

Painting the industrial

Samantha MacKay

The Falls

Falls of Clyde, the walk from New Lanark to Corra Linn is beautiful, however intermingled with machinery, industrial hydro-power elements, and derelict buildings – once tourism fuelled viewpoints to admire the waterfall. My main interest in this walk largely surrounded the journey to the fall, and the brief stop to view areas that lay the pipes carrying pumped water – or slightly off-path to reveal electric powerlines stretching across nearby fields.

My journey through this project led me to realise how much I underestimated my initial appreciation, or better worded – awe, for the sheer scale of the hydro-power facilities and equipment that surrounds rivers, creates reservoirs, and the power required to even change the flow of a river itself. However, in concept that notion is almost terrifying – machinery so powerful it can change the landscape and make up of a river, whether a plain is flooded or left dry, or, in the case of Corra Linn, the flow being allowed to run at full power for tourist season, this first hand shows how hydro plants directly affect the landscape, changing the flow of water for months at

a time changes the underlying composition of the water itself, and a domino effect occurs with the creatures residing inside. (Česonienė, Dapkienė and Punys, 2021)

I Felt Dread

It left me feeling some form of dread, the sight is uncomfortable. Large, aged, rusting pipes that are an off-green from the surrounding grass to the dam wall at Cruachan Reservoir, to know that stood at the bottom you wouldn't even be able to see the sheer magnitude of the water held behind it. The attempt to blend concrete into surrounding stone, and yet – it's a tourist attraction, and so I chose to set out on a personal journey about how I feel and how that could be represented digitally – a medium that felt apt, with how man-made everything is in regards to hydro-power, digital art representing nature and hydro components felt more appropriate to me than gathering anything from my journeys other than images. On reflection, initial nonchalance to a majority of what I encountered feels reinforced

by living in a busy, overtly grey city for my whole life, where construction is common-place no matter where you travel, and the further into the middle of the city, the less greenery there is – the River that runs through the centre of Glasgow is interlaced with bridges, walkways and commercial buildings running alongside the water. The Falls of Clyde invoke a different feeling, due to how remote it feels, despite it not being so, the natural fauna that lines the river isn't city concrete, or media buildings – so hydro-power pipes feel much more unexpected, and out of place.

The first image is of the first striking thing I encountered, the pipes that feed the water at the Falls of Clyde. They lie blocked off, appear aged and rusted, and separate the person via a metal gate as not to trespass. Largely, the surrounding trees were left, greenery growing around and near it. However, the main thought was that once that area wouldn't have been blocked off, from the river to this small, sectioned off bit of land would have been free to access. No adjoining buildings for maintenance, just open landscape that maybe once people walked through and enjoyed what was once there.

The painting is abstracted, simplified, designed almost as a children's book illustration, depicting three children silhouetted amongst the pipes and machinery, playing as if they would without industrial objects there. Displaying the discomfort I felt at its existence, it's out of place – and most certainly children, or anyone should be near or on it – but at the same time, at some point, those objects weren't there either, and suddenly the prospect of children or people playing there isn't as preposterous.



Figure 1. Falls of Clyde, New Lanark. Image: MacKay, 2024

The Dam

Cruachan reservoir, whilst I haven't visited myself, I became incredibly interested in its function, and the sheer scale of the dam itself – the concrete is glaringly obvious against the landscape, and it becomes clear that it is manmade. The height of the dam and the almost absurd placement piqued intrigue. Aerial views of the dam did not quite sell the magnitude, and many images found online work to create and aesthetically pleasing image of the reservoir, I did not want to do that – the dam walls remind me of a city, the deep eroded grey, heights marvelling high-rise buildings, machinery hidden beneath the surface much like cables and pipes beneath a busy city. The colours chosen are muted, purposefully muddy against the bright blue sky, the dam wall blocking off any further view. To emulate the motion of someone quickly looking up to observe the height, motion blurring was applied, partly to make it difficult to focus on any detail that was initially there before filtering was applied. I deliberately chose not to include the water in the image, it is there – the presence is blocked by the dam, a man-made effort, artificial. Dams impact sediment downstream in rivers, halting movement, water quality and fauna inevitably suffers (Baird et al., 2021), whilst this is something I could have illustrated, it is more poignant to have the dam at the start of it all blocking view of all the water.

The design of the dam, whilst plenty are supposedly meant to blend in with the landscape, still take up an impressive size – however, nothing hides the grey concrete that will eventually fade, standing out against lush green hills, “As far as design is concerned, there is little that can be done to disguise their straight lines and uncompromising bulk”. (Lea, 1968, p. 244).

The designs I took forward settled on not presenting the water locked behind the dam at Cruachan Reservoir, nor did I aspire to illustrate Loch Awe. The main goal was to present the scale of the dam wall, that of which neatly hides the engineering beneath, from a bottom-up perspective, boxed in and hiding the sides of the dam – a close-up viewpoint of a single person, all to showcase discomfort.

Reflection

This project encouraged an appreciation of not only the natural landscape I sometimes do not fully see due to living in Scotland's largest city, but an appreciation of the machinery that keeps homes lit whilst also being able to criticise the implementation of them, the tourism surrounding it and the seemingly haphazardly – from an

*Figure 3. Initial Illustration Hydro Turbine.
Digital Illustration, MacKay, 2024*



aesthetic and ecological point of view – placement of the industrial buildings and materials. It is human to be amazed, and simultaneously disgusted, or disappointed in something so grand, but so alien to the natural world.

References

Baird, I.G. et al. (2021) 'The Downstream Impacts of Hydropower Dams and Indigenous and Local Knowledge: Examples from the Peace–Athabasca, Mekong, and Amazon', *Environmental Management*, 67(4), pp. 682–696. Accessed: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-020-01418-x>.

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Lea, K.J. (1968) 'Hydro-electric power developments and the landscape in the highlands of Scotland', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 84(3), pp. 239–247. Accessed: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00369226808736100>.

*Figure 4. The Dam, Final Illustration.
Digital Illustration: MacKay, 2024*

