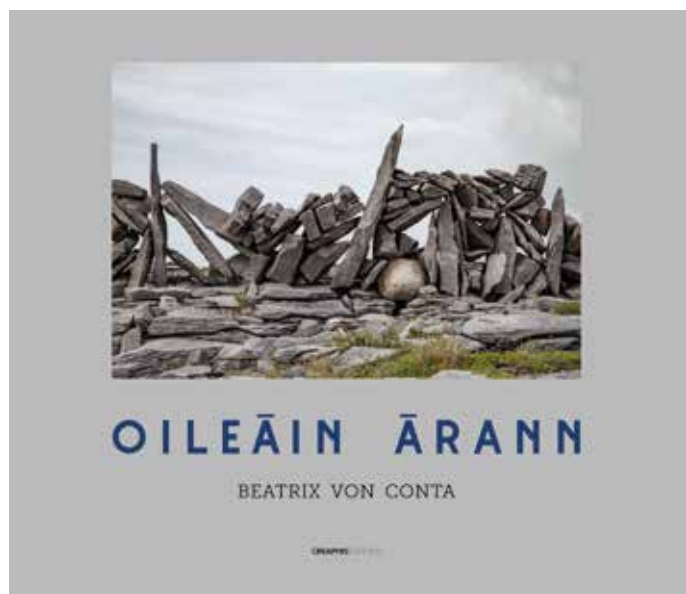


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## OILEÁIN ÁRANN / ARAN ISLANDS

### BEATRIX VON CONTA

The Aran Islands, in the west of Ireland: a «handmade» archipelago, streaked with dry stone walls assembled entirely by hand. The photographer Beatrix von Conta came to Aran to pursue her long-term work on contradictory landscapes, examining the physical traces of human labour. In his text, Olivier Gaudin questions the slow formation of this unstable and forever impermanent "man's land". Three islands lend themselves as much to scientific study as to philosophical meditation, and to poetic and visual reverie.



Photography and text : Beatrix von Conta

Text : Olivier Gaudin

Bilingual book (French/English)

About 90 photographs

Two creative papers

Bodonian hardback binding

160 pages

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**In conjunction with this publication, an exhibition is proposed in association with the gallery Le Réverbère, representing the artist.**

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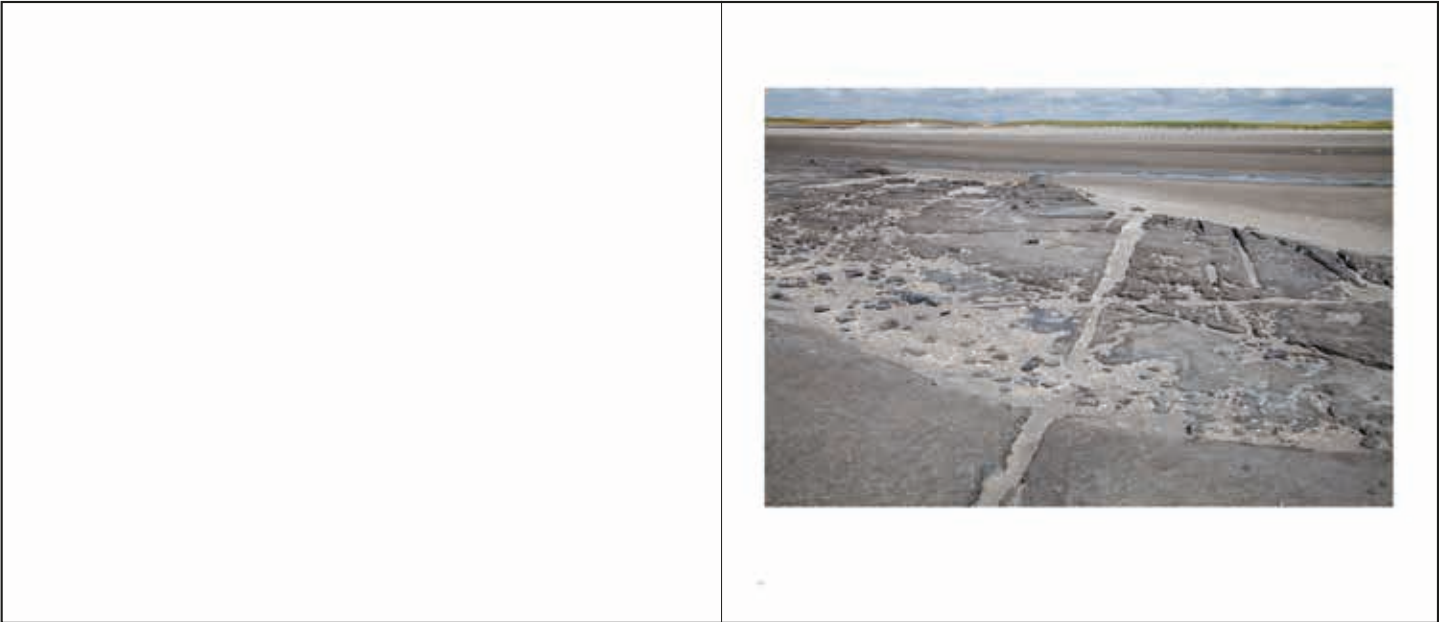
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SOME INSIGHTS











