

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Eve MacSweeney, "Everything is Video for Rachel Rose, the Art World's Screen Star," *W Magazine*, March, 2019

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Photograph by Susan Meiselas Magnum Photos Styled by Felicia Garcia-Rivera.

Everything Is Video For Rachel Rose, the Art World's Screen Star

Up four steep flights of stairs in a Chinatown loft building in lower Manhattan is the command center of the woman many are hailing as the future of the art world. The video artist Rachel Rose opens the door to a small, neat room, more office than studio. A long table holds desktop computers and speakers, metal bookshelves bear orderly stacks of catalogs, and a smartboard is filled with lists, questions, and scene-by-scene breakdowns of recent work. Only an ad hoc collage stuck to the wall with torn blue tape breaks the austerity: verdant landscape photographs, intricate drawings, a printout of a poster in vivid colors for a 1964 Japanese movie, *Kwaidan*, by Masaki Kobayashi. "I don't think too much about those," she says casually of the images. "They're left over from different projects."

Creating order out of chaos is a particular strength of Rose's, not least because her subject matter is vast, wide, and deep. Just 32, she has already had a number of solo museum shows, most recently with her film *Wil-o-Wisp* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Turin's Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. (It is currently playing at her London gallery, Pilar Corrias, through March 30.) Rose works on serial, long-term, and very different pieces. Sitting *Feeding Sleeping*, her M.F.A. graduation show, in 2013, looked at zoo animals and human survival. *Lake Valley*, which had its debut in Japan, in 2016, before making a showstopping appearance at the 2017 Venice Biennale, is an animation fashioned largely from vintage children's-book illustrations to spin a tale of fear and disjunction around the approach of adulthood. -*Wil-o-Wisp* explores witchcraft in early-17th-century rural England.

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An installation view of Wil-o-Wisp, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The Enclosure movement had begun to claim swaths of public land for private ownership, disrupting people's previously more animistic connection with their surroundings and, therefore, says Rose, with magic. "That conflict contains all the things that I'm interested in: the occult and the rational; the fragility of the structures we live with, and how recent some of the things we think have been here forever might be," she says. "It's been traced as the end of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism, and I was interested in what was happening in this exact little spot of the world in this moment that has so many roots in the way we live today."

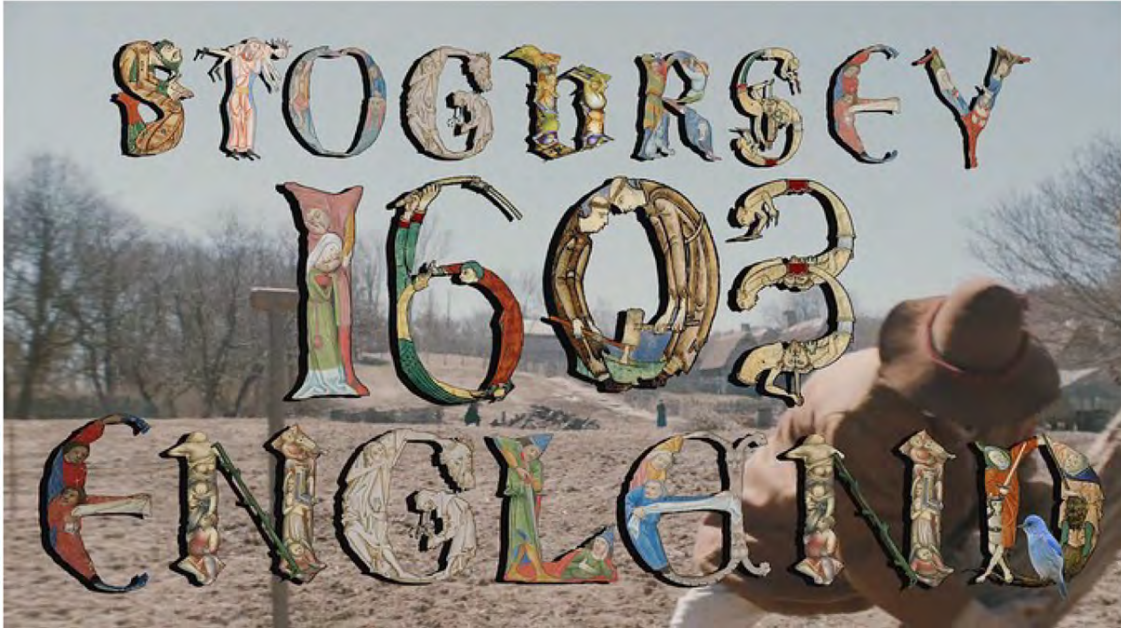
With her handful of sharply defined pieces, Rose has swiftly built an impressive reputation. Her work has been bought by important museums, and she's attracted the support of such powerful patrons and rainmakers as Luma Arles's Maja Hoffmann and London's -Serpentine Galleries' artistic director—and global art wizard—Hans Ulrich Obrist. Her success is all the more remarkable given that a few short years ago she was ready to walk away from art entirely. Newly enrolled in the M.F.A. program at Columbia, in which she had embarked as an abstract painter, she hit a wall. "I was in a major crisis of thinking that art was not the right place for me and I had fucked up by going to grad school," says Rose, who earned a B.A. at Yale and an M.A. at London's Courtauld Institute of Art. "I was just filled with doubt."

