



# BARRY UNDERWOOD: IMMERSING INTO THE NATURE AND THE MAN-MADE

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## BARRY UNDERWOOD: IMMERSING INTO THE NATURE AND THE MAN-MADE

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Born in 1963, American photographer Barry Underwood has been in the photography industry for about 30 years already with a number of gallery and museum exhibitions throughout whole America.

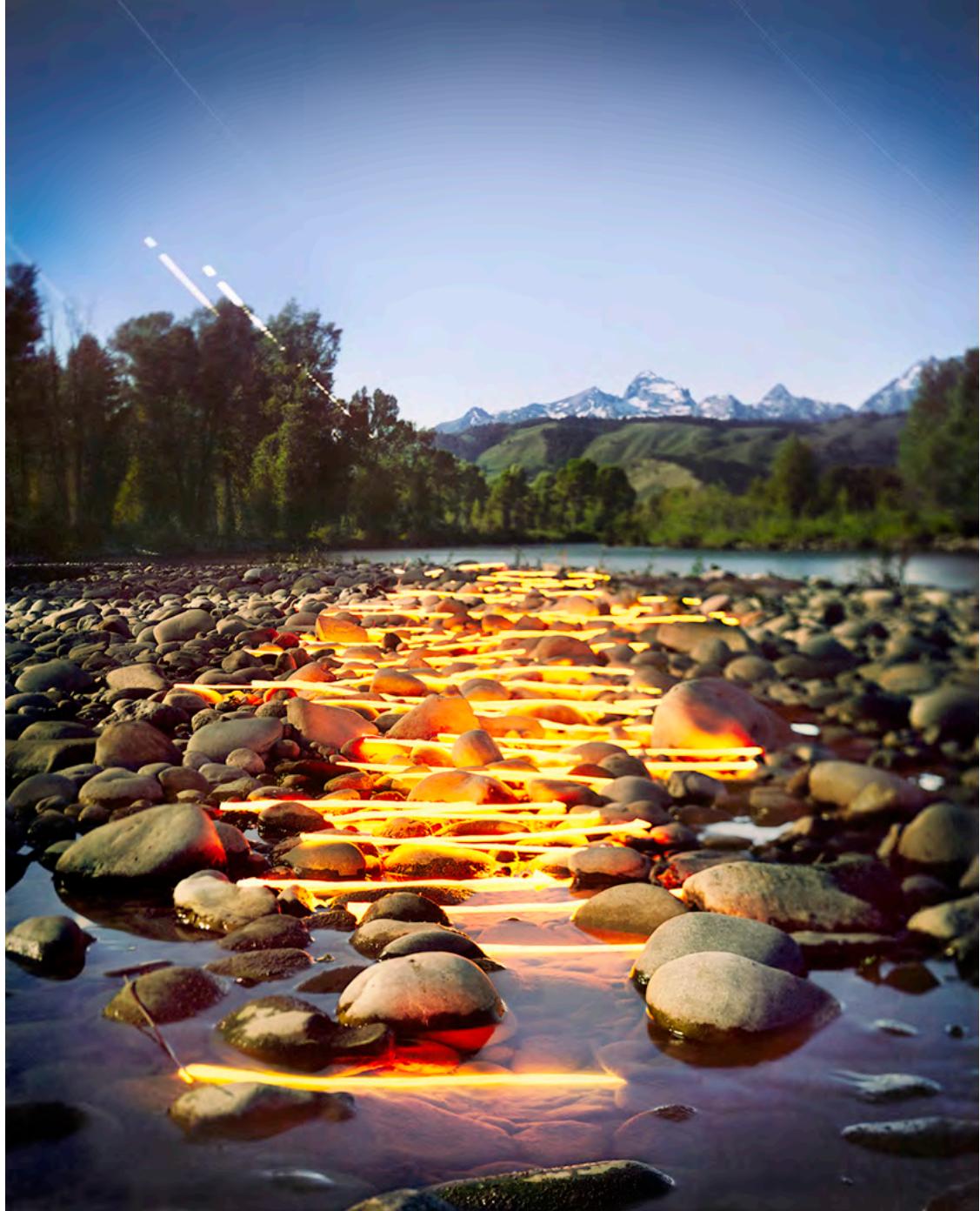
He is a photographer whose works amaze with their creativity. His weapon is combining nature with foreign, manmade materials such as LED lights, luminescent substances, and other physical processes. This way he tries to show human influence on nature thus emphasizing and calling attention to environmental blight.

