

University for the Creative Arts  
Research Project Portfolios

# The *Eden* Films

By Maren Hahnfeld



# Project Details

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Name of Researcher:	Maren Hahnfeld
Name of Output:	The <i>Eden</i> Films
UCARO link/s:	<a href="https://research.uca.ac.uk/view/projects/Eden.html">https://research.uca.ac.uk/view/projects/Eden.html</a>
Output Type:	Q - Digital or Visual Media; 2 short films and accompanying book, disseminated through exhibition and screenings
Year and mode of dissemination:	<i>North of Eden</i> film Screening at Kingston University, UK, February 2017 Screening at Ann Arbor Film Festival, MI, US, March 2018  <i>Winter in Eden</i> film Exhibition at <i>Times and Movements of the Image</i> , Espaço Concas, Centro de Artes, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, November 2018 - January 2019 Screening at Ann Arbor Film Festival, MI, US, March 2019
Collaborators:	Charis Coke - Sound Mix Harry Whalley - Music Composition
Key Words:	Experimental documentary, photo-film, memory, history, landscape, photography
External Funding:	British Film Council Travel Grant, 2018

# Synopsis

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‘The *Eden* films’ research output by Maren Hahnfeld consists of two short films, *North of Eden* and *Winter in Eden*, accompanied by photographs and a publication. The films reflect the perspectives of members of the small, remote community of Eden on the high desert of Southern Idaho and the artist and researcher Hahnfeld, an outsider to the community.

To make the films Hahnfeld travelled from England to Eden, where she had lived for a year as a teenager with a host family. *North of Eden* is the first of two experimental documentaries that juxtapose photography and audio to focus on the home Hahnfeld visited and the effect the visit had both on her and the couple she lived with. *North of Eden* is accompanied by a publication which includes photography, poetry and interview excerpts. The second film, *Winter in Eden*, revisits the community in the wake of

the 2016 presidential election, won by Donald Trump.

The films have been disseminated in the UK, US and Portugal. *North of Eden* was screened at the Ann Arbor Film Festival in Michigan, which specialises in experimental and avant-garde filmmaking, in 2018. *Winter in Eden* premiered at Ann Arbor the following year. *Winter in Eden* was also shown in the Times and Movements of the Image exhibition, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, where it was accompanied with a series of photographs by Hahnfeld.

This portfolio of supporting information includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes which led to new insights. It is illustrated with images of the creation of the films and stills from the films themselves. Appended are a PDF of the *North of Eden* book and a PDF of the *Times and Movements of the Image* exhibition catalogue.

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# NORTH OF EDEN

A FILM BY MAREN HAHNFELD





# WINTER IN EDEN

A FILM BY MAREN HAHNFELD

# Context

'The *Eden* films' involved Hahnfeld revisiting and documenting a place where significant experiences in her adolescence took place, 27 years after the event. The close relationship with her participants enabled members of the community to reveal intimate details about their lives. Both *Eden* films investigate the manifestation of political events in the day-to-day lives of two cattle ranchers in the Idaho desert. Remembering plays a crucial part in this work and the documentaries explore how memory and time can be depicted in audio-visual form.

The research builds upon Hahnfeld's previous work in terms of both medium and theme. Hahnfeld began working with the tape-slide medium over twenty years ago; her first project using this method, *East Becomes West* (1996), depicts the effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall on members of a community choir in Dresden. Here, Hahnfeld began working with memory and personal manifestations of political change within a group of people defined by a geographical boundary and a similar ideology. After ten years working in factual television, Hahnfeld then returned to produce experimental documentaries within the tape-slide medium.

The *Eden* films also draw on the work of other filmmakers, such as Chris Marker, who explored the use of still images in film in his short, *La Jetée* (1962) in an attempt to bridge the divide between memory, presence and future. In her film

*Ascent* (2016) Fiona Tan juxtaposes photographs of Mount Fuji with narration of a woman's letter written to one of the early mountaineers. While Marker produced a sci-fi drama and Tan uses a historical narrative, Hahnfeld's photofilms depict the attitudes of people who live in the tiny community of Eden, Idaho, where a wild-west ethos and early settler mentalities are deeply ingrained. In particular, *Winter in Eden* investigates how these ideas shape an ideology that enabled Donald Trump to become president of the USA in 2017.

Hahnfeld's imagery, meanwhile, has been influenced by Todd Hido's photographs of American landscapes that are devoid of life but heavy with suggestion, Nadav Kandar's images of desert and Alec Soth's portrayal of American life in small towns. The use of still images in both films slows down the viewing experience and enables the spectator to absorb the spoken word while submerged in the barren landscape of Southern Idaho. This space for thought has been described by Raymond Bellour (1984): 'the photograph enjoys a privilege over all other effects that make the spectator of cinema, this hurried spectator, a pensive one as well.'

