

# Organismo

Art in Applied  
Critical Ecologies

## Independent Study Program Case studies

- ARQVA / National Museum of Underwater Archaeology  
○ Cartagena, Murcia
- ALTAMIRA / Altamira National Museum and Research Center  
○ Santillana del Mar, Cantabria
- SUQ CENTENO  
○ Cordoba, Andalucia
- TERRITORIO ABADÍA RETUERTA  
○ Sardón del Duero, Valladolid, Castile and Leon
- UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE  
○ Barcelona, Catalonia
- IMMERSIVE NARRATIVES  
○ Virtual

## ● ARQVA / National Museum of Underwater Archaeology

### ○ Cartagena, Murcia

Throughout the 1960s a series of underwater discoveries made largely by amateur divers and the Spanish Navy, along the coast of Murcia, Spain, motivated the Spanish Directorate General of Fine Arts to create the Board of Underwater Archaeological Excavations of the Maritime Province of Cartagena.

The minimum necessary facilities and infrastructure were set up as the Center for Underwater Archaeology of Cartagena in an old Navy pavilion, located in the Navidad dock of Cartagena. After almost twenty years, on July 5, 1982, the National Museum and Center for Underwater Archaeological Research was constituted, with a new building constructed on the footprint of the old pavilion.

This brief summary of the birth of the center brings together two of the most significant aspects of the context surrounding this case study. On the one hand is the collaborative nature of the work developed by the museum, which involves a wide range of actors, from state security forces to the museum librarian, as well as bathers and non-humans. Today, as has been the case for the past sixty years, sport divers and diving clubs in the area are indispensable allies in harmonizing the dynamics of public awareness for the respect of underwater archaeological sites throughout the vicinity. On the other hand, this account indicates how the building evolved from the site of one organization to another, and thus opens the conception of the idea of the trace, of vestige; of the consideration of what remains, what is protected, what can be seed or sediment, and of the temporal dimension that runs through any geographical enclave.

This case study is deployed to address the critical questioning of what we understand by heritage and what should be protected. The analysis of the mechanisms, protocols, and tools that are used for this consideration, from the Green Book: National Plan for the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage to the confidential archaeological charter, passing through the parameters that register the sighting notification forms, will allow us to unravel the implications and biases inherent to the legal processes in the determination of the stories of past history and the definitions of futures. The particular approach to asset protection in the underwater realm will help us identify dependencies with present issues such as seabed extractivism and the effects these practices have on the oceanic balance and the commons they harbor. We can write other narratives for the commons from definitions of heritage articulated according to different orders of parameters and values.

#### VALVE:

##### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY

Subdirección General de Museos Estatales, Dirección General de Patrimonio Cultural y Bellas Artes - Ministerio de Cultura de España.

The National Museum of Underwater Archaeology ARQVA, a state-owned museum under the Spanish Ministry of Culture, in Cartagena, Murcia, holds both archaeology and sustainability as fundamental to its identity. This link is exemplified in its permanent and temporary exhibitions, its activities, and its daily operation, having won with it the obtaining of the S for Touristic Sustainability, last 2022. Among its objectives, we find the combination of the protection and research of underwater cultural heritage and the environment that is not limited to an internal action, but also external.

[+ info](#)

● **ALTAMIRA / Altamira National Museum and Research Center**  
○ **Santillana del Mar, Cantabria**

The cave of Altamira was inhabited during the Paleolithic period, between 36,000 and 13,000 years ago. It is located 158.5 meters above sea level, at the top of a Pliocene karst. However, there are hardly any signs of subway water circulation, as its formation is due to collapse of the roof and gravitational subsidence of the subsoil. It was one of these landslides that blocked access to the cave and kept it hidden and inaccessible, enabling the immaculate preservation of the paintings inside. The cave remained obscured until 1868, when it was discovered by a local resident, Modesto Cubillas, and its paintings were not discovered until 1879, by María Sanz de Sautuola and her father Marcelino, who published the discovery. The exceptional nature of the images merited their inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985. The increasing number of visitors led to an increase in the CO<sub>2</sub> levels inside the cave, which triggered an acceleration of the deterioration of the pigments. For this reason, the Altamira Museum proposed as an alternative the construction of the replica known as the “Neocave,” which allows visitors to see the site as it was inhabited in prehistoric times, before the natural and anthropic transformations that have given it its present appearance.