## "A handmade island"

photographs and text by Beatrix von Conta

### Excerpts from the text

*May 2019. I had been awaiting this trip for thirty years. Ever since I discovered a small photograph taken from a plane showing one of the three Aran Islands in the west of Ireland. In this image, the landscape looked like nothing I had ever seen before, more like a gigantic drawing in the middle of the ocean. Strangely striated, the mineral surface of the treeless island was almost entirely covered by innumerable low grey walls organised in plots as if to thumb its nose at the randomness of its steep contours exposed to the violence of the waves.*

Three islands beaten by the winds, sculpted by the hand of man, studded with a harmonious grid formed by thousands of low walls that cover them like a fishing net with flexible meshes imposed by ancestral practices. Geometrical writing where, from squares to rectangles, an alphabet can be read, the meaning of which, today, is becoming blurred: to protect the arable land, laboriously made with seaweed and manure for centuries, by confining it between low walls that protect it from the violence of the wind. To shelter, but also to defend: the inhabitants of the ghostly Iron Age fortifications designed to resist invaders protected themselves behind a succession of thick semi-circular walls. They were sometimes preceded by immense fields bristling with innumerable slabs laid vertically in all directions, impassable obstacles to men and horses. [...]

I had my back to the sea, my eyes and senses turned inwards. By force of habit from contemplating these structures under the variations of light, feeling sheltered and supported but never walled in, my shots naturally adopted a frontal approach. Sometimes, in order to make the linearity in the succession of fragments more apparent, I worked kneeling down, keeping a fringe of earth in the images to accentuate the rooting of the stone serpent. [...] Each stone, a rough, dense, and heavy mass, defends its appointed place. Leaning on it, finding a hold, an advance to put the tip of the foot on disturbs the precarious balance to the point of making entire sections fall like dominoes.

The immersion in the landscape that the eye explores to the rhythm of the walk was coupled with a tactile experience. It was as if touching, in conjunction with looking, led to an extension of the senses and a different perception of reality. The approach, instead of narrowing the space, widened the world. Each stone, though a tiny detail in a vast landscape, became singular and unique, claiming a new existence. [...]

The power and magic that emanate from these islands are for me clearly rooted in their history of manufacture: over the millennia, every single one of these millions of stones, transported, stacked, adjusted, has been touched by men and women's hands. Each one bears the DNA imprint. [...]

## "Man's Land"

text by Olivier Gaudin

### Presentation of the text

The Aran Archipelago, which punctuates the horizon of Galway Bay, is made up of three karst islands of unequal size and irregular topography. This edge of the western world, turning its back on the Atlantic expanse with no visible boundary, marks out the Europe of atlases and globes, fascinating map lovers. But if Aran has intrigued so many visitors over the past two centuries, it is above all because of the harsh authenticity of the human life forms that have developed there, in an environment overexposed to the elements. Despite the mild oceanic climate, the constant weathering of water, salt, and wind, eroding the dark limestone into countless cracks and crevices, has restricted the natural formation of fertile soil. In order to make these islands habitable and to supplement the fishery, their occupants had to create, by a collective effort, thin cultivable plots - with only human and animal muscle power and very few tools. The soil was amended by removing stones, adding sand and seaweed, and raising thousands of dry-stone walls held together by gravity. The vegetation of the fields rarely exceeds the herbaceous layer, while the labyrinth of walls extends to the extreme edge of the cliffs which are slowly but irreversibly collapsing into the ocean below. The evocative power of these inhabited landscapes lends itself as much to scientific study and poetic reverie as to philosophical meditation: the surface of Aran bears witness to a domestication of the world, a precarious man's land, forever temporary.

