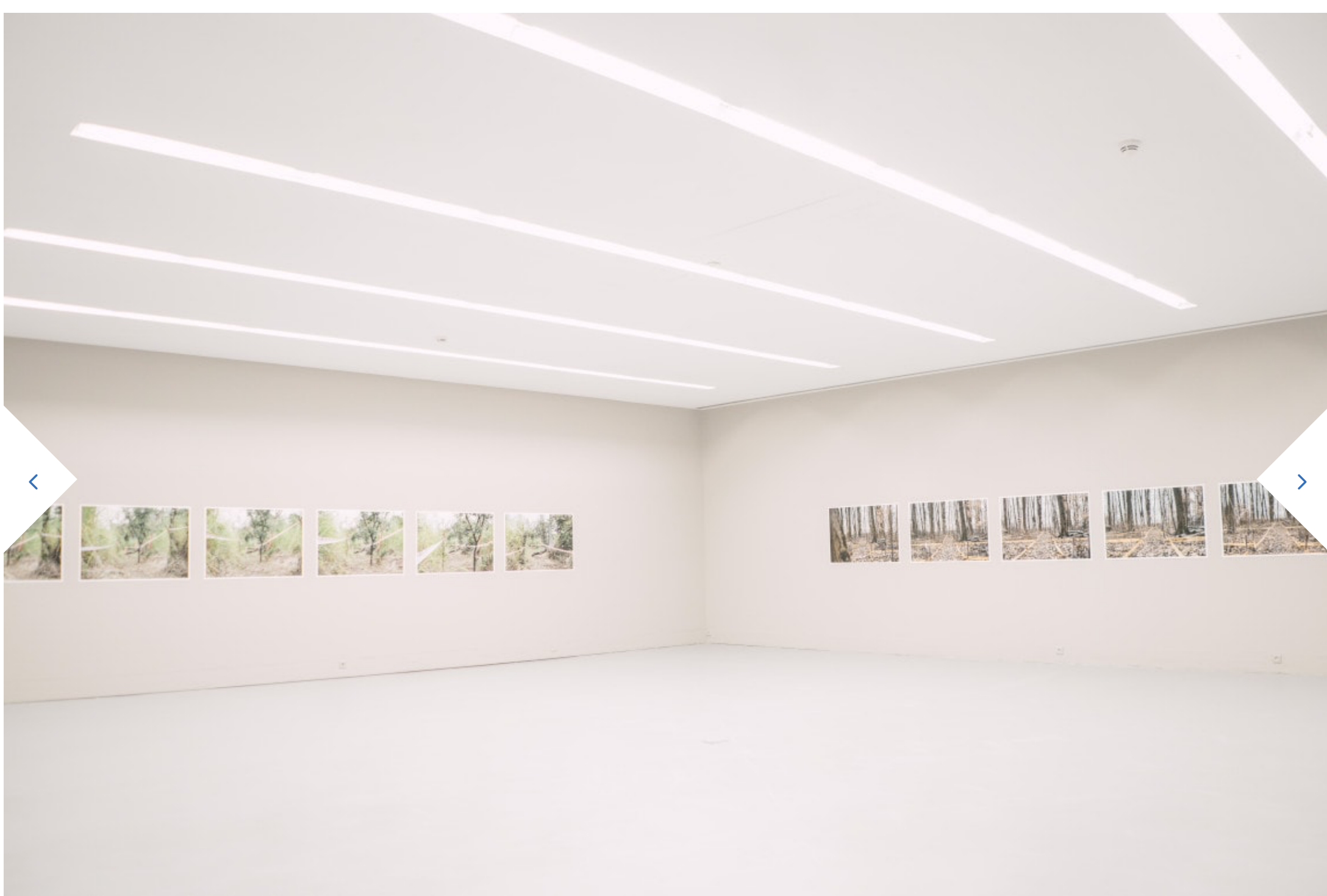
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Lisbo2020



Alice Miceli, Em Profundidade (campos minados): Angola e Bósnia. @ Escola das Artes da Universidade Católica do Porto, Porto © Luísa Fernandes

ART & CULTURE

Alice Miceli and the sublime underground at Escola das Artes

▲ Mafalda Teixeira

The exhibition *Em Profundidade (campos Minados): Angola e Bósnia*^[1], by the Brazilian artist Alice Miceli (1980), on display at Escola das Artes of the Catholic University of Porto, is important during this Russian invasion of Ukraine. Despite the theme and geopolitical issues of the artist's work, we are surprised by the silent and bucolic aura the images – elegantly and neatly arranged on the walls – convey when we enter the gallery: the intense green of the Angolan photographs, of a territory that first seems wild, virgin, unexplored in contrast to the hostile, bare landscape of the Bosnian images.