Today, one of the intentions of the museum is to pay attention to the environment from which the cave remained isolated, while at the same time giving its access value as a historical site. The museum wants to get out of the cave to place us in the context, to analyze the relationships that link the site to its surroundings and to tell its stories as a means of narrating what motivated long-lasting human settlements in this enclave. In order to know and comprehend who the inhabitants of this cave were—a space of more than 290 meters in length—and to feel deeply into what their lives were like and how they related to this space, we must understand what led those communities to inhabit this and other caves located a few kilometers away, such as La Clotilde, Las Brujas, Las Aguas, El Linar or Cualventi.

This case study takes as a starting point the exploration of the particular ecological context of the prehistoric site, its ecosystemic conditions, its relationships, and the evolution of its native vegetation, in parallel to the identification of the pressures of the allochthonous vegetation, both in the balance of its biodiversity and in the landscape identity. The case is thus developed as an approach to the deep time of the place, to understand the human being in relation to the region in the passage of time and the roots to the region. This in turn connects with the museum’s intention to reflect on the dominant type of tourism in this type of enclaves, thereby working towards the other, less extractivist experiences of this remarkable space, and away from the broader exploitation of these territories.

VALVE:

**NATIONAL MUSEUM AND RESEARCH CENTER ALTAMIRA**  
Subdirección General de Museos Estatales, Dirección General de Patrimonio Cultural y Bellas Artes - Ministerio de Cultura de España.

The National Museum and Research Center of Altamira, a state-owned museum under the Spanish Ministry of Culture, intends to further develop and expand two of the most important lines of the museum’s work through its involvement in this project. One is the responsibility and commitment to sustainability shaping its “Sustainable Museum” program is in dialogue with the institution’s environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions. The other is a deep commitment to contemporary creation, supporting current artists and opening the museum to artistic practices and projects related, in one way or another, to the cultural heritage being preserved.

[+ info](#)

## ● SUQ CENTENO

### ○ Cordoba, Andalucia

Cordoba's urban planning has been characterized throughout history by the marked character of its intramural neighborhoods. When King Ferdinand III took Cordoba from the Muslims he rapidly Catholicized the city, consecrating the Mosque as a Cathedral and ordering the construction of a series of churches. These churches came to be known as the Fernandine Churches, which in turn became not only centers of worship, but also the administrative center for each of the fourteen neighborhoods into which the city was divided. San Agustín is one of them. Built in 1348, the area stood out as one of the most popular neighborhoods until the end of the twentieth century, due to the bustling activity of markets, tenement houses, and festivals.

From the 1940s through to the early 1960s goods arrived at the San Agustín market from nearby municipal markets. It was a node of great variety and traffic where neighbors came from the adjoining streets: Los Moriscos, Costanillas, Cárcamo, Montero, Calle Aceituno, Calle Ocaña, Calle Jesús Nazareno, el Pozanco, and many others. Many people agree that a series of urbanistic processes are responsible for the depletion of that life. At the beginning of the 1960s the market stalls were moved to the area that was later called "La Mosca" Square. The General Urban Development Plan of 1958 isolated the San Agustín market from the main thoroughfares, which caused it to suffer a gradual disappearance of the commercial fabric, as well as a significant depopulation.

**This case study is located in the neighborhood of San Agustín, and addresses how food distribution and consumption policies can influence urban transformations towards healthier, more inclusive, and sustainable ways of living together. To this end, Plata proposes to activate the encounter with other food policies, agroecological practices, and forms of governance based on new social pacts. How is the city built through its food systems? How could we imagine a desirable future for a neighborhood in Córdoba through a project of community practice around food? The case is structured around the forum created by the Luciana Centeno collective of associations which, thanks to a long process with the administration, obtained the transfer of the school of the same name. The school was forced to end its activity, due to a lack of participating children, in 2017.**

**The study that articulates this case will be able to participate in diverse moments of the productive chain ranging from socialization for decision-making, to sowing or labeling, and to entering into notions of alternative economies, seed banks, spaces of a/legality, oven technologies, vegetative cycles, or climatic islands.**