These three islands form a miniature Ireland: an extremely dense network of grassy plots, dedicated to grazing, where a few houses emerge, isolated or forming hamlets along the few roads. But this petrified landscape, seen up close, contrasts with most known forms. The fences of these plots are built of one and only one material: the dark limestone of the bedrock itself. All the dry-stone architecture that holds up the thousands of walls is an interpretation of the very ground of the islands: that which is magnified by the succession of high cliffs swallowed up by erosion on the ocean side and the various pre-Christian «forts» that punctuate their heights. The dark limestone of the Burren, an omnipresent, unique, and universal material, is found in all the old buildings, without exception - houses, churches, watchtowers, and lighthouses. Aran is a man's land, a land of men, whose landscapes are thoroughly domestic. Their forms are the result of a very long hybridization of human activities with the spontaneous processes we have come to call natural, but which in the past were just as readily associated with the intentions of otherwise wild powers.



## AUTHORS

**Beatrix von Conta**, born in Kaiserslautern (Germany), moved to France in 1975 as a photographer. She now lives near Romans-sur-Isère (Drôme). Her work has been represented since 1992 by the gallery Le Réverbère in Lyon (France).

After studying languages and art history at the universities of Mainz and Heidelberg, she graduated from the Heidelberg University of Education (plastic arts and English) in 1972. She continued her studies in Romance philology and art history at the University of Aix-en-Provence. The discovery of the "Rencontres internationales de la photographie d'Arles" in 1975 and the meeting with Jean Dieuxaide and Eugene Smith proved to be the foundation of her career as a photographer.

She approaches natural spaces as well as the urbanity of cities, from which she picks up the minute or striking signs of an ongoing mutation. Over time and through series, from black and white to colour, she considers her photographic work an essential reminder of today's world. The themes of water, trees, and cemeteries run through her work like a thread. As part of her work on dams, *L'Eau barrée*, a large set was acquired in 2022 by the Cnap (Centre national des arts plastiques).

In 2019, she discovers the Aran Islands in the west of Ireland. The series *Aran Islands, une île faite main* (*Aran Islands, a handmade island*) was exhibited in 2021 at the gallery Le Réverbère as part of "Envie(s) d'ailleurs !" It is also scheduled to be shown in November 2022 at the Paris Photo fair, on the stand of the gallery Le Réverbère.

In 2021-2022, she was invited for a photographic residency at the Hôtel Fontfreyde in Clermont-Ferrand, where she tackled the nature/urbanity theme and created *Tenir ensemble*. Exhibition to come in October 2023, publication of a catalogue.

Winner of the Mission photographique Grand Est (MPGE) 2019-2020, she creates *Le Grand Est, dans le miroir des sources*. Collective exhibition of the MPGE to come at the Arsenal of Metz in December 2022. The collective work *Grand Est, une mission photographique (2019-2020)* was published by Poursuite, Arles.

In 2016, during a photographic residency in Hong Kong commissioned by the Alliance française, the Hong Kong International Photo Festival and Diaphane (Pôle photographique de Picardie), she produced *Hong Kong, au-delà des clichés*. This series was exhibited in 2017 at the Photomaiales de Beauvais and in 2018 at the Paris Photo Fair, at the stand of the gallery Le Réverbère.

In 2011-2012, Flux was produced as part of *France(s), territoire liquide* mission.

His works are part of numerous public and private collections, including Fonds national d'art contemporain, Paris; Cnap, Paris; BnF, Paris; Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône; Maison européenne de la photographie, Paris.

Recent publications:

*Le Présent du passé. La Meuse*, portfolio dans le n° 20 des *Cahiers de l'École de Blois*, 2022.

*Glissement de terrain*, 20 ans de paysages, une monographie, éditions Loco, 2018.

*La Fabrique photographique des paysages*, éditions Hermann, 2017.

*Paysages français, une aventure photographique, 1984-2017*, BnF éditions, 2017.

*France(s) territoire liquide*, texte de Jean-Christophe Bailly, coll. "Fiction & Cie", Seuil, 2014.

*Paysage cosa mentale. Le renouvellement de la notion de paysage à travers la photographie contemporaine*, texte de Christine Ollier, éditions Loco, 2013.

## AUTHORS

**Olivier Gaudin**, born in Paris, has a PhD in philosophy and social sciences from the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. He has spent time studying and doing research in Germany, the United States and Italy. He teaches history of landscape in Blois (École de la nature et du paysage, Insa Centre Val de Loire). He participates in the supervision of end-of-study projects. Since 2018, he has been the editorial director of the annual journal *Les Cahiers de l'École de Blois*, founded by Jean-Christophe Bailly in 2003 and co-published by Editions de la Villette.

