

Koneline: Our Land Beautiful

(Dir. Nettie Wild, 96 mins)

'Reveries of the Connected World'
By Jason Wood

Koneline: Our Land Beautiful is the latest documentary project from director Nettie Wild whose work adroitly blends passion, intelligence and politics. Focusing on social and environmental issues, Wild also has a distinctive eye both for people and for landscape in all its ravishing beauty. At the heart of *Koneline* is the threat faced by indigenous populations in the face of aggressive expansion programs and how the stunning natural habitat of Northwestern British Columbia is imperilled. The viewer is left to draw such conclusions of their own volition, and the film avoids establishing a good versus bad dichotomy. The increased development and the installation of hydro lines in the region is shown not as a force of evil, but more a result of inevitable and undoubtedly unavoidable progression.

The inclusion of *Koneline* on the Canada NOW 2017 tour may well be U.K audiences first exposure to this documentarian's distinctively visual work but with previous features including *FIX: The Story of an Addicted City* (2002), *A Place Called Chiapas* (1998), *Blockade* (1993) and *A Rustling of Leaves: Inside the Philippine Revolution* (1988) Wild has already established a strong reputation in her homeland, winning two Genie awards for Best Feature Documentary. Wild's work has also been showcased at numerous prestigious international film festivals, including Berlin where it won honours from the Forum of New Cinema. She was also Filmmaker in Residence at the National Film Board in 2007 and in 2010 she received the BC Film Critics Circle Award for her contribution to the film industry. *Koneline* recently triumphed at Hot Docs, winning the Best Canadian Feature Documentary award.

Alongside producer Betty Carson, Wild is the driving force behind Canada Wild Productions, an independent Vancouver-based company with a mission statement to produce accessible and engaging documentaries about controversial issues. Key to Canada Wild is the belief that behind the politics in any community lay human dramas with lessons that deeply affect our lives. The ethos behind Canada Wild is not distanced and remote from the subjects with which they actively engage and the films have the power to act as agency for change, as evidenced by the significant funds raised by *A Place Called Chiapas*, monies that went directly to the peoples of Chiapas.

Aptly described by the filmmakers as 'a celebration of the dreamers who move across northwestern British Columbia', this deeply sensual, humanistic tonal poem is set deep within the traditional territory of the Tahltan First Nation and focuses on a number of its inhabitants as, with great respect, they forage honourable livings from their surroundings. This vast wilderness is undergoing irrevocable change and Wild captures varying perspectives as to the extent to which livelihoods and ways of life will be affected. A guide outfitter (who asserts that her way of life is not 'surviving' but 'living') swims her horses across the vast Stikine River whilst, in a scene reminiscent from Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, a chopper flies 16,000-pound transmission towers over mountaintops. There are diamond drillers, both Native and white, and elders who blockade them. There's a Tahltan son struggling to preserve a dying language, and, in the smashing of stereotypes, the depiction of white hunters carrying bows and arrows in contrast to members of the Tahltan First Nation who hunt out of a pickup with high-powered rifles.

There is something reminiscent of the more recent documentary output of Werner Herzog (though Gideon Koppel's *Sleep Furiously* also comes to mind when drawing comparisons) in the way in which Wild and cinematographer Van Royko (the recent winner of the CSC Robert Brooks Award for Best Cinematography) captures in breath-taking visual terms the wonder of the natural world. Rather than portray technology as a destructive force, Wild and Royko however prefer to express similar wonderment at some of the feats of engineering, at various junctures showing nature and technology existing in a kind of acceptance or symbiosis. An Aurora Borealis viewed through newly installed power lines being just one example. Awe is everywhere, making this an impressively and deeply nuanced work that favours ambiguity and space over rhetoric and didacticism.

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