



WATCH BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP
IS A VIDEO INSTALLATION BY
BRISBANE-BASED ARTIST
MARISA GEORGIU.

IN ALTERING THE EDITING PROCESS OF
DIGITAL LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY,
GEORGIU EXAMINES THE WAY
WE SURROUND OURSELVES WITH
AESTHETICISED, CONTRIVED
AND MEDIATED VERSIONS OF
'NATURE' IN ORDER TO FEEL
GROUNDED AND CONNECTED.
IN DOING SO, SHE DRAWS CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN MYTHOLOGISED NOTIONS OF
ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHENTICITY AND
WESTERN EXPECTATIONS OF THE
SUBLIME LANDSCAPE, WHILST
ASKING WHETHER THE MANUFACTURED
ASPECT OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IN
THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT HAS
BEARING ON ITS LEGITIMACY.

MARISA GEORGIU: WATCH BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP

8 APRIL - 30 APRIL 2017



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Designed by DB

Marisa Georgiou
Watch Before Going To Sleep (detail) (2017)
Still from HD video 21:31
Video Projection, Yellow Velvet Couch,
Bonsai Fig, Garden Escape Scent
(Cut Grass, Apple Blossom and Daffodil)
Original Video: www.yurifineart.com
(@yurifineart - Instagram)
Original Image: frank1crayon

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DOMINATING CONIFERS FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE

I realise that equating a German accent with Nazism is an unsavoury leap. Nonetheless, the narrator's voice in Marisa Georgiou's *Watch Before Going to Sleep* (2017) conjures to my mind a specific piece of Nazi imagery. It's known colloquially as the forest swastika. You've probably seen photos; they use it as clickbait sometimes. Each Autumn in a Brandenburg forest, among a sea of evergreens, an expansive swastika becomes discernible from above, mapped out by yellow-leaved larch trees planted in 1938.

Of course, more than an accent brings this image to mind. Evidence of an aggressive desire to dominate, to position nature as one unwitting victim of an ideology, links *Watch Before Going to Sleep* and the forest swastika. The prominent ideology evident in Marisa's newest video work is not Nazism, of course. Rather, it is the engrained anthropocentric viewpoint of a colonialist and patriarchal Western perspective.

Watch Before Going to Sleep presents an instructional video in which the narrator describes how to manipulate an image using the computer program Lightroom. The video features a photograph of a lake, its edges skirted by tall pines, its water still and reflective. The scene is distinctly European and, in partnership with the Swiss German accent, positions us firmly in the midst of a Eurocentric tradition of capturing and reproducing representations of nature. Although often critiquing that Eurocentric approach to nature, Marisa's practice has typically fixated on an Australian context. *Watch Before Going to Sleep* is therefore her first major examination of European landscape imagery, perhaps stemming from her own nostalgia of growing up in an English country town surrounded by conifer woods.

Both the instructional audio and the video of the recorded mouse movements and tool selections in *Watch Before Going to Sleep* have been slowed to over half their original speed. As the video progresses, the lake scene becomes less real in appearance, shifting into a dream-like landscape where the trees are honey yellow and mist consumes the horizon line. The video appears at first calming, if humorous and slightly absurd. The slow, echoed voiceover resonates with the ethereal landscape in the photograph, but contrasts

with the references to JPEG file formats and adjusting contrast. The video is reminiscent of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) videos, which depict simple acts like whispering, preparing food or turning the pages of a book, to give the viewer a sense of meditation and sometimes a tingling sensation similar to auditory-tactile synthesis on the scalp and spine. I don't watch these videos. However, on occasion I will watch a constant stream of makeup tutorials on YouTube with no intention of applying the instructors' methods. I find it soothing to see the steps played out, a competent hand promising a pleasing outcome. You may have experienced a similar meditative screen-based experience, for example watching an episode of Bob Ross' *The Joy of Painting* and becoming inexplicably calmed. *Watch Before Going to Sleep* at first seems to mimic these meditative tools, with its instructional content, idyllic visuals and decelerated narration. However, as we continue to watch, the video emerges as progressively more disturbing.

