

LESNINI FIELD

A 55 ACRE WILDERNESS AND ART RETREAT

FIELD REPORT FOUR—MAY 16TH OF 2020 THROUGH JANUARY 9TH OF 2021



Kunstenaar Gerco de Ruijter bezoekt Lesnini Field

Vraag: Waarom fotografeert de mens de aarde vanuit de lucht?

Antwoord: De hemel is de grote onbekende. Je kunt er op ontdekkingsreis. Bedenk daarbij dat de verbeelding aan de foto voorafgaat. Het is een reis van de verbeelding. Van boven gezien oogt de wereld als een godswonder. Het is een reden om aan god te doen.

De beschouwers stellen, alvorens ze de foto bekijken, de vraag wat het eigenlijk is waar ze naar kijken. Men denkt sneller dan men kijkt. De verticale blik wordt overgezet naar de horizontale gewaarwording, wetende dat de luchtfoto aan een plek refereert, die in de werkelijkheid herkend zou kunnen worden.

De vraag, waar het is, wordt minder gesteld. De bevrediging van de herkenning of het sentiment dat een foto kan opwekken zijn afwezig. Het zijn gevoelloze foto's.

Je moet je best doen om jezelf te verplaatsen naar het standpunt van de camera, maar die hangt zonder fotograaf erachter in de lucht en daarom wordt er geen gevoel opgeroepen. De kijker moet een drempel van abstractie over.

De vraag naar het waar dringt zich in drie vormen op: Waar kijk ik naar? Waar is het? Waar ben ik? Men wordt over het algemeen door de fotografie schandalig verwend met sentiment en herkenning.

Voor mij telt het gevoel dat me overkomt als ik iets voor de allereerste keer zie, zonder context, zonder connotatie. De informatie die je dan tot je krijgt, kan je nooit kwijtraken. De foto legt vast. Het is niet voor niets dat men in het engels van capturing spreekt.

Artist Gerco de Ruijter visits Lesnini Field

Q: Why does man photograph the earth from the sky?

A: Heaven is the great unknown. You can go there on a voyage of discovery. Bear in mind that the imagination precedes the photograph. It is a journey of imagination. Seen from above, the world looks like a miracle of God. It is a reason to acknowledge a god.

Before looking at the picture, the spectators ask what it is they will be looking at. One thinks faster than one looks. The vertical gaze is transferred to the horizontal perception, knowing that the aerial photograph refers to a place that could be recognized in reality.

The question, where it is, is asked less. The satisfaction of the recognition or the sentiment that a photograph can generate is absent. They are photographs without feeling.

You have to do your best to look from the point of view of the camera, but it hangs in the air without a photographer behind it and therefore no feeling is evoked. Observers have to cross a threshold of abstraction. The question of place comes in three forms: What am I looking at? Where is it? Where am I? In general, one is shamefully spoiled by photography with sentiment and recognition.

For me, it's the feeling that counts when I see something for the very first time, without context, without connotation. You can never lose the information that then comes to you. The photograph captures it. It is not for nothing that one speaks in English of capturing.



Photo Gerco de Ruijter

Fotografie is een vorm van machismo. Je wilt je bezit, jouw plek op de wereld inventariseren. Men pronkt met bezit, veroveringen en expansie, ook in de zin van een bedrijf. Denk aan de luchtfotografie van boerderijen. Mijn eerste interesse werd gewekt toen ik in de keuken van de boerderij van mijn oom zijn land van boven zag.

Wat je van boven ziet, kun je niet op de grond zien. Het bevredigt de nieuwsgierigheid als je eropuit trekt en de vlieger oplaat zonder te weten wat je vangt. Noem het luchtvisseren.

Toen ik in Lesnini Field arriveerde moest ik aan Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* denken, aan de protagonisten die bij Soledad in een rivierbedding slapen. Mij intrigeert dat de levensader van Salinas Valley als slaapplek van zwervers kan dienen.

In Lesnini Field verwachtte ik aan de rivier een plek met karakter te vinden. Ik ben op zoek naar sterke plekken. Ik wil het land in beeld brengen, zodanig dat een ander die de plek kent, het in mijn beelden kan terugvinden. Het is een vorm van dienstbaarheid, dat mijn foto tot een plek op aarde herleidbaar is.

