

GLADSTONE GALLERY

David Humphrey, "Rachel Rose: Everything and More," *Art Papers*, May, 2016

ART PAPERS



Rachel Rose: *Everything and More*

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

"I[Ma]n is soluble in his thought!"

—André Breton

REVIEWS

Tears wait in the lacrimal lake to be drawn into sacs and ducts before spreading across our eyes. Crying distorts vision and changes tear chemistry with a jolt of emotion, but it springs from the same lubricating reservoir that aids everyday seeing. We see through cornea and lens but also always through tear-waters. During one stretch of Rachel Rose's new piece at the Whitney Museum, *Everything and More* [October 30, 2015–February 7, 2016], the camera pans along the side of a pool, then abruptly pivots and dives into the water. Lights and objects above the surface undulate in the bubbled turbulence while the soundtrack becomes muffled as if heard through the water. Rose's work celebrates an understanding of seeing as *seeing-through*. *Everything and More* (2015) builds analogies between lens, window, screen, and eye with psychedelic verve. When the doused camera re-emerges from the pool, a filter subtly breaks up the image, as though water on the lens had a transformational effect. The pool turns out to be part of a microgravity-training site for astronauts to rehearse the experience of being in outer space. An empty spacesuit hangs beside the water as the camera moves behind the helmet's facemask to view a scene of pulsing biocellular foam.

Everything and More oscillates between footage of a massive crowd at a music concert, close-up images of viscously flowing liquids, smoke rings, a face smiling in slow motion, ambient electronic noise, drones and pulses, an acoustically reworked recording of Aretha Franklin singing fragments of *Amazing Grace*, and the voiceover of astronaut David Wolf talking about his experience in space and the difficulties of returning to Earth. Boundaries between inside and outside, bodies and objects, seer and seen are blurred in ways both ecstatic and melancholic.

The screen in the museum's darkened space hangs in front of a large window. When the projected image darkens, the screen becomes a translucent scrim revealing two Frank Stella star sculptures and various museumgoers milling about on the outdoor terrace. Light spots within the projected image sometimes puncture the darkness like stars, and occasionally expand to completely obliterate the image and illuminate audience

members in the gallery as they watch from the soft floor or single bench at the back of the room. This motley handful of thoughtfully immobile spectators contrasts with the projected crowd of pulsing ravers. Those concertgoers fuse into a plasma of excitation, an undulating body of merged concentration, a thousand-eared audio receptor that metabolizes performed sound into a collective membrane. But the scene feels faraway, and we don't hear the same music that's moving them. Blue and red filters and distant bass thuds with mixed layers of noise open the mood to possibilities of menace or loss.

Philosopher Peter Sloterdijk theorizes about the resonant effects of our experience in the womb: undifferentiated and mostly acoustic. In *Bubbles: Spheres I*, he writes, "My existence includes the presence of a pre-objective something floating around me; its purpose is to let me be and support me." *Everything and More* evokes such endo-acoustics with layered multispeaker sound design. We are plunged and intimately addressed in a fluid stream of non-narrative audio information. Elsewhere Sloterdijk asks, "On what wavelength is the speech broadcast that puts you in a state of unreserved resonance, and whose audition makes the ear open and swell up, as if it were suddenly involved in ardently singing a hymn whose sounds contain its earliest and most recent expectations?" The astronaut David Wolf describes, in his voiceover for Rose's video, the sense of heightened perception and loosened boundaries he experienced while floating in the darkness outside his space station in a comfortably climate-controlled suit. Franklin's singing includes a line from *Amazing Grace*: "The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine."

Found oneiric concert footage rubs against the vivid presence of Rose's own psychedelic imagery. Closeness and distance, the amniotic and the cosmic, are stirred into a dramatic light-show brew. Biological growth, accelerated geologic activity, enhanced satellite images of space, and other similar morphologies are evoked; software filters intensify trippy effects by opening holes and overlaying images into the gooey flow. Jordan Belson's experimental films, Joshua White's liquid light shows, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and recent

movies such as *Gravity* or *Interstellar* inform Rose's visual language, and inflect how viewers understand it.

Rose appears to use her own version of Hollywood film magic, and an avant-garde self-consciousness, to produce associations and metaphors unfamiliar to both those idioms. She vivifies the space between perceiver and perceived by the unlikely means of distortion and artifice. Cheesy conventions, reflexivity, and real bodies are employed to tell a story of dissolution and bodilessness. *Everything and More* cycles through a range of aural and visual metaphors for the threshold between matter and mind, and between the world and ourselves. The video sequences exist in data suspension, made mutable and potentially agitated by the artist's sensibility with software. Her found footage is emulsified with studio and field photography; imagination converses with nonfiction. This agility in the face of binaries gives *Everything and More* the loose spontaneity of improvisation, even though it is a research-based work commissioned by the Whitney Museum.

Buckminster Fuller famously said that we are all astronauts; Rachel Rose has conjured and playfully deflated that possibility. Outer space turns out to be something we can cook up at home with milk, eggs, and soy sauce—or stream from Netflix.

—David Humphrey

OPPOSITE: Rachel Rose, stills from *Everything and More*, 2015 [courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery, London]

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