

Erris Huigens / Anti-Monuments



Erris Huigens, Anti Monuments, at FORM, Wageningen / Amsterdam, 5–30 January 2026, video still.
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The sculptures in the Anti-monuments project appear as silent, almost hostile presences, refusing to offer any narrative or invitation to contemplation. In an art world increasingly obsessed with legibility and engagement, what does it mean for you to create works that do not seek understanding, but instead generate friction?

For me, friction is a more honest condition than understanding. Understanding tends to close things down, to stabilize them into meaning, function, or value. Friction, instead, keeps things open. The works operate primarily within a space of ideas and visualization rather than as objects to be decoded. They are not meant to be read; they are meant to be encountered. For most viewers, this encounter happens through documentation on a screen. In that sense, the sculptures exist as real presences within the documented context of my immediate, everyday surroundings, even though they remain conceptual in nature. The images are concrete; the sculptures are propositions. Their silence is not an absence, but a refusal, a refusal to enter the economy of explanation, narration, or justification.

By withholding a clear narrative, the works expose the expectation that art should communicate transparently, seduce the viewer, or legitimize itself through meaning. While there are multiple references embedded in them, none of these are necessary to know. The friction they generate is not directed at the viewer, but at the conditions that normally structure seeing and understanding. In this sense, the works are less about being seen than about unsettling the assumptions that govern visibility itself.

Your work, especially in recent years, seems to reject any explicit function or reference, positioning itself as a kind of “threshold” between architecture and sculpture, between public presence and anonymity. How do you conceive this spatial and semantic ambiguity? Is it a way of resisting any form of categorization?

The ambiguity is not a strategy; it is a consequence. It emerges from working through intervention, translation, and documentation of structures that were already functional, already embedded in use, history, and reference. These objects carry meaning by default, simply because they once operated within a system. For that reason, my engagement with them does not require the addition of new functions or explanatory layers.

I am interested in what happens when an object occupies space without resolving itself into use, symbol, or image. Architecture usually promises shelter or orientation; sculpture promises meaning or contemplation. These works promise neither. They stand in between, as thresholds that do not lead anywhere. Their indeterminacy resists categorization precisely because categorization depends on purpose and legibility. By withholding both, the work remains unstable, not unfinished, but unresolved.

This unresolved state allows the object to function as a condition rather than a statement. It is not about resisting labels for the sake of resistance, but about slowing down the moment in which the work is absorbed into a system of definitions. Within that context, the demand—particularly prevalent in the Netherlands, that art must be justified through explicit meaning or often clichéd historical narratives feels unnecessary. The history is already there. My role is not to illustrate it, but to translate and deconstruct it, allowing the work to exist without being overdetermined by explanation.



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When you decide to place a block within a specific site, what conditions need to emerge for the intervention to make sense? This seems to be a practice that exists primarily through its documentation, not unlike, in many ways, what many land art artists were doing. How do you relate to this idea?

The site does not need to invite the work; in fact, it often functions better when it resists it. I look for conditions of neutrality, transition, or neglect, places that are already unresolved. The intervention makes sense not because it completes something, but because it sharpens what is already present. There is something both radical and precise in simply placing a concrete sculpture in such a context, without extensive investigation, preparation, funding structures, or preoccupation with public consultation. Stripping away these layers allows the act itself to remain direct.

This kind of placement avoids the energy-consuming processes that often surround contemporary production, anticipating reception, justifying relevance, or scripting engagement. I am drawn to the possibility that a minimal, even seemingly meaningless action can generate something visually compelling and intellectually demanding, without needing to declare its intentions.

Documentation is not a substitute for the work, but a trace of it. The sculpture exists fully in the moment and place of its positioning; the photograph is what remains once the object is no longer present or accessible. In this sense, my relation to land art is limited to the acceptance of disappearance. Unlike much land art, however, I am not concerned with scale or with merging into the landscape. The work does not belong to the site. It interrupts it.

The choice of concrete, a foundational material that is usually hidden—as your primary medium appears central to your artistic gesture, even beyond this specific project. Have you experimented with this material in the past? What does it represent for you, beyond its formal and structural qualities?

Concrete has been present in my work for a long time, both physically and conceptually. I grew up surrounded by it—in infrastructure, post-war architecture, and industrial remnants. It is a material that is everywhere and nowhere at once: essential, structural, and largely unnoticed. What interests me is precisely this condition. Concrete carries weight, permanence, and authority, yet it remains mute. Beyond its formal qualities, it represents an agreement we no longer question, a material decision that has shaped landscapes, cities, and personal memory.

At the same time, concrete is a tactile, strong, and fundamentally functional material, very close to nature in its rawness and honesty. There is an intentional irony in the fact that, in this project, I am primarily visualizing rather than building. In earlier work, I approached existing concrete structures as a passer-by, documenting them as they were. Here, the engagement shifts toward visualization, even though the material itself insists on physicality and weight. That tension, between heaviness and image, between touch and distance, is central.

By stripping concrete of function and making it autonomous, it becomes problematic. It no longer supports something else; it only supports itself. In this unresolved state, concrete shifts from being a building material to becoming a condition, one that speaks about endurance, inertia, and the quiet violence of permanence. Even when the work takes the form of images or surface-based interventions, it remains anchored in concrete structures: I work on concrete surfaces, apply my work onto them, and allow the surfaces of the paintings and their surroundings to become part of the work. Physicality is never absent; it is displaced. Moving forward, this trajectory could also extend back into fully physical concrete structures or sculptures, closing that tension without resolving it.