In Lesnini Field gebruikte ik een 360° graden camera, een bol op een hengelstok die aarde en lucht tegelijk vastlegt. Ik kijk niet meer alleen naar beneden, zoals ik dat dertig jaar lang deed.

Ik ontdek dat ik de ultieme verhouding van land en lucht in beeld breng. Ik richt mijn aandacht nu op de onstabiele lucht boven het stabiele land.

Als ik een en dezelfde plek meerdere keren vastleg, maak ik ook tijdsverloop zichtbaar, omdat de bewegingen in de lucht van foto tot foto navolgbaar zijn. De foto's kunnen door de gestage bewegingen in de lucht chronologisch gerangschikt worden.

Een foto met een 360° camera die de horizon in het midden heeft en het vlak in 50% lucht en 50% land indeelt geeft stabiliteit aan het beeld. Laat ik daar eens wat mee gaan doen, zei ik tot mezelf.

Photography is a form of machismo. You want an inventory of your possessions, your place in the world. One shows off one's possessions, conquests and expansion, not only militaristically but also as a company. Think of the aerial photography of farms. My first interest was awakened when I saw my uncle's land from above in the kitchen of his farm.

What you see from above you can't see on the ground. It satisfies the curiosity when you hit the road and fly the kite without knowing what you are catching. Call it aerial fishing.

When I arrived at Lesnini Field, I remembered Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the protagonists sleeping in a riverbed near Soledad. It intrigues me that the source of life of the Salinas Valley can serve as a sleeping place for vagrants.

In Lesnini Field, I expected to find a place with character by the river. I am looking for strong places. I want to depict the land in such a way that someone who knows the place can find it in my images. It is a form of service, that my picture can be traced back to a place on earth.

In Lesnini Field, I used a 360° degree camera, a ball on a rod that captures earth and air at the same time. The gaze is no longer only directed downwards, as was the case for thirty years.

I discover that I capture the ultimate ratio of land and sky. I now focus my attention on the unstable air above the stable land.

When I capture one and the same spot more than once, I also make time lapse visible, because the movements in the sky can be recognized from photo to photo. Because of the movements in the sky, the photos can be arranged chronologically.

A photo with a 360° camera that has the horizon in the center and divides the plane into 50% sky and 50% land gives stability to the image. "Let me do something with that," I said to myself.

Gerco de Ruijter in interview with Andre Dekker, October 2020



Photo Gerco de Ruijter

In Gerco's three works on view here in Field Report 4, Gerco is visible standing with his back more or less to the north in each photograph. As viewers, we look over his head towards the north and to the west in the left of the photographs and to the east in the right of the photographs. Far in the background of each work—to the left—are the Santa Lucia Mountains (which separate the Salinas Valley from the Pacific Ocean). If you know the range you know that some way down the northern side of one of the higher peaks indicates true west from the vantage point of Lesnini Field. For simpler measurement, in each of the three images, the sun makes its way to its western destination while many degrees of sky (never mated in our natural vision) are pushed together as part of an expansive tableau.

Given the northwest to southeast lay of the Salinas valley parallels the coast, the most direct route to the ocean is southwest, by exiting the images to the left.

In the image on the first page, the straight line of the Wash makes a "U"--distorted by the multiple lens view of Gerco's camera. The "U" cups the neighbor's field above the Wash. If you could see into the distance beyond these fields you would see the town of King City.

In the image on page two, it is the Salinas river that flows past Gerco from his left to his right that is made to look as if it came from behind him and then went back behind him--Gerco stands on the Bank and the river flowing directly in front of him is a distorted line at the bottom of the picture. In the "interior" of this reshaped river--on the left side--is Terra Incognita. And in the "interior" on the right side is the route to the Bar—an area of river sand favored by wild boar. Visible from the heightened vantage points of the camera, wild animal tracks and human trails intermingle. On the "exterior" of the river, fields which are just across the river but which are never visible to the unaided eye because of the height of the far side bank become a natural part of a never-before-seen landscape.

In the image on this page, on a point in a line from the Wash to the Bank, Gerco stands in the Flat. Almost centered in the image is a lone tree. One of the few places off the river to find shade on hot summer days. The tree escaped a fire that burnt through some acres of land a year ago summer. It was the remnant charcoal from this fire that was used for the collaborative map paintings visible on the next page.

