

Marine Hugonnier

Exhibition Information

Gallery Talks

Saturday 26 June 2.00
pm, Galleries Artist
Marine Hugonnier in conversation
with DCA Curator, Katrina Brown

Thursday 1 July 7.15
pm, Activity Room / Galleries
Simon Jenkins, an experienced
mountaineer and climber gives his
view of the exhibition in an
informal tour. He discusses the idea
and impact of 'conquering' great
landscapes.

Both talks are **free**, but please book
as places are limited.

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**Around the world there is
an ever-growing
'mountain' of depictions,
books about and films of
famous mountain ranges.
This grows ever higher as
the feet of the authors
erode the mountain.**

*The Accelerated Sublime:
Landscape, Tourism and Identity*
Claudia Bell and John Lyall, 2002

This exhibition of works by artist
Marine Hugonnier includes images of
some of the most extreme natural
phenomena in the world – the Hindu
Kush mountains in Afghanistan and
the world-famous Matterhorn in the
Swiss Alps. What the artist asks us to
consider when looking at these
images is not just their beauty or
vastness, but the ways they affect our
lives, our thinking and our history.
Together the works in the exhibition
raise questions about tourism,
photography, utopias, democracy, our
relationship with nature – how and for
whom the landscape is controlled and
how the land itself shapes history.

At the entrance to the exhibition is
Flower (1998/2000). This is both a real-
life still life and a painting – for the
flowers are carefully spray-painted
with special florist's colouring,
enhancing the natural colour and
beauty of the flowers. It is as if the
idea of what they could or should be is
greater than what they really are. This
attempt to improve on nature creates
a contrast between the ideal and the
real flower.

26 June –
8 August 2004

Leader (1996/2004) is a photogram of a super 16mm film shot at night in Oukaimeden, Morocco. A 'leader' is the strip of black that precedes the beginning of any film. It exists, in cinema, to create a black / blank screen and a moment of anticipation before the film itself begins.

Part documentary film and part poetic essay, **Ariana** (2003), one of two films in the exhibition, is the story of a film crew that set out to visit the Pandjshêr Valley in north-east Afghanistan, home of the famous Afghan resistance force, the Northern Alliance. The valley was described in ancient Persian poetry as an earthly paradise. In fact its strategic situation and lush environment are what made the resistance movement possible – the mountains provide a strong natural defence, making the valley almost inaccessible to outside forces.

It has resisted the two great ideologies that swept Afghanistan in the 20th century – Soviet Communism and Islamic Fundamentalism, in the form of the Taliban.

The film aims to look at how the particular geography of a place helped create its history. As the crew is not allowed to film from a vantagepoint in the surrounding mountains (the Hindu Kush), the film becomes the story of a failed project. It reflects on the

'panorama' as a strategic viewpoint, rather than a source of visual intrigue or pleasure. The crew becomes aware of the implications of the sweeping camera movement that suggests a 'total' vision, something that is, however, impossible – in film or politics.

For a country that has been so heavily photographed and relayed to us on television news, the images we first see in the film are surprising – lush green farmland and torrents of water. When the crew eventually moves back into the city, the images are more familiar, with the scars of decades of war visible everywhere. Amid the traces of past events and attempts to enforce or build ideals, the rush of life carries on regardless.

Ariana is accompanied by a group of photographs made during the same visit to Afghanistan. Each titled **Mountain with No Name** (2003), the photographs are portraits of mountains within the Hindu Kush range. These mountains have never been named: only the paths are given names by local inhabitants. The portrait format of the images stresses how we might try to read them, to detect the individual character of each mountain, to distinguish one from the other.

These anonymous mountains are in stark contrast to the tradition of naming such peaks: from Everest in the Himalayas (the world's highest at 8,848m), the Jungfrau or the Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps to the Munros here in Scotland. The history of mountaineering, the drive to conquer the world's highest peaks, is one of two topics that influenced the making of the second film, **The 'Last Chance to See' Tour** (2004). The other was the artist's awareness, during a visit to the USA, of the political and economic issues that surround the development of National Parks. These are places of great national, natural significance in which access and use are controlled, and increasingly restricted. Some of the same issues were raised here with the creation of the first National Park in Scotland, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, set up 'to conserve and enhance the natural, cultural heritage'.

Many of Hugonnier's works share a concern with visions of the future, whether in political ideologies or environmental issues. This is explicit in **The 'Last Chance to See' Tour**, which is set in the near future. It imagines a time when these tourist attractions (like the world-famous Matterhorn, featured in this film – 4,478 m) are about to be completely closed to the public. To protect against the ravages of mass

tourism – extinction, erosion, destruction.

The film introduces the possibility of blank spaces re-appearing on the map – places that cannot be visited or 'experienced'. The viewer embarks on a 'Last Tour', flying quietly over the mountains in a hot-air balloon. A mode of transport that recalls the time when mass tourism began to develop in the nineteenth century: Thomas Cook first offered tours to the European mountain destinations in 1865 and Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* was first published in 1872. Now, in a time when we live with the threat of extinction of species and environmental catastrophe, the title of Hugonnier's film reflects the fear, or fantasy, that we may be the last humans.

Another vision of the future is offered in two vast photographic works, **Towards Tomorrow (International Date Line, Alaska)** (2001). These imposing seascapes were made in Alaska, looking towards Siberia across the notorious Bering Strait that separates Russia from the USA. With the International Date Line falling between the two countries, so that one is 24 hours ahead of the other, Hugonnier's photographs are effectively pictures of tomorrow.