#### VALVE:

##### **PLATA (in collaboration with the Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation)**

Plata is a collective with different interests in contemporary artistic practices, situated with their given communities and the territories. Based in the city of Córdoba, Plata operates in a collaborative manner with other independent collectives, artists, and cultural institutions. Their practice is oriented towards a cultural critique sensitive to ecofeminism, agroecology, the care of bodies, and the diversity of queer thought. They pose as a challenge to approach each project from the learning and incorporation of voices and dissident ways with hegemonic cultural policies. Their latest projects include "*¡Vives en una ciudad agrícola!*", "*Disidanzas*", and "*Wadi*."

[+ info](#)

On this occasion, Plata's work is articulated through a collaboration with Luciana Centeno, Culturaza, María José Suso, Asociación Axerquía Norte, and Rafael Tamajón.

## ● ABADÍA RETUERTA TERRITORY

### ○ Sardón del Duero, Valladolid, Castile and Leon

The Abbey of Santa María de Retuerta was built in 1146 on land donated by Doña Mayor, the fourth daughter of Count Pedro Ansúrez to the Premonstratensian Order, and was constituted as the motherhouse of the order in Spain. The deeds in stone of the monastery church testify that the right of construction was accompanied by an important donation of terras et vineas—lands and vineyards. The Spanish word retuerta comes from the Latin rivula torta, meaning winding river, and refers to its location: it was built on the banks of the Duero River. The estate covers an area of 700 hectares, with Sites of Community Importance (SCI) such as El Carrascal, where more than 4,000 meters of the estate borders the banks of the river. In spite of the severe climate of this area, it has a high biodiversity. Some of its trees, such as the fourteen-branched oak, are several hundred years old. More than 300 hectares are hills and forests, meadows and heathlands; 180 hectares are devoted to vineyards and the remaining land is used for agriculture.

Abadía Retuerta is recognized for innovation in ecosystemic regeneration processes that, in turn, can meet production expectations while generating the least impact on the site. It has the PEFC seal for its Forestry Management Plan and is part of the Natura 2000 network, a European initiative for the conservation of rare species. Another example is its pioneering achievements in organic pest control through two projects with insectivorous birds and raptors in collaboration with the International Foundation for Ecosystem Regeneration. Among other initiatives, they placed more than fifty nests in the vineyards and surrounding pine trees to attract species such as the blue tit, which eats up to 200 insects per day.

**This case study works with the ninety hectares of land between the river and the abbey, all of which Abadía Retuerta still leases for agricultural production. It is the only part of the property that does not contribute to the company's position on sustainability or water consumption. What narratives of coexistence can be established on these soils; how can they articulate the necessary relationships between the many interests of the communities that inhabit them, and the communities that use them for production?**

**This case focuses on the recovery of this forest in order to imagine what futures are possible for this particular ecosystem—harnessing collective intelligence as a virtuous assembly comprising human and non-human beings, innovative and vernacular technologies, techniques, and solutions for regeneration and wine production, as well as different experts, farmers, entrepreneurs, and local communities of producers.**

#### VALVE:

##### Abadía Retuerta

Abadía Retuerta in Sardón de Duero, Valladolid, central Spain, is more than a winery and hotel—it is the base of a vital natural, historical, and cultural heritage. The organization's core values of sustainability, social responsibility, and a commitment to preserve and develop its legacy of nine centuries, continues to write the chapter that concerns us: the 21st century. Abadía Retuerta, in an effort to be consistent with its time, continues to add layers of meaning to expand, preserve, share, and disseminate the common heritage. An example of this is the revival of the gardens and the monks' historic orchard, regenerating the land and respecting the integrity and history of the abbey, and adding layers of value to the whole patina that surrounds and protects it through the creativity of the 21st century, which drives the Organismo project.

[+ info](#)

# ● UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE

## ○ Barcelona, Catalonia

Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations states that among the main objectives of the creation of this institution is its goal “to maintain international peace and security, [...] and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;” as well as “[...] to promote friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.”

Although the United Nations came into existence in 1945, it was not until 1972 that the first conference including the word “environment” was held—the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in Stockholm. One of its most visible outcomes of the event was the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Almost fifty years later the first United Nations Ocean Conference dedicated to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources took place in New York.