In a fashion unfamiliar to the pedestrian, from the Flat, we see the Wash and the Plain and the Road and Terra Incognita. Gerco's elevated panovision brings to daylight the omniscience of the dream flyer.

Erik Bakke

LESNINI FIELD IS A SECRET GARDEN on the banks of the Salinas River in Central California—it is 55 acres of wild land in which one can roam freely through sand washes and bushes and engage in discovery. The public has access to the garden by invitation.

Standing between the river and the cultivated land, the garden is part of a narrow band of overgrown banks and wildlife filled habitat, surrounded by wineries and vegetable farms. It offers the visitor routes of observation into a 21st Century kaleidoscope of monoculture, water shortages, labor, and the contested land of the past and the future. It is a project of Andre Dekker, founder of Observatorium based in The Netherlands and Erik Bakke, a California-based artist.

Lesnini Field is a project in progress. The team welcomes nature and art lovers to spend time in a private wilderness and get in touch with darkness, silence, wildlife habitat, and the expanse of the skies and mountains. Your involvement helps establish the resilience of a precious Salinas River environment and the development of arts in Monterey County.

If you would like spend time at Lesnini Field, please email to schedule a visit: erik@erikbakke.com. Also to learn more about the project and/or support it, please inquire about the full concept and latest developments.

Field Report #4 brings together various ways of reconnaissance through photography, writing, recording and drawing by visitors and Bakke and Dekker. The topographical maps, evolving documentation of San Bernabe, the Mexican land grant which became US territory in 1851, are taken from archives on the internet. Mapping is done when you don't know too much about your environment.

Our featured guest of Field Report #4 is artist Gerco de Ruijter from The Netherlands who visited the field in March 2020. Because of the virus it was unexpectedly his last day of a California trip that was to end not before April. He did a survey of the field with a 360° camera, which has this special quality that everything in the sky and on land is in view—the areas visible in the photograph are decided by editing. To see more about Gerco's practice go to <http://www.gercoderuijter.com>.

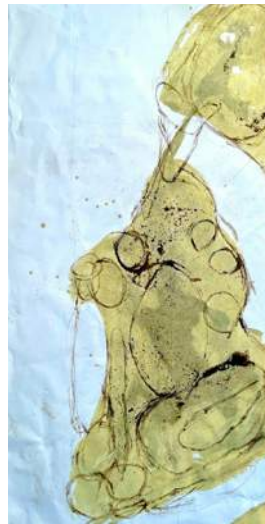
The reporter Greta Mart came out to conduct a radio interview and collect sounds from Lesnini Field. They can be heard here: <https://www.kcbx.org/post/arts-beat-lesnini-field-project#stream/0>

The artist Melissa Smedley visited on 21 November 2020. She and the artist Nanette Yannuzzi Macias are developing plans for future engagement with Lesnini Field. Melissa writes in a recent correspondence after this visit, "We'll be percolating, the way underground rivers must, in not always obvious ways." To see more about Nanette's practice go to <http://nymacias.com>. To see more about Melissa's practice go to <https://melissasmedley.net>.



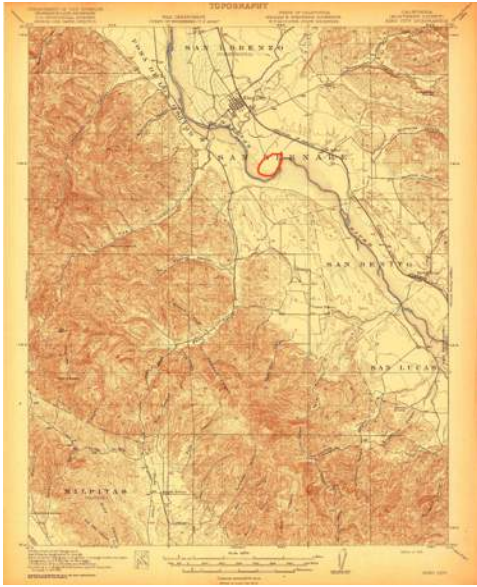
Above: Andre and Erik on January 2, 2020 taking pictures of paintings completed in collaboration from December 31, 2019 to January 1, 2020. While the paintings were being made they were spread out in the Wash further north of this site on plastic sheeting so no foreign chemical agents would get into the sand of the Wash. The paintings were made on paper with marine paint, gouache, lacquer, and pencil, as well as with materials from Lesnini Field including ochre, charcoal, and sand. Each work is about 7.5 x 4 feet. The works started as maps of the 26 areas of Lesnini Field.

