

*Screen Saver* is an extended-length video with a sinuous, electronic soundtrack composed on a synthesiser by experimental musician Sonya Waters in response to Greta Anderson's visual imagery. The video opens with a postcard-perfect shot of snowy Mount Ngāuruhoe looking magnificent against the deep blue backdrop of a cloudless sky on the Central Plateau of Te Ika-a-Māui the North Island. Later in the video, we see the muscular, aqua torrent of the Waikato River tumbling down the Huka Falls near Tāupo, and then the vibrant ochre, pink, brown and white silica cliffs and terraces at Ōrākei Kōrako – the steaming geothermal valley halfway between Tāupo and Rotorua.

By stitching together a series of 'static' shots and lingering on each one for long periods, Anderson has created a long, mesmerising sequence of images that resemble screen savers – the generic and sublime images of landscapes that appear on our computer screens and are designed to give us a brief moment of respite from our digital toil. The title of this video, and Anderson's choice of well-known tourist sites in Aotearoa, signal her intention to explore our transactional relationships with nature – how we commodify and consume it without even being aware of our objectification and misuse. Anderson chose these landscapes because they are beautiful sites, which also happen to be rich in natural resources – in other words, they have conflicting use values.

"Not many of us occupy the land for any other reason than being a tourist these days," she says. "We are there to look and take pictures. We can ski on the mountain or kayak down the river. The site is purely recreational. However, some of us will be looking at these places from a financial point of view – for example, if we are a shareholder in an electricity or mining company."

In *Screen Saver*, Anderson slows our attention and encourages us to see the subtle movements and patterns created by her main character – water. Her background as a still photographer influenced her choice to use a fixed camera throughout the video. By doing so she collapses traditional boundaries between still and moving images, creating a hybrid visual language that combines the distinctive qualities of both media – the contemplative qualities of photography and the narrative elements of cinema with its potential to immerse viewers and influence their senses and emotions on a more physical level than photography. This embodied quality is enhanced by Waters' soundtrack which eddies and swirls like a river, moving from serene passages evoking British pastoral composers Vaughan Williams and Frederick Delius and mellotron voices, in response to the Huka Falls imagery, to folk horror-inspired music which emphasises the otherworldly feeling of the Ōrākei Kōrako footage.

In his book *The Marvellous Clouds – Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* John Durham Peters observes that contemporary humans speak of data clouds and network clouds in the same breath as cumulus and stratus clouds associated with weather. This shared use of the word to describe very different phenomena illustrates how the natural world and the technological world are interwoven in ways that reveal their interdependency. Peters argues that although we think of media as environments, the reverse is also true – environments *are* media. He developed the term 'elemental media' to include natural phenomena as a way to expand our understanding of media as more than just carriers of messages. He believes that media can also be the infrastructures combining nature and culture that allow human life to survive. In *Screen Saver*, water is presented as an 'elemental media' that is saturated with multiple meanings spanning nature and culture and affirming their inseparability. When we look at Anderson's footage of the Huka Falls surging through a narrow canyon at the rate of 220 cubic metres per second, we see an awe-inspiring image of nature, and most of us will be unaware that this flow rate is regulated by Mercury Energy through the Taupō Control Gates as part of the company's hydro system planning.

In the 1960s, when international tourism blossomed in Aotearoa, it was possible to consume tourist images of New Zealand with innocent enjoyment, however, those days are gone. When I look at the hypnotic, swirling patterns of the Waikato River meandering across the screen in *Screen Saver* I'm aware of the presence of ghosts ruining my viewing pleasure. By 1971 there were eight dams and nine hydroelectric power stations on the Waikato River. They were built

in response to severe power shortages after the Second World War, but the cost to the environment of large infrastructure projects like these is high. In 1961 two-thirds of the Ōrākei Kōrako geothermal field was drowned when the Waikato River was dammed to create the Ōhakuri Power Station.

*Screen Saver* was first shown as a live performance at Audio Foundation earlier this year. It featured musicians Sonya Waters, Dream Chambers (electronic music composer Jess Chambers) and Motte (violinist, cellist and vocalist Anita Clark) performing alongside the video. Anderson says she imagines the work as similar to an old-fashioned silent movie accompanied by an orchestra playing in the theatre. *Screen Saver* is a work in progress and Anderson plans to add more footage to the video and eventually re-introduce live musical performance.

Virginia Were, October 2024