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Kelly Richardson, Terrene

The Great Destroyer (2007-2012) is an eight monitor video installation that, rather than depicting wreckage, plays idyllic scenes from Algonquin Park, one of the Group's preferred painting spots and the site of Tom Thomson's death. The monitors, which are about the same size as the included paintings, function more like canvases than videos. There is no camera movement or editing; the only motion is the swaying of leaves and the flowing of water. One can easily imagine the painters in these exact locations attempting to produce uniquely Canadian pictures. Overtop the videos runs an audio track of an Australian lyrebird, a species that mimics the sounds around it. Between moments of birdsong, its tone convincingly descends into a chainsaw's growl or the humming of a passing car. While these sounds portend imminent destruction, they also speak to the hybrid nature of wilderness itself. Nature, and how we separate ourselves from it, is only ever a concept that serves someone's ends, whether it be imperial power, environmental activists, or industry. At the same time, we are encouraged to interpret the accompanying paintings within the framework of destruction. The wilderness, now well documented, is not quite wild anymore but lies in the service of culture and national mythology. While the destru-
cutive connotations of the chainsaw are apparent, there is also a destruction that occurs with any type of representation. Images of wilderness depend on witnessing that which derives its value from being untouched by human hands.

The largest work in the show is a dual channel video called Orion Tide (2013). The landscape is reminiscent of the Nevada desert nuclear test site, except here the explosives originate on the ground and blast up into the air like missiles or space shuttles. The impression is of the Earth attacking an unknown enemy rather than our world under siege—Orion, after all, is the great hunter of Greco-Roman antiquity. However, it is unclear who the enemy is. The so-called attack has a vaguely impersonal quality to it and, eventually, even a lulling effect. Could this be a test or an automated response that jumps into action after the civilization that built it is long gone?

The fashion for ruins was so prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries that weathered Greek temples inscribed with moralistic, edifying verses were often constructed in the English countryside. These “ruins” had the effect of visually positioning England as the rightful inheritor and caretaker of civilization. In a reworking of Mitchell’s quote above, we might think of empire extending into the past by occupying time itself. In Richardson’s work, time is stunted. Since it is impossible for us to see our own end, it remains unclear who inherits the vestiges of the future empire.

More strikingly, it feels as if the eye that surveys our future wreckage is closer to machine than human. Even as they reference Romantic landscape painting, Richardson’s images are mediated views that minimize the presence of human touch. They are modelled on data and composed using technological means. There are no moral verses, no narrative, no movement forward, only vast, moody expanses and automatic repetition.

The exhibition also showcases Richardson’s early works, which include polaroids taken of wilderness scenes in horror movies, as well as an augmented video of her childhood neighbourhood in Guelph. These works function as precursors to her more ambitious digital constructions and show the evolution of her interest in the “apocalyptic sublime.” Uncanny feelings of loss and a confrontation with the unknown permeate all the works, though they are brought to a much higher refinement in her installations. Together with the assorted paintings, the exhibition continues the Canadian tradition of thinking through landscape, though its implications are universal at a time when commercialized space travel and missions to Mars begin to sound like reality. The show also highlights a particularly secular sort of apocalyptic imagination based on environmental collapse and our likely failure to outrun our own destruction.

Dagmara Genda

Dagmara Genda is an artist and freelance writer. She has published with Border Crossings, esse and Black Flash where she served on the editorial board between 2008-2011. Genda graduated with an MA from the London Consortium, Birkbeck College and with an MFA from Western University. She has had solo exhibitions at the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff and the Esker Foundation, Calgary, and group exhibitions in numerous public galleries, the most recent of which was the nationally touring Ecotopia.

1 Terrene by Kelly Richardson was presented at the Mac-
donald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, from January 22 to March 27, 2015.
ardson in reference to her work.
4 Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “Ozymandias.” The Literature Net-