Right: The paintings.

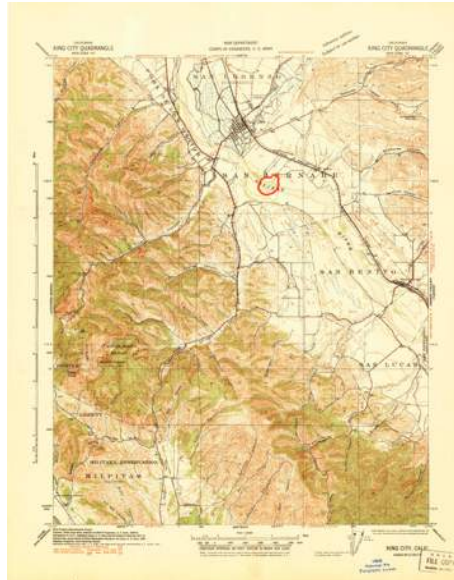


Google satellite image of Lesnini Field. Top of image is oriented northeast.

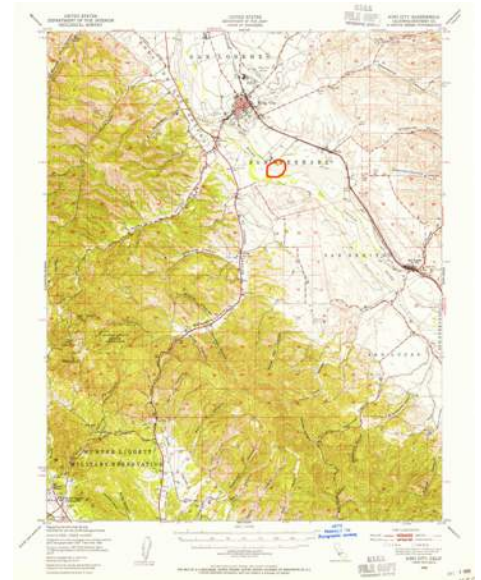
100 Years of Industrialized Agriculture



King City 1919—area of Lesnini Field indicated by red circle



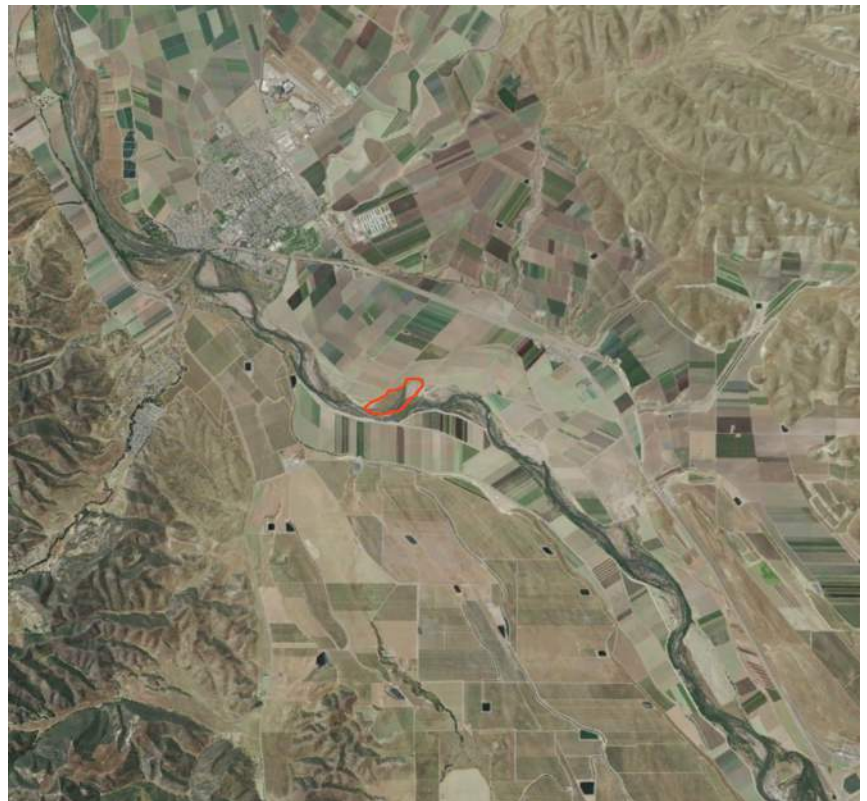
King City 1939—area of Lesnini Field indicated by red circle



