

# Gonçalo Fonseca

A Burning Landscape



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Project Groundswell is organised by Photo Museum Ireland,  
Fotohof, Cortona On The Move, Imago Lisboa

# A Burning Landscape Gonçalo Fonseca

## ( BIOGRAPHY )

**Gonçalo Fonseca** (1993) is a documentary photographer based in Lisbon, Portugal. He specializes in intimate and long-term projects. He is a regular contributor to the Washington Post, New York Times, Der Spiegel, and The Guardian, documenting the significant issues and events in his homeland.

Gonçalo has received numerous accolades, including the Leica Oskar Barnack Award (Newcomer) and was a finalist for the Community Awareness Award at the POY and the Hellerau Portrait Prize. His work has been exhibited at major museums and galleries in Portugal, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, South Korea, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates.

[goncalofonseca.net](http://goncalofonseca.net)

## ( EN )

With three percent of its territory burned and the largest wild-fire in its history, Portugal once again faced a devastating fire season. Despite the country's size, Portugal has consistently recorded the largest burned area in Europe over the past two decades.

Depopulation in the country's interior has left vast, unmanaged landscapes. Home to one of the largest expanses of eucalyptus in the world, Portugal is also one of the continent's top exporters of paper products. Uninterrupted fields of eucalyptus monoculture are a common sight. According to a 2009 pulp industry report, around 80% of these plantations are either mismanaged or not managed at all. The same report predicted that one in every four years would bring significant forest fire losses. They draw much attention from the media, eager to cover the tragedy but quick to depart the scene, only returning the following summer.

**A Burning Landscape** seeks to move beyond the usual media cycle of covering the issue every summer when the landscape is in flames, and explore potential solutions to Portugal's wildfire crisis. The project examines why Portugal burns so frequently and documents the efforts being made to change that reality. It aims to highlight how the country and its communities are combining technology, ecological restoration, traditional fire knowledge and large-scale land management to rise from the ashes and build a more fire-resilient future.

My roots lie in central Portugal, in the Açor Mountains of the Coimbra region – an area devastated by cyclical wildfires. This time, our home was spared, though we lost our orchard in 2017 when wildfires swept through the region, claiming 114 lives. Many in the region lost their homes. The most recent, in August 2025, was the largest ever recorded in the country, with 66,000 hectares burned. I was there, documenting my community and how they cope with this enormous tragedy that affects us year after year and does not allow nature enough time to restore itself, even with human intervention. At the entrance to Vila Pouca da Beira, in Oliveira do Hospital, I photographed an agricultural shed near the cemetery. Two days after the flames had passed, it was still burning. The owner stood beside it crying. 'Thank God, this time we didn't lose everything,' he told me. 'In 2017, I lost two nephews. They're buried just over there.'

When the embers stop glowing, a monumental task begins. With the first rains, tons of soil and ash are swept into rivers, threatening wildlife and contaminating drinking water for towns and cities. Crews of workers labour for countless hours, fighting

# Uma Paisagem em Chamas

Gonçalo Fonseca

( PT )

a difficult battle to clean the landscape and build ash-retention barriers before the rainy season begins. Others plant fast-growing native weeds – often using drones – to stabilize the terrain and prepare the ground for reforestation.

Innovative, large-scale projects are now underway to restore vast stretches of landscape degraded by recurring wildfires and invasive species. In collaboration with local communities, teams use heavy machinery to prepare the land and plant thousands of saplings, redefining the idea of an industrial forest by blending productive species such as Maritime Pine with native species chosen for conservation. With an 80-year horizon and developed on communal lands, these projects allow the forests to mature and regenerate over generations.

Com 3% do seu território queimado e o maior incêndio florestal da sua história, Portugal enfrentou mais uma época de fogos devastadora. Apesar do seu tamanho pequeno, há duas décadas que continua a registar a maior área ardida da Europa.

Portugal tem uma das maiores áreas de eucalipto do mundo e é também um dos principais exportadores europeus de produtos de papel. Campos contínuos de eucalipto em monocultura são uma imagem comum. O despovoamento do interior deixou grandes extensões de terreno sem gestão, onde espécies invasoras e pirófitas, ou seja que estão adaptadas a regimes de fogo, dominam a paisagem.

Segundo um relatório da indústria de pasta de papel de 2009, cerca de 80% do eucaliptal em Portugal é mal gerido ou está completamente abandonado. O mesmo relatório previa que, em média, um em cada quatro anos traria perdas significativas devido a incêndios florestais.