## REFERENCES

Bellour, R. (1984) 'The Pensive Spectator', *Wide Angle*, vol. ix/1, pp. 6-10

# Research Questions and Aims

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Research questions:

How can photography and film be combined effectively to bridge the divide between memory and present?

How can complex political themes be depicted cinematically in a poetic, experimental short film?

How do the history of settlers in the Midwest and the impact of cowboy mythologies influence political opinion?

What is the effect of the election of Donald Trump on small, rural communities in the American Midwest?

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Research aims:

To explore adolescence, identity and politics within a small rural community in the American Midwest by using the unique approach of juxtaposing photography, film and audio interviews in an experimental short film

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*Photograph of Eden used in the  
North of Eden book*



*Winter in Eden film still*

# Research Methods and Process

The *Eden* films were created using audio interview and photographs of a couple with whom Hahnfeld had a previous connection, reflecting on the past and its impact on the present. Audio interviews were also recorded with a number of key members of the community of Eden (pastor, petrol station attendant, farmer, migrant, etc.) to gain insights into their way of thinking and view of the past and present. Instead of formal interviews, these are audio recordings of conversations Hahnfeld held with the participants. The lack of camera enabled participants to be less self-conscious and to almost forget about the fact that these conversations were being recorded.

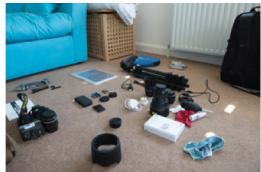
These interviews and images of individuals were then juxtaposed with images of Eden's landscape. Hahnfeld sought to portray landscape in a way that reflects some of the points made by participants and that captures the atmosphere of the community. Particular emphasis was placed on photographing the vastness, emptiness and wildness of this land. Landscape was depicted so that ideas from participants could be projected upon it as a blank canvas.

In *North of Eden* in particular, Hahnfeld sought to recreate responses to events which took place 27 years ago during her time in Idaho. To do so she used colour, light and symbolism to create an immersive atmosphere and enable the viewer to experience what it was like to be in that place. Imagery and sound evoke intense heat and wind, while Hahnfeld's point of view is conveyed through photographs of her hand stroking a dog's head and images taken from her position in the passenger seat of a pick-up truck looking at the driver and out at the road.

The combination of images, footage and audio provide poetic insight into the thought processes and decisions of the inhabitants of Eden. As one image fades into the next, a new, constantly changing, in-between image appears. For a miniscule moment, the frozen photograph springs to life, only to be arrested again in the next still. While the images create a sense of place, the narrative is conveyed through sound. The sound creates a sense of continuity that bridges the divide between the stills.

While Hahnfeld was responsible for nearly all aspects of the production of the films (conceiving the idea, taking the photographs and film, recording the interviews, and editing the components together), she collaborated with others to create the overall soundscape. This included audio collaboration with sound designer Charis Coke on both *Eden* films, and with composer Harry Whalley for *Winter in Eden*, to create the country/cowboy theme in the soundtrack.

The use of additional sound also marked a development between the two films. Although the two use largely the same techniques and aesthetic, the thematic development in *Winter in Eden* to focus on the election of Trump was reinforced by a change in the way participants were photographed. In the second film participants were photographed from the back or side, not fully recognizable. Instead, participants are introduced to the audience through interview audio clips. This makes the audience use their imagination to get to know the characters, to listen intently to their words instead of forming judgements on the basis of their image. It also questions how we get to know another person, through their image, thoughts or the place they live?



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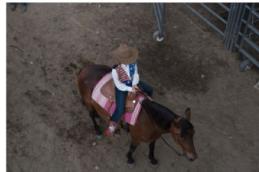
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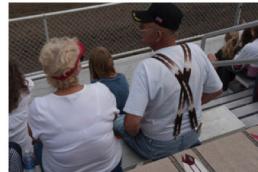
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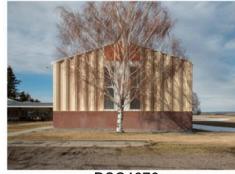
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Contact sheet of photographic experimentation for Winter in Eden

# Research Contribution and Recognition

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## Research insights:

Both *Eden* films demonstrate the effectiveness of still images in a contemporary moving image project as a way to bridge the divide between past and present. The films provide insight into the process of using still images of wide-open landscapes as a stage on which ‘actors’, or participants, appear through audio only. This encourages the viewer to use their imagination to visualise past events. In *Winter in Eden* attitudes derived from the settler’s history in the Midwest are linked to the election of Donald Trump and shine a light on the reasons behind his success.

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## Further Dissemination:

### SCREENINGS

Both *Eden* films were screened at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, the oldest avant-garde and experimental film festival in North America, founded in 1963. The festival receives more than 3,000 submissions annually from more than 65 countries and serves as one of a handful of Academy Award-qualifying festivals in the United States. *Winter in Eden* was also a runner-up in the selection of prestigious documentary film festivals, DOK Leipzig and the True/False Film Fest in Columbia, Missouri.

