

Carrier, David. "Reviews: Diana Thater" *tema celeste*, no 109 (May/June 2005), pp. 75-76.

diana thater

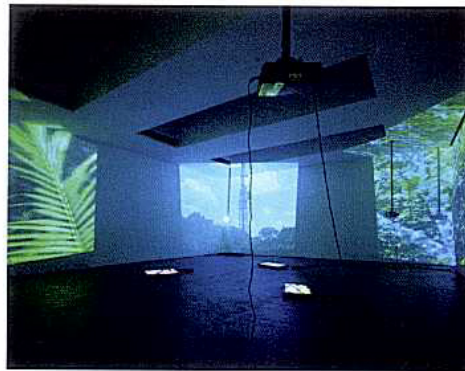
David Zwirner and / e Zwirner & Wirth
New York

This two-part exhibition displays Thater's recent videos and some associated drawings. At Zwirner & Wirth, in the front room you encounter her video *Unisphere* (1998), and a drawing which explains the entire exhibition. A wall label quotes Michel Foucault to the effect that meaning is only superficial; underneath, he says, is what sustains the system. At the back in the main gallery, *White is the Color* (2002) uses two video projectors to display what appear to be beautiful clouds, but which actually are forest fires.

As a label near the desk says: "Beauty is just that. The sublime is horror-based." At night, the basis of the work is extended as these images are projected from inside on scrims that have been pulled down over the windows of this five-floor townhouse. At the David Zwirner gallery, four smaller videos are in the front rooms, and Thater's masterpiece—a new, untitled video of the Panama rainforest—is in the back room. As you walk through the large space, one projector shows a 300-foot-high crane that scientists installed in the rainforest, while a second projector displays images of the jungle taken from that crane. Images of birds and other animals are shown on floor monitors, transporting visitors into a lush tropical world.

Thater's imagery forces us to revise our way of thinking about nature, the concept of beauty and the sublime. To 18th-century aestheticians, beauty was something easily understood, while the sublime was considered to symbolize a destructive mode of nature, the excess beyond human understanding.

With her work, Thater seems to be implying that contemporary technology forces us to revise this way of thinking. When we go beneath the surface of her images, we find truly horrifying things. The seemingly beautiful clouds in *White is the Color* are actually, as highlighted before, destructive fires, while the video which aims to show jungle life is photographed from an enormous intrusive machine. The pleasures of her attractive images may appear self-evident, but by revealing to us the mechanisms for how they are produced, she shows that what lurks behind them is terrifying.



Diana Thater *Continuous. Contiguous.*, 2004-2005, mixed media / materiali vari, dimensions variable / dimensioni variabili.