**Uma Paisagem em Chamas** é um trabalho em curso que procura ir além do ciclo mediático e explorar possíveis soluções para a crise dos incêndios em Portugal. O projeto analisa porque é que o país arde tão frequentemente e documenta os esforços que estão a ser feitos para alterar essa realidade. O objetivo é mostrar como comunidades e instituições estão a combinar tecnologia, restauro dos ecossistemas, conhecimento tradicional do uso do fogo e gestão do território em larga escala para que o país possa renascer das cinzas e construir um futuro mais resiliente.

O incêndio mais recente, do Piodão em Arganil em agosto de 2025, foi o maior alguma vez registado no país, com 66 mil hectares ardidos. A minha família materna é originária desta zona, da Serra do Açor, região de Coimbra, um lugar marcado por incêndios recorrentes. Conheço bem o cheiro das cinzas e a aflição de ter o indêndio à porta. Em 2017 a nossa casa escapou, mas perdemos o nosso quintal e pomar, o ano em que os fogos devastaram a região e causaram 114 mortes. Muitas famílias perderam tudo.

À entrada de Vila Pouca da Beira, em Oliveira do Hospital, fotografei um barracão agrícola perto do cemitério. Dois dias depois da passagem das chamas, ainda ardia. O dono estava ao lado, a chorar. “Graças a Deus, desta vez não perdemos tudo”, disse-me. “Em 2017, perdi dois sobrinhos. Estão ali sepultados atrás.”

Todos os anos, o espectáculo repete-se ao vivo em todas as televisões do país. Os media cobrem a tragédia enquanto dura, mas rapidamente partem e só regressam aos territórios nos anos seguintes.

Quando as brasas finalmente se apagam, começa uma tarefa imensa. Com as primeiras chuvas, toneladas de terra e cinza são arrastadas para os rios, ameaçando a fauna e contaminando a água que abastece vilas e cidades. Equipas de trabalhadores passam longas horas a limpar a paisagem e a construir barreiras de retenção de cinzas antes que a época das chuvas comece. Outras equipas semeiam ervas autóctones de crescimento rápido, muitas vezes com recurso a drones, para estabilizar o solo e preparar o terreno para a reflorestação.

Projetos inovadores e de grande escala estão agora a ser implementados para recuperar vastas áreas degradadas por incêndios sucessivos e por espécies invasoras. Em colaboração com as populações locais, equipas usam maquinaria pesada para preparar o terreno e plantar milhares de jovens árvores, redefinindo o conceito de floresta industrial ao juntar espécies produtivas, como o pinheiro-bravo, com espécies nativas escolhidas por motivos de conservação. Com um horizonte de 80 anos e desenvolvidos em terrenos comunitários, estes projetos permitem que as florestas amadureçam e se renovem ao longo de gerações.

“O fogo é necessário, faz parte do ecossistema, por isso temos de aprender a conviver com ele. Só temos de o saber usar”, explica André Mota, da Equipa de Proteção Civil da Comunidade Intermunicipal Viseu Dão Lafões. A sua equipa tem realizado queimadas controladas há vários anos em zonas repetidamente afetadas por incêndios nas últimas cinco décadas, recuperando uma prática antiga dos pastores de montanha. Descobriram que estas queimadas prescritas podem abrandar significativamente a propagação dos incêndios de verão e, nalguns casos, travá-los por completo.

Muito foi feito para melhorar a vigilância, as estratégias de combate e a proteção dos ecossistemas desde a tragédia de 2017. Mas num clima cada vez mais quente, os incêndios tornam-se mais rápidos, mais intensos e mais imprevisíveis. O futuro destas paisagens dependerá de se a inovação, a tradição e a ação comunitária conseguirem manter-se um passo à frente das chamas.



































































# About Project Groundswell

Project Groundswell was initiated in 2022 by Photo Museum Ireland together with three other European photo organisations – Fotohof (Salzburg, Austria); Cortona On The Move (Cortona, Italy) and Imago Lisboa (Lisbon, Portugal).

The project arose from the desire of the four partners to work together to create opportunities for artists and audiences to engage with the climate emergency – the defining challenge of our time. All four organisations had already been working independently to incorporate environmental themes into their respective activities, so the Creative Europe programme presented a marvellous opportunity to coordinate and focus our efforts, and to amplify our collective impact. Over a two-year period, the partners came together online to develop and refine the Project Groundswell proposal, which successfully received funding support from Creative Europe in 2024.