In 2023, TBA21 received an invitation from the French government to lead the Ocean Art & Science of the United Nations Ocean Conference that will take place in Nice, France in 2025. This important challenge is directly aligned with the Foundation’s inquiry into the potential of art for generating engagement so vitally needed to activate social and political change in the face of pressing crises.

The case study thus seeks to articulate possibilities for what art can contribute to these political apparatuses. The case will mirror TBA21–Academy’s own commitment to politically informed artistic activation, exhibition, and facilitation. It will incorporate and give voice to the experiences and concerns of the artistic and scientific community shaping the TBA21–Academy network, making use of tools and learning platforms developed by the Foundation to test forms of research, participation, and engagement with communities.

The Bauhaus of the Seas Sails (BoSS) project will be one of the key case study objects. This initiative was born in response to the challenge of the New European Bauhaus to make the Green Pact more tangible through initiatives that are aesthetic, inclusive, sustainable, and local, and proposes to address the Ocean and other aquatic bodies through seven pilot projects. Located in seven European cities—Lisbon, Oeiras, Genoa, Venice, Malmö, Hamburg, and Delta/Rotterdam—it brings together municipalities, cultural or academic institutions, and so-called “Ocean Ambassadors” to observe the power of art in creating Ocean Awareness, Care, and Action.

Looking ahead to 2025, the case will consider a first set of actions for the United Nations Decade for Oceans 2024 Conference, to be held in Barcelona from April 10–12. On the occasion of Ocean Week, an activity will be co-designed between TBA21–Academy and Sónar+D—a technological-creative innovation program that has already established itself as an international platform for the dissemination and diffusion of advances in the scientific world through creative practice.

VALVE: TBA21–Academy

[2025 UN Ocean Conference](#)  
[Bauhaus of the Seas Sails](#)

[Conferencia del Decenio de las Naciones Unidas para los Océanos 2024](#)  
[Sónar+D](#)

## ● IMMERSIVE NARRATIVES

### ○ Virtual

Storytelling has been a profound and invaluable mode of human expression throughout human history. Immersion, too, has proven to be an enduring and effective tool for generating altered states—both creating memorable and impactful experiences, and facilitating mental manipulation. During the medieval era, stained glass in churches created an otherworldly interior ambiance, in which visitors were immersed in colored light.

The advent of motion pictures revolutionized the perception of images, following the audience's shock in witnessing *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* in 1895, and *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903, which introduced the narrative potential of cinema. Today, digital technologies have completely transformed the possibilities of analogue media, ushering us into the era of virtual, interactive immersions.

In an era in which immersive experiences are often co-opted and privatized by large corporations, and museums and festivals are the dominant forms of presentation, some initiatives start to advocate for immersive, digitally native projects that offer unique perspectives on uncharted territories such as algorithmic realities, ecological emergencies, and real-life conspiracies. By nurturing a digital imagination that challenges prevailing modes of algorithmic governance, the works may be addressed to envision a future where we prioritize coexistence, care for the commons, and disaster mitigation, rather than solely focusing on maximizing gains.

The case study on immersive narratives focuses on transcending the artificial divide between the digital and physical realms. We perceive immersive storytelling as more than just a spectacle—we aim instead to approach it collectively, engaging others through mapping, practice based research, and collaborative prototyping to bring together users and visitors alike. The selected case study seeks to achieve its goals through the collective and collaborative mapping of contemporary digital narratives and artistic practice. The case's objective is to prototype a new, experiential immersive extension of the TBA21 Collection. The collection comprises works that are reflective and critical of the world they originated in, frequently exploring ecology as a relation between organisms and with the environment.

Does immersion (re)produce only distraction, or can we navigate spaces where we nurture critical and regenerative thinking? Can immersive narratives help us to move beyond binaries of nature/culture, online/offline, virtual/real, and human/machine? How can the digital interface permit and encourage experimentation, or play with otherwise closed, inaccessible collections? How can we adapt gaming principles to extend the concepts inscribed in the artworks? What is gained and what is lost through digital remediation? How can we give significance to ideas crucial in an era of attention economy and surveillance capitalism? How can we think with and for ecology?