

Almudena Romero's *Farming Photographs* takes visible form near Toulouse after an exceptionally wet winter nearly prevents the work from materialising

Following three years of development, a failed first attempt, and an exceptionally wet winter that placed the work at risk, Almudena Romero's *Farming Photographs* is now taking visible form in a cultivated field near Toulouse.

Developed in collaboration with the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, INRAE, the first iteration of the project occupies approximately 11,000 square metres of cultivated land. Believed to be the largest photographic artwork ever made, the work transforms a field into a living photographic image, produced through the growth of plants, photosynthesis and chromatic variation.

Sown between 30 and 31 October 2025, the work uses living crops as a photographic medium. Rather than being printed, projected or chemically fixed, the image is cultivated. From the ground, the work appears as grasses of different colours, textures and densities. Because of its scale, the full photographic composition cannot be perceived from a single terrestrial viewpoint. The image becomes legible from above, through drone footage and aerial vision, revealing a monumental human eye cultivated into the landscape.

Initiated in 2023, *Farming Photographs* is the first project to use living crops as a photographic medium, transforming the field itself into an image produced through photosynthesis. By merging agricultural science and photographic practice, the work proposes an unprecedented form of image-making in which light, ecology, weather and time converge through living matter.

Building on Romero's ongoing research into the material and conceptual possibilities of photography, the project investigates how plants can generate and sustain photographic images, extending the medium beyond human control and into the domain of biological agency.

A Revealing Winter

The emergence of *Farming Photographs* has been far from certain. January 2026 was around 73% wetter than the 1991 to 2020 average, and February around 206% wetter. February 2026 was the wettest February recorded in the area since records began in 1947. The field flooded, and for several weeks it was unclear whether the grasses would grow as planned, or whether the image would appear at all.

This is the third year of the project, and the second attempt to bring it into being. In the first attempt, the work did not even reach the sowing stage: persistent rain meant that the narrow agricultural window for sowing winter grasses was missed. In this second attempt, the work

was successfully sown, but then nearly undone by the very climatic instability it seeks to address.

For Romero, this precariousness is not incidental to the work, but part of what the work reveals. *Farming Photographs* does not simply represent environmental vulnerability. It is materially exposed to it. Its near failure makes visible the conditions under which agriculture now takes place, as crops increasingly fail or become unpredictable under the pressures of climate change.

“To spend years developing a work only to see it mirror so precisely the environmental reality it addresses, to the point of possibly not happening at all, has been devastating. And revealing. This is agriculture today: crops fail year after year because of climate change. In *Farming Photographs*, the vulnerability of the image is also the vulnerability of the field.”

Farming the Anthotype: Photosynthesis as Image-Making

Farming Photographs builds on Romero’s earlier works *The Pigment Change* and *Photographies Vivantes*, marking a methodological shift away from the use of negatives and towards a materially autonomous form of photography that unfolds through biological processes.

At the heart of the work lies the use of photosynthesis in farmed plants as an imaging mechanism. The project evolves from the nineteenth-century anthotype process, which produced early photographic images through the extraction of plant pigments. In *Farming Photographs*, however, no pigment is extracted. Instead, the living crops themselves perform the act of image-making.

The field becomes the photograph: a responsive, evolving surface shaped by light, growth, water, weather and time.

Generative Photography

Farming Photographs reconsiders the etymology of *photo-graphos*, or light writing, by proposing that this act can be performed by plants through photosynthesis.

This reorientation of agency invites new understandings of authorship and artistic creation, positioning photography as a generative rather than extractive practice. Light is absorbed, transformed and recorded within living pigment, allowing the image to emerge slowly through growth and duration.

The project also reframes agriculture as an artistic gesture. Cultivation becomes a form of photographic production, situating the work across photography, performance, land art and ecological research.

“Coming from a family of sustainable orange farmers in Valencia, I have always been aware of the importance of how we do things as much as what we do, particularly in the context of the current environmental crisis. With *Farming Photographs*, I feel I have come full circle, making my photographic practice more sustainable by allowing images to emerge through light and plant growth.”

A Cultivated Gaze

Departing from conventional wheat cultivation, the field has been grown sustainably, combining diverse seed varieties and bridging agricultural heritage with contemporary ecological thought.

The resulting image draws inspiration from eyespot mimicry, the natural phenomenon in which animals evolve eye-like markings to deter predators. Here, a cultivated human eye gazes back from the land, symbolising our entanglement with the Earth and its ecosystems.

Composed of features drawn from a range of races and genders, the eye presents a universal image of humanity that is at once collective, symbolic and self-reflective. It is not an image imposed upon the land, but one grown with and through it.

Duration and Impermanence

In *Farming Photographs*, the archival nature of the image is determined by the life cycle of the plants themselves, challenging conventional ideas of permanence and preservation. Rather than seeking stability through chemical fixatives or storage, the work embraces transformation, vulnerability and impermanence as intrinsic qualities of its form.

The image will continue to change throughout the growing season. Its visibility is temporary and dependent on the development, maturation and eventual harvesting of the crop.

Future iterations will employ plant species responsive to their host environment, with each plant's lifespan defining the temporality of its photographic composition. Some may last only a few months, while others may endure for decades. These durational registers echo the precarious yet resilient dynamics that shape our relationship with the living world.

Once the crop matures, it will be harvested in August 2026. The wheat will then be milled into flour, extending the artwork's material life into daily sustenance and returning it to the communities and ecologies that enabled its making.

Timeline

2023

Development of *Farming Photographs* begins.

2024 to 2025

First attempt to realise the work fails before sowing, as persistent rain causes the agricultural window for sowing winter grasses to be missed.

30 to 31 October 2025

The first iteration is successfully sown across an approximately one-hectare plot at INRAE, near Toulouse.

January to February 2026

The field is affected by exceptional rainfall and flooding. February 2026 becomes the wettest February recorded in the area since records began in 1947.

May 2026

The image begins to take visible form in the field and becomes legible through aerial view and drone footage.

May to August 2026

The artwork remains visible as the crop continues to grow, change and mature.

August 2026

The wheat is harvested.

September 2026

The wheat is milled into flour and locally distributed.

About Almudena Romero

Almudena Romero, born in Madrid in 1986, is a visual artist whose practice explores the material, historical and social dimensions of photography. Working with organic and sustainable materials, she expands the medium beyond the mechanical and chemical, approaching photography as a biological, performative and ecological process.

Her work has been exhibited internationally at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Saatchi Gallery, Musée Départemental Albert-Kahn and Les Rencontres d'Arles, among other venues. She was nominated for the Prix Pictet in 2021 and has received major grants and commissions from Arts Council England, Creative Europe and Wellcome Trust, as well as international residencies at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, the Mitsubishi Ichigokan Museum and the Whitechapel Gallery.