Your interventions in abandoned places often occupy marginal, forgotten sites or spaces awaiting transformation: sand depots, former industrial buildings, no-man's-lands. What draws you to these environments? Are they chosen for their indifference, or for their latent availability to be disturbed?

I am drawn to these places because they have not yet been decided. They exist in a suspended state, outside clear function or representation. At the same time, they carry a very specific history: they once operated as working systems. People labored inside them; machines, structures, and processes were designed to be purely functional. That history is already embedded in the space, and it is enough.

Their apparent indifference is precisely what makes them available. They do not resist because they no longer need to perform, and that lack of care creates room for interruption. My role is simply to react to what is already there. The intervention does not add extra weight, symbolism, or explanatory meaning that would distract from the existing energy of the site. It acknowledges the history without illustrating it.

In such environments, the work does not compete with identity, narrative, or spectacle; it simply arrives. I act as a passer-by who happens to add something subtle, a thin, quiet layer of black paint. The disturbance is minimal, but its effect is amplified because the site offers no new narrative to absorb it. These places are not neutral; they are unfinished. And it is precisely this unfinishedness that allows the work, like the site itself, to remain unresolved.

Your most recent work is defined by an act of “subtraction”, the subtraction of context, function, and narrative. In an era when art is often heavily loaded with content, symbols, and messages, what drives you to work in the opposite direction?

Subtraction is not a rejection of meaning, but a way of delaying it. Excess meaning closes a work too quickly; it positions the viewer in advance and narrows the range of possible responses. By removing context, function, and narrative, I keep the work exposed, vulnerable, and resistant to quick resolution. This approach is driven by a mistrust of certainty. In a time saturated with statements and positions, silence can operate with more precision than speech.

I do not aim to reflect or transmit meaning. I prefer action over explanation, and I am interested in creating the conditions in which others have complete freedom to form their own references, ideas, feelings, or even meanings. That freedom depends on my own refusal to predetermine a reading. For that reason, it is essential for me not to think about an audience while working. The work does not explain itself because explanation would reduce it. Through subtraction, the object remains present without being resolved, and in that unresolved presence, something more open, and more honest, can take place.

How long can a sculptural gesture endure, in your view, before it is reabsorbed by the landscape or forgotten? Does this process of dissolution interest you?

Endurance is not a matter of time, but of tension. A sculptural gesture lasts only as long as it maintains friction with its surroundings. The moment that friction dissolves—when the object becomes familiar, functional, or slips into the background—the work effectively ends. In that sense, dissolution is not a failure but a form of completion. I am interested in this process because it exposes how quickly presence turns into infrastructure, how something singular becomes absorbed into its environment. The landscape is patient; it eventually absorbs everything. What matters is not resisting that absorption, but acknowledging it. The work is temporary by definition, even when the material suggests permanence.

In everyday snapshots and photographs, I already encounter sculptural qualities in moments where there is a dynamic tension between the man-made and the natural. These sculptures are translations of ideas derived from those observations. They can be read as monumental gestures or as silent structures that simply happen to be there, without meaning or function. I am drawn to this blurred line between art, architecture, and purely functional structures, where it is no longer clear whether something is intentional, symbolic, or simply present. It is within that ambiguity, sustained briefly by tension, that the work endures.

A more radical question now: do you believe that the value of an artwork can reside exclusively in its pure presence, independent of any audience, use, or critical discourse?

Yes, I do. Presence does not require validation. An object can occupy space and exert pressure without being witnessed or interpreted. In fact, the absence of an audience can sharpen its condition. Use, discourse, and reception are external frameworks that often come later, sometimes too late. I am interested in the moment before all of that — when the work simply exists, without permission and without explanation. That does not mean discourse is irrelevant, but it is not foundational. The value lies in the act of positioning something in the world and accepting that it may remain unnoticed, misunderstood, or forgotten. That risk is essential. Without it, the gesture would be decorative rather than necessary.

A minimalist grammar comes to mind when encountering your work, but without nostalgia or reverence. How do you relate to the history of minimalist sculpture? Is it a legacy you consciously distance yourself from, or one you engage with in a more subterranean, intimate, or pre-existing way?

Minimalism is not something I look back to; it is something I passed through. Growing up in the Netherlands, I was educated within a visual culture shaped by minimalism, landscape architecture, land art, Dutch design, De Stijl, and the tradition of the old Dutch master painters. Because of that, their languages are already embedded in how I understand form, space, and reduction. I do not experience these movements as external references or historical positions that require acknowledgment or critique. They function more as shared ground than as a lineage I consciously activate.

The grammar of minimalism remains useful to me because it removes distraction and allows things to appear with a certain directness. That stripped-back way of visualizing is almost instinctive. In some works, elements connected to these histories are deconstructed quite literally, but they are rarely used as starting points in order to refer back to them explicitly. Where minimalism often aimed for purity, autonomy, and clarity, my work accepts contamination—by site, by history, by erosion, and by use.

If there is a connection, it exists beneath the surface. It is not an homage, nor a critique, but something that has already been absorbed and reworked through time and context. The influence is quiet, almost unconscious, shaped less by theory than by prolonged exposure. What remains is not a reference to minimalism as a movement, but a set of tools that have been worn down and repurposed through experience.