Thanks to this support, the partners can now work on a wider canvas, and can forge new connections with artists, communities and audiences that would otherwise be beyond our individual reach. What's more, the support has enabled us to be more ambitious in our creative remit. From the outset, the partners recognised that we wanted photographic discourse to move beyond raising awareness of the **effects** of climate change, and instead embrace ways of **being the change we want to see**. In the photo space, that has meant constantly reappraising our practices along sustainable lines, carefully evaluating immediate carbon footprint against long-term usage and re-usage of materials. For example, this photobook has specifically been designed and produced in such a way as to minimise waste and harmful, carbon-intensive processes. Or to take another example, a key strand of Project Groundswell is devoted to providing online training webinars and workshops on sustainable practice, culminating in an in-depth series of workshops that led to participants gaining certification from the Carbon Literacy Project.

Another important consideration was that the opportunities we created be open and freely accessible to as many artists as possible. Thus we organised an Open Call for artists and its resounding success is a testament to the burgeoning interest and commitment among Europe's photographic and lens-based artists to address climate action.

The Project Groundswell Open Call attracted 480 artists who submitted 571 projects. The international jury had the difficult task of selecting just 12 Finalists.

The Finalists are:

**Chloé Azzopardi** ( FR )

**Marco Buratti** ( IT )

**Sean Charlton White** ( NL )

**Gonçalo Fonseca** ( PT )

**Matjaz Krivic** ( SL )

**Camilla Marrese & Gabriele Chiapparini** ( IT )

**Yvette Monahan** ( IE )

**Ingmar Björn Nolting** ( DE )

**Maria Oliveira** ( PT )

**Oliver Ressler** ( AT )

**Nora Schwarz** ( DE )

**Adam Sébire** ( NO )

An audiovisual Showcase of these artists' outstanding works can be seen on [www.projectgroundswell.eu](http://www.projectgroundswell.eu)

From the twelve finalists, four overall winners were selected by the Jury. They are: Gonçalo Fonseca, Yvette Monahan, Ingmar Björn Nolting and Maria Oliveira. These four projects are included in a specially curated exhibition that will be presented in Salzburg, Dublin, Cortona and Lisbon throughout 2026. In addition, this photobook that you have in your hands, and three other photobook publications, explore the winners' projects in depth. These monographs stand as an enduring record of the individual artist's works for the future.

#### ( PHOTO MUSEUM IRELAND )

Photo Museum Ireland is Ireland's national centre for contemporary photography. It is dedicated to advancing the development, appreciation and understanding of photography and visual culture in Ireland and internationally. In its purpose-designed space, Photo Museum Ireland organises innovative exhibitions and curated programmes that address important social and cultural issues. With 5–6 major exhibitions annually, Photo Museum Ireland enlightens, challenges, and inspires over 60,000 visitors each year. Its dynamic engagement programmes enrich public awareness of photography and its subsidised darkrooms and digital production and printing facilities are a vital support to practising photographers. It also operates a specialist book shop and photobook publishing. Since its establishment in 1978, the organisation has been to the fore in facilitating meaningful exchanges between artists and the public, ensuring that great photography is accessible to all.

[photomuseumireland.ie](http://photomuseumireland.ie)

#### ( FOTOHOF )

A dynamic collective established in 1981, Fotohof operates Austria's most active centre for contemporary photography exhibitions, archival projects, education and publications. Fotohof has a clear Europe-wide focus, showing around 50% Austrian artists, 40% rest of Europe, and 10% rest of the world.

In addition to the exhibitions in the gallery, Fotohof's program includes one of the most extensive photo-specific libraries in Austria (comprising 17,000 photobooks and photorelated publications), an internationally active photo book publishing house (400 published books), an archive for historical and contemporary photography, international touring exhibitions, a wide range of educational offers with workshops and discourse events.

In addition to presenting the Project Groundswell exhibition in its purpose-designed space, Fotohof brings unrivalled expertise in the area of photobook publishing. Their publishing imprint, Fotohof Editions, has published over 380 mainly monographic titles and has developed strong international distribution channels. Like Photo Museum Ireland, they also operate pro-quality exhibition printing facilities.