**Q:** Some words about you and your career. What motivated you to become a landscape photographer?

**A:** I think of myself more of an artist the photographer, and I am working in the art historical context of Landscape; be it painting, land art or cinema. Landscape allows for certain types of storytelling. It encapsulates the ideas of the sublime, human's power over nature,

and nature's power over humans. Curiosity about the ecological and social history of specific places now drives my work. I'm particularly interested in the connection between man-made landscape patterns and cultural norms. Each photograph is a sort of dialogue - the result of my direct encounter with nature and historical research.

I think about science fiction and how the fantastic or supernatural is supported or given credibility by a ubiquitous everyday world. Within the storytelling, there is moral to the tale. There is a looking inward process or a self-evaluation (on cause and effect) and the consequences of one's actions. I am thinking about land use and the interpretation of landscape. How people use and abuse the landscape, as well as how landscaped is divided, surveyed.



**Q:** Which photographer(s) most inspired you?

**A:** Photographers who I found to be influential are John Pfahl, Barbara Kasten and Carl Toth.

They are photographers who worked with ideas of a constructed a photographic image. In Barbara's case, she still does.

I was fortunate to be able to show work along sides John Pfahl's work in *Altering Spaces*.

I am also influenced by artists working with landscape or site-specific environments and constructed realities, such as James Turrell, Francis Alÿs, Olafur Eliasson, through their process and practice- the ways in which they engage and articulate an experience or phenomena, and the poetic executions of their work.

When I was in graduate school, I was lucky to be able to work as an artist's assistant for various artists through innovative public art program curated by [Mary Jane Jacob](#) called Sculpture Chicago a Culture in action.

Through this opportunity or luck of the fates, I was able to assist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Marc Dion, Daniel Joseph Martinez and Suzanne Lacy.



Marc was working with The Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group, a group that transported high school students from Chicago to various places to discuss ecosystems and art. For one of his trips with the group, Dion took the students to Wisconsin to visit the Hirsch Farm Project in Wisconsin. I was his driver for the trip.

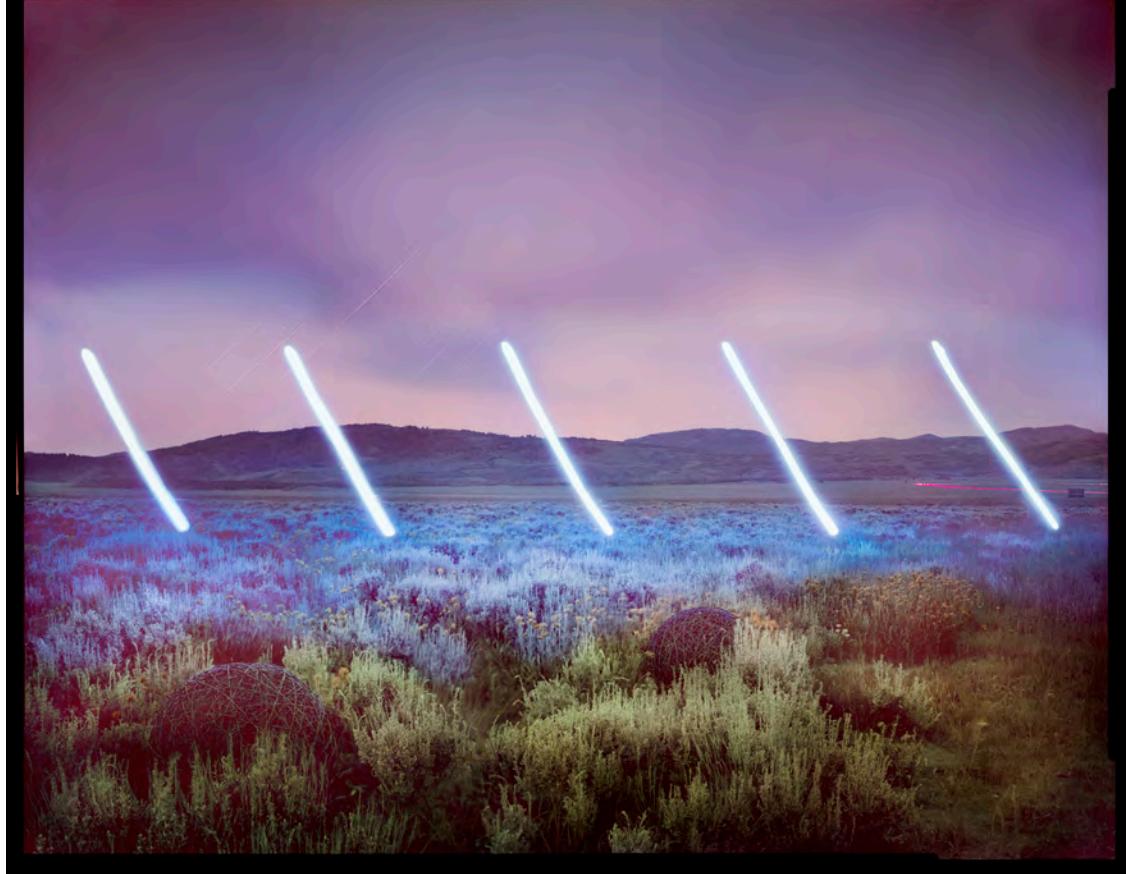
I was able to sit in with the Mark and the group as he discussed ecosystems and art.