His research relates pragmatist philosophy to urban and landscape studies. He pays specific attention to perceptions, human ecology in the social sciences and the cultural history of inhabited places, as well as to artistic and literary representations. He has published some forty texts on these issues in journals and collective works. He co-edited with Alexis Cukier *Les Sens du social, philosophie et sociologie* (PUR, 2017), and with Maxime Le Calvé the n° 102 of the journal *Communications*, "Exercices d'ambiances. Présences, enquêtes, écritures" (Seuil, 2018). He is a member of the editorial board of *Marnes, documents d'architecture* and of the editorial boards of the online and open access journals *Métropolitiques* and *Pragmata*, revue d'études pragmatistes.

Selection of publications related to landscape:

"Berlin sous le ciel. Paysage urbain, mémoire et politique", *Mémoires en jeu*, n° 7, dossier "La mémoire se fond-elle dans le paysage?", 2018, p. 101-105.

"Autopsie urbaine. Sur *Le Géant* de Michael Klier (1983)", *Multitudes*, n° 65, 2016/4, p. 213-219.

"L'expérience du grand paysage : un agrandissement continu", *Les Cahiers de l'École de Blois*, n° 15, "Vous avez dit paysage ?", INSA CVL/La Villette, 2017, p. 10-21.

"Les scènes urbaines de la peur : l'invention de l'agoraphobie, une histoire d'ambiances", *Communications*, n° 102, "Exercices d'ambiances. Présences, enquêtes, écritures", 2018, p. 219-231.

"Entre campagne publicitaire et films d'auteur : douze paysages urbains italiens au cinéma", *Projets de paysage* [en ligne], n° 19, dossier "L'imagerie du paysage", dirigé par Jean-Luc Brisson et Sabine Ehrmann, 2018.

"L'idée de ruine. Images, usages, paysages", *Mémoires en jeu*, n° 11, 2020, p. 19-22.

"Émietter Rome : *L'Éclipse*, crise des émotions ou libération des sens", *La Furia Umana*, n° 40, 2021 [en ligne].



BEATRIX VON CONTA

## OILEĀIN ĀRANN

TEXT BY OLIVIER GAUDIN

### Description of the book

Format: 280 x 242 mm

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160 pages

Approximately 90 four-colour photographs

French/English texts

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**Beatrix von Conta shows excerpts from her  
from her series *Aran Islands*, a handmade island  
at the Paris Photo fair, on the gallery's stand  
Le Réverbère, 10-13 November 2022**

### A BOOK OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO BE PUBLISHED BY CRÉAPHIS ON THE ARAN ISLANDS

Beatrix von Conta looks at the world with a constantly renewed curiosity. In what she calls "contradictory landscapes", she explores the edges, the seams, and the scars. Her eye focuses on details. Her framing precisely cuts out a fragment in the infinite that overwhelms the gaze. A specific beauty is revealed, often hidden at first sight. A landscape photograph does not explain anything, rather, it inscribes signs to be decoded and preludes any immediately perceptible meaning.

Thus in Inishmore, on the Aran archipelago (*Árann*), Beatrix von Conta's gaze travels through a territory where earth and sky meet at eye level, welded together by a mineral line. For centuries, this unique territory has been surveyed, sewn up, and reworked; it is entirely handmade.

This book continues the photographer's "questioning without judgement": her bias is to formulate questions, without certainties or answers. A complex relationship with reality, a reality where grass, stone, air, and water are mixed, a landscape is also for her a fiction that the photographic image makes possible. A new reality, offered by the framing and the point of view.

These stones assembled in an apparent imbalance, self-blocked without binders or joints, are as much visual obstacles as they are ways of crossing the path of the step and the gaze.

As in all her series, Beatrix von Conta's approach is both benevolent and critical. Benevolent in its attention and respect for these places and in the way it confronts and stands up to them. Critical, in that she questions with subtlety the often irreversible changes brought about by human intervention.

What is so moving about her photographs, and what sort of beauty is involved? What do these man-made landscapes reveal, witnesses of an ancestral history that questions our complex relationship with the earth?

With this book, Créaphis Editions, born in regions where dry stone is a marker of civilisation, continues to reflect on the characteristics of landscapes and their potential for resistance to the threats that surround them.