[fotohof.at](http://fotohof.at)

#### ( Cortona On The Move )

Nestled in the ancient Tuscan hills, Cortona On The Move festival was founded in 2011 by the cultural association ON THE MOVE, whose goal is to disseminate and promote the visual arts, particularly contemporary photography. From the outset, the festival has championed contemporary photography, promoting innovative interpretations of the medium's language and codes. Each year, from July to November, it attracts a growing audience with its dynamic programme and high-quality exhibitions. True to its **On The Move** ethos, the festival fosters curiosity, observation,

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and a profound engagement with the changing world. Now in its 15th year, Cortona On The Move has evolved into a vibrant platform for contemporary photography and visual storytelling, bringing together diverse voices to share stories that inspire reflection and dialogue.

Today, Cortona On The Move is more than a photography showcase; it has become a hub for production, exploration, and critical thought. It stands as a vital reference point for photographers, enthusiasts, and a global audience, including a steadily increasing number of students from high schools and universities.

[cortonaonthemove.com](http://cortonaonthemove.com)

## ( IMAGO LISBOA )

Imago Lisboa – Photo Festival is organized by Cedilhas e Legendas – a non-profit cultural association. This is a group of people who use the visual arts, and particularly photography, as their tool for cultural activism. With different paths in the cultural area, their common interest in images brought them together and awakened the desire to move forward with this project.

Photography has gained a growing presence in the visual arts and respective markets. Its functionality is diverse and complex. In addition to the arts, photographic recording is also linked to history, anthropology and science in general. From this broad base, Imago Lisboa sets out to:

- Promote emerging artists and contemporary photography in general without neglecting knowledge of classical authors.
- Stimulate reflection around the different territories of photography.
- Create a platform for promoting younger authors.
- Create a space for constructive knowledge, equality and freedom.



( 1 )

Burnt eucalyptus trees in the Águeda region, Aveiro, Portugal. 18 September 2024. Image produced on assignment for Bloomberg.



( 2 )

A young boy, together with his relatives, tries to contain a wildfire in the village of Porto Castanheiro in Arganil, Coimbra district. The village was affected by the Piódão wildfire, the worst ever recorded in Portugal, with more than 60,000 hectares burned. 14 August 2025.



( 3 )

A bulldozer opens a path through the forest to stop the fire from reaching the village of Cabeça do Cão in Águeda, Aveiro, Portugal. 18 September 2024. Image produced on assignment for Bloomberg.



( 4 )

A woman protects herself from harmful wildfire smoke spreading through the village of Casal in Águeda, Aveiro, Portugal. 18 September 2024. Image produced on assignment for Bloomberg.



( 5 )

A Fireboss aircraft drops a load of water as hundreds of birds take flight when the Piódão wildfire reached the village of Porto Castanheiro in Arganil, Coimbra district. 14 August 2025.



( 6 )

Firefighters from the Arganil fire brigade try to stop a wildfire from reaching the village of Porto Castanheiro in Arganil, Coimbra district. 14 August 2025.



( 7 )

An exhausted firefighter from the Arganil fire brigade looks on as the Piódão wildfire reaches the village of Porto Castanheiro in Arganil, Coimbra district. The Piódão wildfire is considered the worst ever recorded in Portugal, with more than 60,000 hectares burned. 14 August 2025.



( 8 )

Firefighters from the Arganil fire brigade work to stop a wildfire from reaching the village of Porto Castanheiro in Arganil, Coimbra district. 14 August 2025.

( 9 )

A fire burns through a patch of invasive acacia trees in the Águeda region of Portugal. 18 September 2024. Image produced on assignment for Bloomberg.



( 10 )

A burnt railway track in Albergaria-a-Velha, Aveiro, Portugal. 25 September 2024.



( 11 )

Luís Neves, 80, poses for a portrait at a local café near the village of Casal do Monte, Trancoso, in the Guarda district. A retired forest ranger, he lost his home in the 2025 fires after a lifetime of working in the forest. 'Nowadays we don't have any forest left, only chaos,' he said. 3 September 2025.



( 12 )

The burnt remains of Luís Neves's home in the village of Casal do Monte, Trancoso, Guarda district. 3 September 2025.



( 13 )

Two women observe the damage caused by a recent wildfire that destroyed the chapel in the cemetery of Cedovim, Vila Nova de Foz Côa, Guarda, Portugal. 3 September 2025.