### EXHIBITION

*Winter in Eden* was screened and accompanied by an exhibition of photography in *Times and Movement of the Image*. This was a three-month exhibition of ten selected artists accompanied by a conference led by The School of Arts and Design, Caldas de Rainha, Portugal.

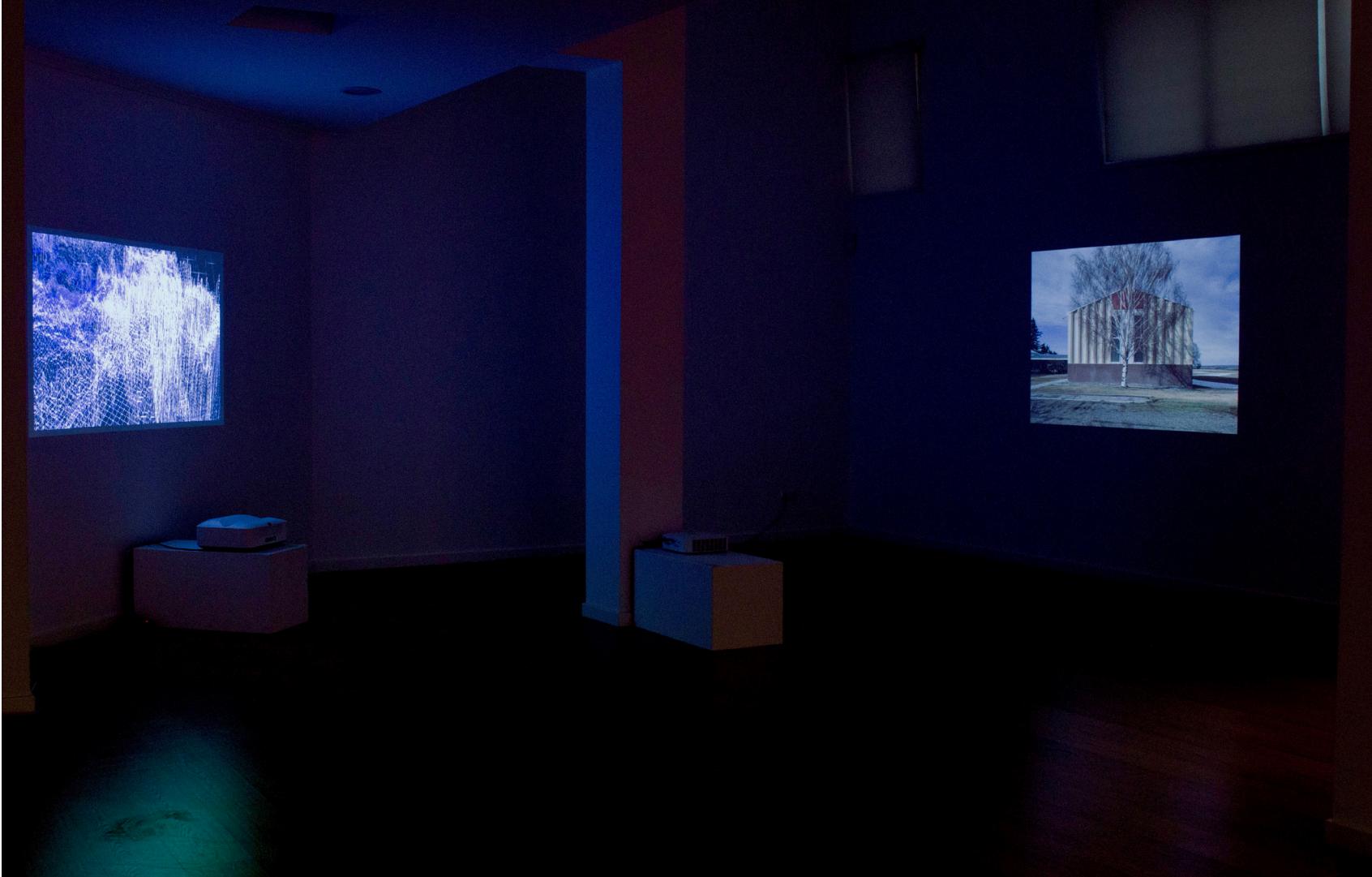
### PUBLICATION

*North in Eden* was accompanied by an artist’s book composed of photographs and short pieces of text. This has been shared online through Hahnfeld’s website (<https://www.marenhahnfeld.co.uk>) and is appended with this portfolio.

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*Installing the Winter in Eden exhibition, Times and Movement of the Image, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, 2018*



*Exhibition shot, Winter in Eden  
exhibition, Times and Movement  
of the Image, Caldas da Rainha,  
Portugal, 2018*



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