Suzanne Lacy's project *Full Circle* was a public artwork that memorialized the societal impact of women in the history of Chicago. I worked on one of the four, four-person teams (semi-truck driver, crane operator, and two art/rock-handlers). In one night these four teams, working "guerilla style", placed 100 half-ton limestone boulders in the Loop area of Downtown Chicago. The boulders had Bronze plaques acknowledging and honoring women from Chicago's past and present whom actively shaped public life in the city.

I was able to work with Daniel Joseph Martinez on two projects. First, I marched as one of *The West Side Three-Point Marchers* in his parades as part of Sculpture Chicago a Culture in Action. Later I assisted him as the carpenter, building his installation *Twenty-Three Blows of the Dagger* at Randolph Street Gallery, in Chicago. While building the piece at Randolph Street, I was able to not only see and take place in the building process; I was fortunate to have time with Daniel to listen and have conversations with him, discuss his artwork, the artwork of his friends (like Ann Hamilton), as well as artwork and galleries on the whole.

My encounter with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle was brief but made a huge impact.

Iñigo was working on a project with Street-Level Video, called Tele-Vecindario through Sculpture Chicago.



Tele-Vecindario was centered in the Manglano's own neighborhood, a predominantly lower-income, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central, and South American neighborhood. "Using video and audio production, graphic design, digital photography, and the Internet, Street-Level youth address community issues, access advanced communication technology, and gain inclusion in our information-based society."

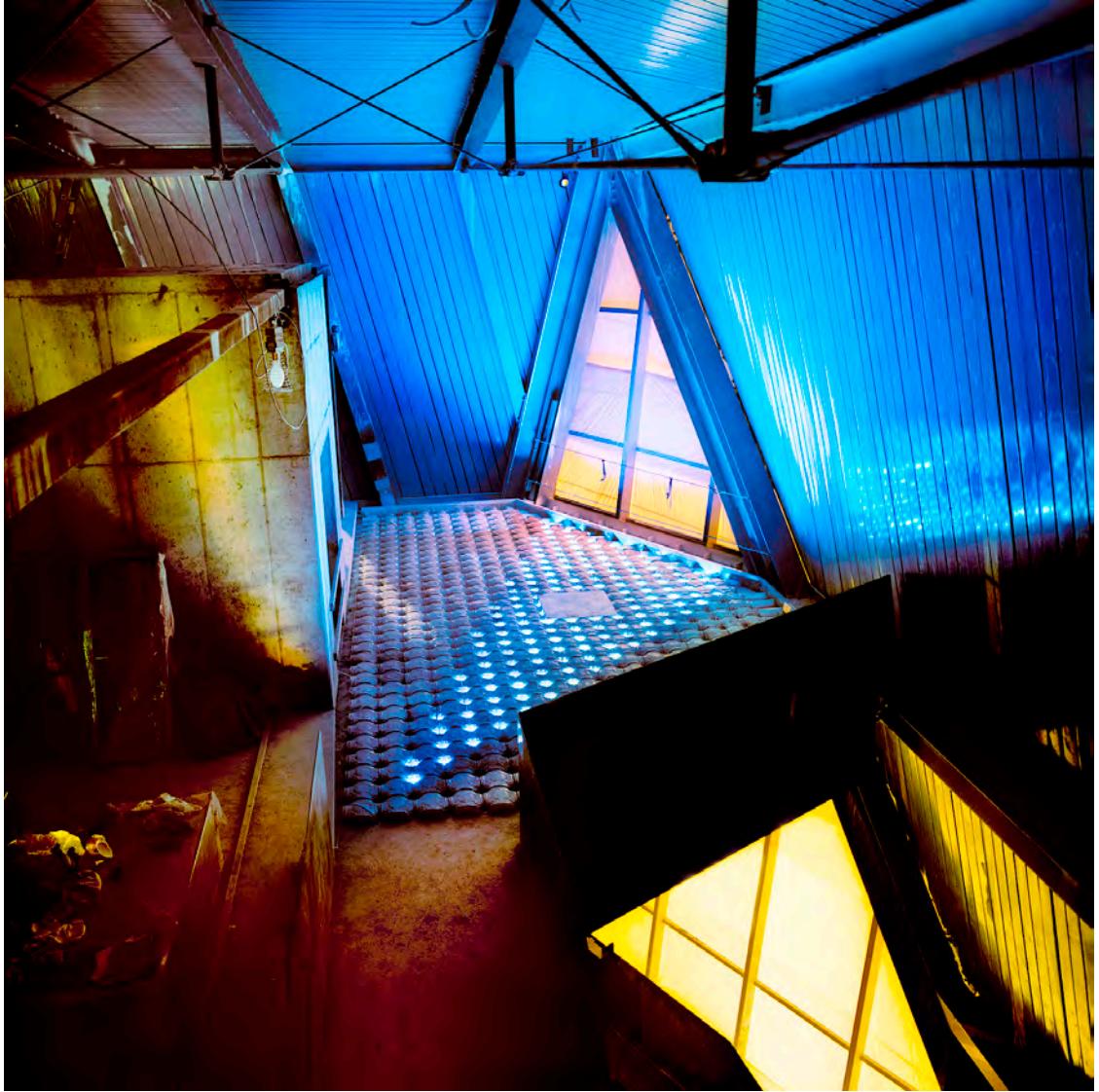
It was this time, along with working my mentor Carl Toth while in graduate school at Cranbrook Academy of Art, that formed my understanding of art, art making, construction of photographic images, and construction of ideas mediated through artwork. And, specifically, these works were not executed through a single or traditional medium. There were installation, performance, site-specific projects, and projects that

