

Invernaderos 2005-2006

The work was selected for the Format06 festival <http://www.formatfestival.com> which included work from a range of international photographers in various exhibition spaces throughout Derby city. It was additionally shown at the University of Northampton in a solo exhibition. Through practice-led methodologies it explored the visual impact on a unique desert landscape in southern Spain of large scale man-made geographical transformations, new corporate agribusinesses and plant monocultures contained within vast greenhouses. The desert of Almeria is bordered by Granada, Murcia and the Mediterranean Sea. It is a harsh, dry environment resisting real sustained habitation and up until recently had remained relatively impoverished and to some extent neglected. The filmmaker Sergio Leone brought the desert environment to public awareness in the so called 'Spaghetti Westerns'. Since the 1970's well over 2,500Ha of plastic greenhouses have been constructed in the region and expansion is still accelerating. The region ('affectionally' known as the Costa Plastica) is now clearly visible from satellite as the greenhouses expand further over the countryside. In effect, the research developed a case study of environmental and visual change in the context of globalization and contestation of land use. The desert of Almeria has a rich history of occupation by different civilizations - each leaving vestiges of their time with the land - most notably the Moors who governed in the south for around 700 years. The province is now strategically active around the rich profits possible in eco-holidays mass tourism, pan-European property speculation and the second home phenomenon and, therefore, the region is awake to the complex issues of environment and ecology. Land (real estate) is now highly contested and disputed. The research was carried out over eighteen months and used specific locations in the desert of Almeria. The landscape has a very distinctive story to tell in terms of its geology, climate, light and its physical and biological make up. The imagery explored both new greenhouse constructions and the decay/renewal inherent within abandoned structures. 'Google Earth' was used to target locations in which to work and a range of theoretical texts around issues of place, non-place and placelessness provided theoretical stimuli. Unlike personal research carried out over previous years, which explored representation of the unseen nature of science and technology, this new research used the topographical power of the photograph and its capacity for retaining emotional distance or apparent objectivity in the image. The strategy moved the viewer from the top down satellite view (surveillance and monitoring) to the more normal ground-based view. The approach explored the potential and language of the 'deadpan' photographic genre in presenting a more 'objective' account - outside the sentimental and hyperbolic. The work aimed to stimulate personal visual experiences with the landscape and nature in the context of contemporary thinking on place and wilderness. Examples of the work were also published in the exhibition catalogue *Twelve Views* with an essay by Anne Ramsden and were shown at both the University of Northampton and University of The Arts, Camberwell in 2006.