King City 1948—area of Lesnini Field indicated by red circle



King City 1961—area of Lesnini Field indicated by red circle



King City 2021—Lesnini Field outlined in red



Location of the 2020 Mineral Fire

Intruders, Droughts, and Fires, from the Bakke-Dekker Correspondence

From the Wash, I walked to town along the river. I sent you an image of where we ended up. For the first part, we went through the sand until the sand ended, and it was all brush between the fence and the river. We then went under some brush and through some wet areas before ending up in a more narrow version of the Wash. We were following the tire tracks of an ATV that we could see had been all around Lesnini Field. At first we thought it had come through the gate, but then we tracked it back to town. For the last part of the trip, the trail runs along the river side of the fence.

The fences along the fields become even more substantial as one heads toward town. They are more solidly built and include strands of barbed wire at the top--and there is not another gate in the fence between the LF gate and the end of the fields before town.

It is impressive how much "wild" area there is between the fence and the river. It is clear that many critters live in that area. We saw quite a bit of fresh scat. You will be able to see on the map that there are many motorcycle trails in the area near town. It is fortunate that there is as much sand and brush as there is between the town and LF. The sand makes it difficult for motorcycles to get through, and if you didn't know there is a trail to get through the brush, you wouldn't find it.

We arrived on Saturday midday. LF looks dry and barren in the midday sun but starts to reveal itself as evening settles in. At this time of year the marine layer of low clouds remains in place until about 10 a.m. It makes for an easy morning of animal viewing and breaking down the camp.

We used the new concrete pipe fire pit to keep from burning down all the dry grass and wood and also as our grilling station. We had skirt steak and peaches off the grill. Amazing. Hope you can come sooner than later just for this reason.

At night, in the distance to the east, we could see the Mineral Fire coming over the ridge. It was about 30 miles away and we could see the red glow of the fire behind a ridge and then areas of grass flaring up on our side of the mountain. It was a dramatic sight.

The closest fires are 15 miles away and the smoke is thick--not billowing smoke but a haze that makes the whole area seem like a smokey room. At night, our lights showed just how much fire dust we were breathing. All the same, the fires seem to be sticking to the mountains. We will see if they make it down to the river. When we awoke this morning, our tents were covered with ash.

On the way down, we saw a golf course on fire (the brown hills in and around the course--not the greens) just south of San Jose. And then we were stopped for an hour on 101 outside Gilroy while the fire department put out a vehicle fire that seemed to have lit the roadside trees on fire. This fire didn't seem related to the lightening strike fires.

In the Wash we noticed western black widows. There was one on a bench and another on a log. As we walked around, we noticed that nearly each ground squirrel hole had at its mouth a scruffy black widow web with a female black widow just inside the hole. I understand they do well in hot weather.

The last couple times I have been down, there has been a couple collecting river rocks from the Wash for their garden. Yesterday they were there with their 12-or-so-year-old niece (and a dog). Karl and I decided to not completely discourage them. I spoke to them as I did last time I was down by myself. There are using an ATV, likely the ATV we were tracking, and with all piled on (the dog at front) are driving along the river from King City to get to the Wash. I didn't say anything about the rocks but told them I didn't want to drive them off and wished them a nice day. They left a while later as we were setting up camp. It is an interesting balance. I enjoy seeing this put-together family enjoying their outing, but if there were more people or the people were drinking and making a mess, my feeling would be different. Perhaps we could put pictures of the family's garden in one of the field reports.