An invisible violence underlies *Watch Before Going to Sleep*. The narrator places a controlled intervention on the image of the landscape, a forceful attempt to make it more sublime using the hand of man (yes, man). Yet the narrator is not the only one intervening here. Multiple layers of mediation separate the original lake and the viewer. The photographer took the photograph, the narrator manipulated it on screen and recorded himself doing so, Marisa then further manipulated that recording and projected it onto another screen, from which we are now receiving the image. The agency of the lake has been buried beyond retrieval; it has no option but to submit passively to its violation. The work becomes as much an illustration of a psychological landscape as a physical one.

As conceived in Western tradition, nature is a backdrop for human activity. The foreground, middleground and background constructed in images like the lake scene position nature as it is perceived in relation to humans, from an anthropocentric viewpoint. Traditionally, dominant power structures – namely Western men, unoriginal as that is – have perpetrated this positioning of the landscape as 'other' to themselves. Unsurprisingly, this othering projects beyond the physical landscape and into the social one. 'Traditionally, women are "the environment"', says Val Plumwood, '– they provide the environment and conditions against which male "achievement" takes place, but what they do is not itself accounted as achievement'¹.

1. Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.22.

The notion of women as comparative to the environment forms one focus of the recent ecofeminism movement. Despite what preconceptions the term 'ecofeminism' may elicit, I encourage you to dispel any notion of the maternal earth lover/mother here. Marisa has no interest in this, nor do most ecofeminists. However, ecofeminist pioneer Val Plumwood does argue that "The connection between women and nature and their mutual inferiorisation is by no means a thing of the past"².

The 'mutual inferiorisation' or domination of both women and nature manifests in Marisa's work through the performance of objectification. We hear the voice of a man making decisions about visual improvements to his (nameless, voiceless) subject based on personal preference. 'I think this very darkish mood, especially on the corners, works really really well, so instead of bringing up the shadows I might even bring them down' he commentates. He projects his own aesthetic judgements onto the image, making it visually consumable for himself. By the very nature of the instructional video, the YouTube instructor is judging the manipulated image to be better than, an improvement on, the original photograph and indeed the physical lake environment. The video seeps into pornographic fantasy. The original lake is forgotten as the YouTube clip references only the author of the photograph and not its location. The lake becomes a nameless thing, dominated by the manipulator, there for his viewing pleasure.

As with the forest swastika, domination over the environment often emerges simultaneously with domination over human beings. In *Watch Before Going to Sleep*, this domination most obviously echoes that of women and the female body. However, Vandana Shiva notes that 'it is not only women's labour which traditionally gets subsumed "by definition" into nature, but the labour of colonised non-western, non-white people also'³. Subsuming others into the wilderness of nature remains a common tool for those in power to maintain their distinguished status. Imagine a slide rule. On one end is placed culture and on the other is placed nature. If the system in control means to degrade something or somebody, they will slide them down toward nature. The Noble Savage. The Taming of the Shrew. You cow, you bitch, were you raised by wolves? Nature, then, is a target for domination and oppression, but it is also a tool.



Instead of providing nature with agency – a goal arguably unattainable with human intervention – *Watch Before Going to Sleep* exposes with what frivolous ease that agency can be removed. The work parallels engrained attitudes toward both people and nature, and encourages discussion on how these attitudes must alter to create a more productive and proactive future for the world.

Miranda Hine



Miranda Hine is a Brisbane-based arts writer. She is co-founder of artist-run initiative In Residence and is currently undertaking a Masters in Museum Studies at the University of Queensland.

2. Ibid. p.21.
3. Ibid. p.4.



Marisa Georgiou is an inter-disciplinary artist, critical writer, and student of embodied performance strategies, interested in atmospheric sensation and our relationship to 'nature' in connection to wider feminist/postcolonial discourses. Marisa completed her Bachelor of Fine Art (Hons) at Queensland College of Art (Griffith University) in 2015, where she researched the potentials of an ethical visual approach to landscape, in video and installation mediums. In 2016 she presented work for In Residence ARI, This Is Not Art festival and Boxcopy's ARI in residence program, and appeared on panels for LEVEL ari and Critical Animals Creative Research Symposium. *Watch Before Going to Sleep* is Marisa's debut solo show.



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