Anarcadia: Ruth Maclennan

Reviewed by Sara Porter September 2011
The Castlefield Gallery until September 18th

This exhibition at the Castlefield Gallery entitled '**Anarcadia: Ruth Maclennan**' is a collection of video projection and photographic works along with some archive photographs and film footage all taken in Kazakhstan.

“A negation of the idyll of the mythical Arcadia, the title Anarcadia also suggests the unleashing of uncontrollable forces, from the past, or in the future” (from the gallery literature).

The exhibition starts in the upper gallery, with a large lambda print depicting an ambiguous liquid surface next to which is a small, short video installation from the State Documentary Film and Audio Archive in Kazakhstan. The footage is a 7 minute film entitled ‘Bringing Oil Across the Desert to the Land of the Soviets’ and for me this really sets the scene for the rest of the exhibition. This footage provides a fascinating albeit brief insight into the transformation of Kazakhstan with the laying down of the Turkmenistan-Siberian railway. Whilst watching this and viewing the exhibition it is worth remembering that the Kazahks have essentially been nomadic living off the vast steppes and semi-desert lands, and this footage shows how the demand for fuels and mineral deposits has changed the way in which their land has been worked and ipacted on the lifestyles of the nomadic tribes. It was fascinating to watch the nomads looking on as miles of tracks were laid across their land in order to transport mined resources which they had survived without.