Looking west towards the Santa Lucia Mountains with King City in the distance towards the right. Photo Gerco de Ruijter

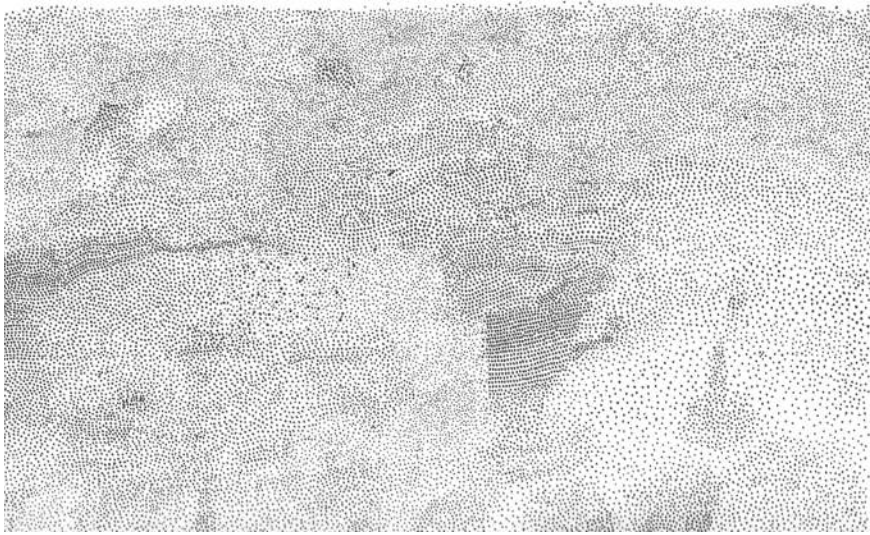


Image of one of Erik's drawings sent to Andre as part of a correspondence

Roadrunner matches pace with a truck
 Doe lopes up the levee
 Boar turns to look before trotting into the underbrush
 Green sweat bee glistens on a thistle

Bald eagle cruises the river and fishes for carp
 Whittled sapling signals the beaver's return
 Red tail hawks wheel in tandem over dried grasses
 Poison oak grows in volkswagen bug shaped mounds

Ticks climb legs and adhere to thighs
 Willows tap the underground waters beneath the wash
 Coyote brush moves north out of the desert

King snakes gravitate to pools of water
 Men with AR-15s, Glock .45s, and Winchester .308s practice
 Black widows occupy the mouth of every ground hole

(Andre's edit of a long poem by Erik)

LESNINI FIELD'S 26 AREAS

river islet bank
 shore launch hollow
 bar flat road
 wash pipes plain
 perch poplars pits
 head dump gate
 fell band ford
 pond tongue curve
 maze terra
 incognito

To learn more about the Lesnini Field project, to contact the collaborators **Andre Dekker** and **Erik Bakke**, or to make a proposal to participate, please email Erik at erik@erikbakke.com or visit www.erikbakke.com.

ANDRE DEKKER RESPONDS TO A MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTS MELISSA SMEDLEY AND NANETTE MACIAS

Good morning Lesnini Field freshers, I have enjoyed you waving at me!

It told me that the Field is a field as local as a field can be, and at same time is able to connect perfect strangers. A warm welcome to Nanette and Melissa from the Rotterdam chapter of Lesnini Field.

The privilege of a visit is for the happy few who know how to enjoy a self-isolation and wishing to venture and describe it. But also from a distance one can play around in the field, imagining seeing and hearing a silence, fantasizing about your use of poison hemlock, researching whatever a treasure of non-human qualities tells an artist.

From the correspondence I take one intention and one offer, who knows...a mutuality or a reversal can be reached

We would relish the opportunity to observe and interpret data on site, create video, see upbubbings of the underground river, etc. and to further explore our new form of cartography of urgency and resiliency.

Our idea would be to write up a Field Report in response to your response, but we can discuss this further at a later date.

That is is the function of Lesnini Field: one wanders, sees and compares, another one reads the notes taken, writes up a Field Report which is then added to the field's memory.

I received advice years ago, which I have found quite useful and now seems appropriate to pass on: leave all your perfect offerings at home (free interpretation of a song of Cohen, the singer-monk)

What a great motto – land relief.



Melissa Smedley on 21 November 2020 at the opening to the Ford and the Maze.