involved audience participation. The message was additionally carried through written, and verbal storytelling.



**Q:** People usually tend to focus on the person's equipment. Of course, it is important but there are other criteria that are also important in being able to make good photographs. What are these other skills that a person should have or develop to produce quality images?

**A:** Equipment/gear are simply a tool. It is important to understand the equipment in order to make a good image. However, to effectively communicate an idea, one needs to understand the language. Understand the history of visual images, cultural history, and the structure of the visual language.



**Q:** Every photograph says something. Do you ever create hidden meanings or messages in your work?

**A:** I think of the work functioning in two different ways; first are ideas tied to photographic documentation of land art and second ideas tied to constructing a photographic image. Intrusion of shape, line and above all, color metaphorically reference or mimics the destructive ways humans divided, and surveyed the landscape, and create turmoil in the natural environment, use and abuse the landscape.

Furthermore, by intervening color (light), which is abrasive and flat, elements, push against, mimic, or set in contrast the rich and wider tonal range of the

ambient hues, in order to disrupt the spatial effects of the native palette of the color of a site.

My work reflects these intrusions, using shape, line and above all color, to metaphorically suggest various ways humans force their will in the natural environment.

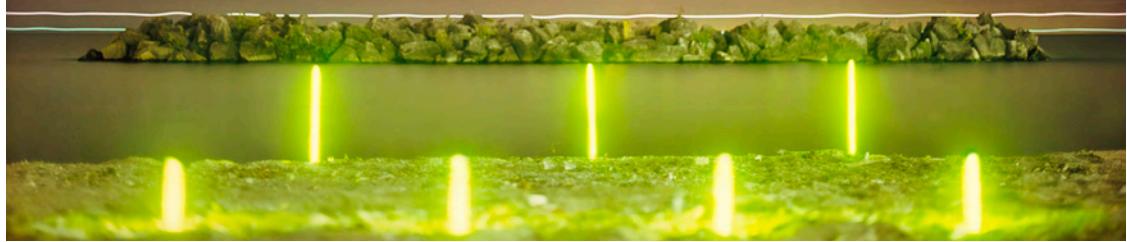
By visually imposing abrasive and flat color on a site, contrasting the rich and wider tonal range of the ambient hues

Geometric forms obstruct organic elements suggesting the ways landscape is divided and surveyed.



**Q:** From your experience, what is the best thing about photography?

**A:** Photography can be great at communicating past cultural, and political boundaries.



**Q:** Everyone makes mistakes. They are unavoidable in life, as well as in every profession. Have you noticed what is the one mistake that most photographers make regardless of experience?

**A:** Mediating an experience through the camera. And, trying to copy ideas from others work. Not paying attention to what is happening outside of the camera.

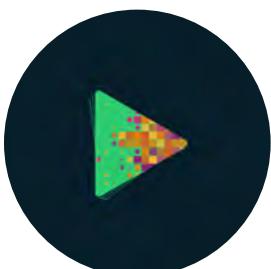


**Q:** Already many years in photography. What are your top 3 tips to landscape photographers?

**A:** My first class was in 1988.

1. Dress appropriately
2. Really take the time to study a place (subject).  
Understand the history of a place. Get to know a place over time. Talk to the locals.
3. Do not try and just try to make a pretty picture.  
Contextualize and communicate a thoughtful idea.

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