( 14 )

Tiago Dias, owner of a car repair shop, stands for a portrait in the middle of the rubble. The family business was destroyed by wildfires in the village of Arcas, Trancoso, Portugal. It was the second time the shop burned down, the first being in 2003. 3 September 2025.



( 15 )

A car repair shop destroyed by wildfires in the village of Arcas, Trancoso, Portugal. This was the second time the business burned down, the same had happened in 2003. 3 September 2025.



( 16 )

Victor Manuel dos Santos, 59, exits a part of his home that almost went up in flames on the outskirts of Albergaria-a-Velha, Aveiro, Portugal. He was woken by a smoke alarm that saved his life. 25 September 2024.



( 17 )

A burnt playground in the village of Cavada in Albergaria-a-Velha, Aveiro, Portugal. 25 September 2024.



( 18 )

The burnt landscape of São Jorge da Beira, an old mining town in the Açor mountains. The region was affected by the Piódão wildfire, considered the worst ever recorded in Portugal, with more than 60,000 hectares burned. 18 September 2025.



( 19 )

Mário Silva, a retired carpenter, poses for a portrait with his beehives in the village of Trigais, Covilhã, Portugal. He lost dozens of hives to the Piódão wildfire, the worst ever recorded in Portugal, with more than 60,000 hectares burned. 18 September 2025.



( 20 )

Containment measures are put in place to protect wildlife and drinking water in the Vouga River in northern Portugal after destructive wildfires in the region. 26 September 2024.



( 21 )

Forestry sappers from the Coimbra Intermunicipal Community build ash-retention barriers near the village of Meãs, Pampilhosa da Serra, Coimbra, a region affected by the Piódão wildfire. 28 October 2025.



( 22 )

Forestry sappers from the Coimbra Intermunicipal Community drive through the burnt landscape near the village of Meãs, Pampilhosa da Serra, Coimbra. 28 October 2025.

( 23 )

Ash-retention barriers near the village of Meãs, Pampilhosa da Serra, Coimbra, a region affected by the Piódão wildfire. 28 October 2025.



( 24 )

Adenilson Moreira, a forestry worker, cuts down invasive acacia trees near the village of Colmeal, Góis, Coimbra. As part of a government initiative, the Village Condominium program aims to clear land within a 100-meter radius around vulnerable villages, replacing invasive species with native plants. 29 October 2025.



( 25 )

A large area of acacia trees cut down near the village of Colmeal, Góis, Coimbra, as part of the Village Condominium program. 29 October 2025.



( 26 )

A worker from Terra Farmers, a drone company, fills a drone's reservoir with fast-growing native seeds to replant a burnt area near the Alva River close to Vila Pouca da Beira, Oliveira do Hospital, Coimbra. 30 October 2025.



( 27 )

A Terra Farmers drone releases fast-growing native seeds to replant a burnt area near the Alva River, close to Vila Pouca da Beira, Oliveira do Hospital, Coimbra. 30 October 2025.



( 28 )

A Terra Farmers drone disperses fast-growing native seeds over a burnt area near the Alva River, close to Vila Pouca da Beira, Oliveira do Hospital, Coimbra. 30 October 2025.



( 29 )

A young chestnut tree grows on a hillside belonging to a 1,000-hectare property managed by the Antarr corporation in the communal lands of Colmeal, Coimbra. The innovative project aims to create a new model of forest management in areas devastated by wildfires, combining productive forestry with biodiversity conservation using native species. 24 April 2025.



( 30 )

Duarte Neves, 24, Forestry Engineer managing the reforestation process of a hillside in the Monte Frio village, checks the health of the Maritime Pines that sprouted naturally after the 2017 fires that left the Arganil with a 95% burnt area. 30 August 2022.



( 31 )

Two workers head home after a long day reforesting part of a 1,000-hectare property managed by the Antarr corporation in the communal lands of Colmeal, Coimbra. The project aims to redefine forest management in areas devastated by wildfires, blending productive forest zones with areas dedicated to biodiversity. 24 April 2025.



( 32 )

Children from a local school learn about fire behavior at the annual open day at the LEIF, the Laboratory for the Study of Forest Fires, the most important structure studying wildfires in Europe. Lousã, Coimbra, Portugal. 30 May 2025.



( 33 )

Forrest sappers in training light a controlled burn to clear the land close to the village of Aigra-Velha in Góis, Coimbra preventing the wildfires of the future from becoming more intense and deadly. 28 February 2025.

# Colophon

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