

Experimental film - Painted poem on 16mm, film archive, video.
***Miners* by Wilfred Owen.**

Sutherland, B. (Director & Co-Producer) & Judge, P. (Co-Producer) (2015). *Miners* (Video projection). *Word & Deed* (Group exhibition), Hastings City Art Gallery, Eastbourne St, Hastings, New Zealand. November 11 – January 31 2016.

Contribution to an exhibition, national – Hastings City Art Gallery

Directed by Bridget Sutherland, Co-produced with Paul Judge.

Director's statement

Miners, a poem by the young soldier Wilfred Owen, makes the connection between fossil fuels and war in a profound and acutely perceptive way. Even from the perspective of 1918, it is clear that Owen is speaking of the Anthropocene, a period where “steam-phantoms simmer” and coals are “murmuring of their mine”. What Owen observes with cutting irony is the similarity between the exploited worker in the mines of England and the experiences of the soldier in the trenches, trapped in caverns of mud, clay and rock in which they will soon be buried. As with the forgotten miners, Owen imagines a future time where the soldiers of WW1 are forgotten and their lives’ ember burnt for fuel. The centuries will continue to “burn rich loads”, sitting in front of warm coal fires never daring to dream of them, the “poor lads / Lost in the ground”.

In painting this poem I was aware of the impossibility of communicating the true hell of industrial warfare. Words are always slipping away, refusing to be formed, stuttering and hesitant. And as the mechanical medium of film itself is already embedded in the psychology and spaces of war, this painterly rendering of the poem becomes a strange and haunted encounter with history. Likewise the fate of the animal suggested in Owen’s vision of “a former earth” with “frond forests” is an uneasy memory of the world denied to animals, horses and birds at the ‘front’. If we can define Modernity as the growing acceleration of humanity’s war on Nature, then it is clear that it also marks the disappearance of the animal. Like Owen’s soldiers, the animal becomes nothing more than “white bones in the cinder-shard”, memories on celluloid and photographic negative.