## Stand-ins for a deviant nature

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Greta Anderson's work is characterised by lonely and dangerous landscapes, writes Malcolm Burgess

From Stark's Cafe in Queen St, there is a great view of Tony Soprano and his criminal cohorts staring out wall-eved from a huge billboard hanging over the St James Theatre opposite. Although all share the same space, each mafioso is oblivious to the next, lost in his or her private world of shame and pain.

It is with a tireless eye for composition that photographic artist Greta Anderson points this out. She jokes how I might also mention the way her dark-green jacket contrasts with her pink milkshake, laced with streaks of dark red syrup. As imagery goes, who am I to argue? The artist is calling the shots, even in this everyday setting.

Greta who? While the late Kiwi curator Giovanni Intra was making a splash in Los Angeles, up-and-comer Anderson was quietly testing the waters of the east coast American art scene

It was at a party in New York that the tides of fate brought her into contact with a very hig fish indeed - Andres Serrano, well known for his Piss Christ, essentially a plastic crucifix suspended in a jar of the artist's own urine. The controversial artist was said to have been impressed by Anderson's restrained, multifaceted work; she gave him

one of her earlier pieces She admits his interest might have lain in the fact the work in question "did have a and other formats. nipple in it", but says their styles are completely different. "His work is controversial

## >> Exhibition

- > What: The Stand-Ins, photographs by
- Greta Anderson → Where: Te Tuhi—The Mark, Pakuranga
- > When: Until June 1

and mine is not as I am always imagining my mother looking at it. My deviant nature is very much disguised."

Serrano later wrote a letter of recommendation for Anderson's successful Creative New Zealand funding application, the result of which now hangs in Pakuranga at the Studio Gallery in Pakuranga's Te Tuhi-The Mark: an impressive, moody exhibition full of disquieting photographic

Anderson's past life as drummer in the Kiwi hand Superette might have influenced the title of the show. The Stand-ins. It could. after all, easily be a band name in the style of the White Stripes, the Vines - or her

latest musical endeavour, the Pencils. Or maybe a brand name, given her dayjob as a freelance photographer whose work spans the commercial spectrum, producing photographs for billboards, magazine ads

Anderson's art, like her craft, is clearly anything but obscure.

"It's clean and direct but doesn't say or sell anything," she says.

These "slices of life", as she calls them, conjure their moods through clarity rather

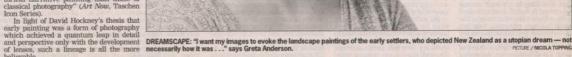
Alongside influences ranging from filmmaking to colonial-era New Zealand painting. Anderson includes the works of Jeff Wall, whose large-scale light-box transparencies "speak more about traditions of historical narrative painting than those of classical photography" (Art Now, Taschen Icon Series).

In light of David Hockney's thesis that early painting was a form of photography which achieved a quantum leap in detail

Anderson's name may even one day be quoted in the same breath as other "photo- where still, calm moments sit on the canvas native-bush lover, I also like to use the graphic painters", such as Andreas Gursky.

Anderson's large-scale prints feature characteristically lonely and dangerous New Zealand and Australian landscapes, peopled by figures who ignore each other her placement of human "puppets" within

and their surroundings. landscape emphasises their insignificance. plot or motivation' "I want my images to evoke the landscape On her stage a "loose, almost unrecogpaintings of the early settlers, who depicted nisable narrative" takes place in an New Zealand as a utopian dream - not environment that demands a double-take



PICTURE / NICOLA TOPPING

A spell as an animator's assistant on Sesame Street in New York might also prefigure her later directorial predilections filmic scenarios. In setting up her shots, As in the colonial paintings of Alfred Anderson imagines herself as a director -Sharpe, their size in comparison to the huge "but such a bad one that I do not reveal the

necessarily how it was - a garden of Eden from the viewer. "Even though I am a

noxious weed locations, which are now part and unprofessional," she says. Although of our landscape."

As such, she compares The Stand-ins to the recent Australian movie Lantana, which takes its name from a noxious weed that is beautiful and destructive. There is another similarity: "In it are scenes between couples based on themes of betraval and trust.

The exhibition title also refers to people who "stand in" for the main actors during "blocking" or setting up a sequence of shots

"They're not up to the lob - awkward she has always made a conscious decision to use friends as the figures in her landscapes, Anderson would like to try using professional models one day.

"Something like that," she says, peering up at the obscenely large billboard presence of Tony Soprano - quite large enough with out the magnification and chums.

Ever the "director". Anderson's mind is on the before and the after.

"Although it would have been really hard to get them all there at the same time."