Seemingly commonplace, the landscapes present new interpretations as we look more closely. In a game of deciphering and discovery with the viewer, where *signs* – markers and warning boards of underground mines – emerge. The images' surreptitious stillness dissipates when we realise that we are walking through minefields with the artist. Her footsteps and camera lens take us deep into normally inaccessible territories. The threat and imminent danger that we do not see, the invisibility that the artist tries to transform into image – typical of her art – is materialised in this exhibition through landscape photographs captured from an internal perspective, with disarming intimacy.

The artist's interest for *impenetrable* landscapes – an adjective she uses –, for human actions, for the issues of representing landscapes and places altered by human occupation or contamination, goes back to *Projeto Chernobyl* (2010) through which she tried to transform the threat's invisibility into images. After Chernobyl, the artist continues to probe traumatised territories, wondering about other impenetrable landscapes on the Earth's surface and their problems of representation. All this in the photographic series *Em Profundidade: (campos minados)*, a research project made between 2014 and 2019, in a union between politics, image and photographic experimentation. Focused on landscape photographic representations, in particular post-conflict areas with landmines, Alice Miceli reflects on the contradiction between invisibility and violence of military devices. In the *Chernobyl* project, the artist tried to capture the invisibility of matter, confronting us with empty landscapes, but full of invisible energy – the radiation that eternally occupies the area. But, in minefields, the visibility itself of the mine object is not what is impenetrable, but rather the *depth of the two-dimensional space recorded in the image*^[2]. That depth becomes impenetrable, that we cannot literally cross or walk through. This is the threat hidden under the ground.

To denounce and visually highlight in space the consequences of contamination by mines and war explosives, in severely affected and geographically distinct regions, Alice Miceli photographed minefields on four continents: Cambodia, Colombia, Bosnia and Angola for the series *Em Profundidade (campos minados)*. She produced four complementary sets. Curated by Luiz Camillo Osório, the show at Escola das Artes of the Catholic University of Porto presents, *due to space limitations and the obvious geopolitics*^[3], the chapters on Bosnia and Angola. The images' visual sequence positions the spectator in contact with time: the time of contemplation and interpretation of the work; the artist's time for taking photographs; the time and current state of the landscapes; and the war time following the conflicts. The arrangement of the two series, on opposite sides of the room, allows a intriguing dialogue between them. The viewer can make an interesting reading, entering into the works' aesthetic and visual side. In large scale prints, the 15 photographs of the Angola series and the 9 photographs of the Bosnia series depict infinite landscapes, such as the potential action of active mines. As we view the images from each series, we follow in Alice Miceli's footsteps. She walks into the landscapes at the same time as we walk into the images. Photography becomes a physical and optical exercise. We are guided by the lens of her camera, by exercises in perspective, landscape framing, zooming in and out of focus, decentering and the artist's movements. The hidden threat, the invisible danger, hidden under the ground, which the artist shows in images with a false bucolic vision, *Veiled memory of the war, about the obsession with the insurmountable territory, the fear of the movement that endures (concrete and unconscious) after a war that never ends*^[4]. Traumatized territories, abandoned exclusion zones that the artist displays, recording historical violence and proving that wars are felt for years. The specific and lethal invisibility of the landscapes of Alice's documentary and factual work, in a poetic language that denounces geopolitical problems so that they are not forgotten. Images without people, but whose presence is part of the work, both the viewer's and the artist's, in a performative action in threatening places where every step is the threshold between life and death. *An aesthetic experience that shows us conflicts and their margins, explosive and subterranean residues*^[5]. In the tension between the mine's potential explosion and the landscapes' bucolic appearance, lies the genius and beauty of the series *Em profundidade (campos minados): Angola and Bosnia*.

Em profundidade (campos minados): Angola e Bósnia, by Alice Miceli, is on view at Escola das Artes da Universidade Católica do Porto until June 23.

[1] Inaugurada a 5 de junho, a exposição de entrada livre pode ser visitada até ao dia 23 de junho de 2022.

[2] Quote from the artist in the interview about the exhibition with Ana Sophie Salazar, *Conversa com Alice Miceli e Luiz Camillo Osório*, published in *Contemporânea* magazine (Ed. 04,05,06/2022).

[3] Osório, Luiz Camillo – *Imagem do que não se mostra: o sublime subterrâneo* (exhibition text).

[4] Osório, Luiz Camillo– *Idem*.

[5] *Idem ibidem*.

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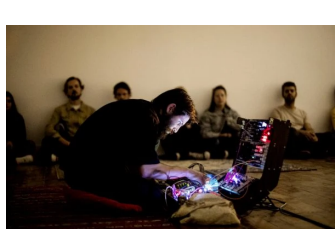
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MAFALDA TEIXEIRA

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