It's a moment that one of her teachers at Columbia, the conceptual artist Liam Gillick, remembers well. "You could see that she was going through an extraordinary rethink of everything," he says. Gillick's advice to her was to go to lectures in different faculties. "I do think sometimes giving up 'art' can really help an artist," he says with a laugh. That, and the encouragement of another of her teachers, Rirkrit Tiravanija, whose own almost immaterial practice was instructive, helped her break out of the mold she had cast herself in. Suddenly, as a video artist, everything was open to her: Images, sound, drawing, found footage, original footage, technology, history, the environment, anxieties, painting, story, installation could all be part of her vision. "And almost immediately, the work was just so much better," Gillick says. "It was a revelation."

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The leap out of what she describes as “the constricting idea of doing something on a certain scale with one material” into the void of doing everything at once paid off for Rose. In 2015, just two years after getting her M.F.A., she was exhibiting two films, *Palisades in Palisades* and *A Minute Ago*, in the Zaha Hadid–designed Sackler -Gallery at the Serpentine, her first solo show in London.

Shortly thereafter, she presented *Everything and More*, a mind-expanding film set to a soundtrack of an astronaut describing the sensation of viewing the earth while floating in space, at New York’s newly opened downtown Whitney Museum of American Art.



A title sequence in *Wil-o-Wisp* featuring a custom typeface.

Today, Rose, who has long auburn hair and warm brown eyes, is dressed in a white shirt, black pants, and a formidable-looking pair of black lace-up boots she is breaking in for a planned trip to Antarctica. She engages with both lightness and gravitas in the question of her rapid success, the kind that can sometimes burden a young artist and give rise to hype and backlash.

Asked if she feels the pressure of expectation, she replies with a vigorous “Yes” and laughs, before explaining that, more specifically, it serves mainly to increase the demands she puts on herself. “I feel like I have to take each opportunity I get as a way to grow and learn as much as I possibly can,” she says. “So I feel that pressure.”

Work for her is a process of discovery. “I just think, What am I feeling?” she says of initiating a project. “Some subtle thing. What am I interested in? What do I want to learn more about? And I just go there. I try to build a world for myself of texture and feeling and information that’s in that. I don’t worry about what I’m going to make.” When she made *A Minute Ago*, in 2014, she had been shaken by the intensity of living through Hurricane Sandy, and the feelings it evoked that the edifices we erect around ourselves are laughably flimsy. (She filmed it at Philip Johnson’s Glass House.)

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Rose was just 27 when she began work on Lake Valley, and “all of a sudden I had a career I was responsible to,” she recalls. “It felt like a second stage of growing up, and I was curious about what being an adult means.” She took a deep dive into the history of childhood—a relatively recent concept distinct from children being considered simply miniature grown-ups—and the world of fairy tales, so often hinging on ideas of displacement, loneliness, and abandonment.

On the practical side, it was her first foray into animation, with its imperative of telling a story purely through images. “What I’m trying to accomplish,” she says, “is to take something I feel very specifically, like this question around adulthood and loneliness, and find other places that contain that same feeling. As a viewer, you can enter into that feeling, but also open into a broader world.”

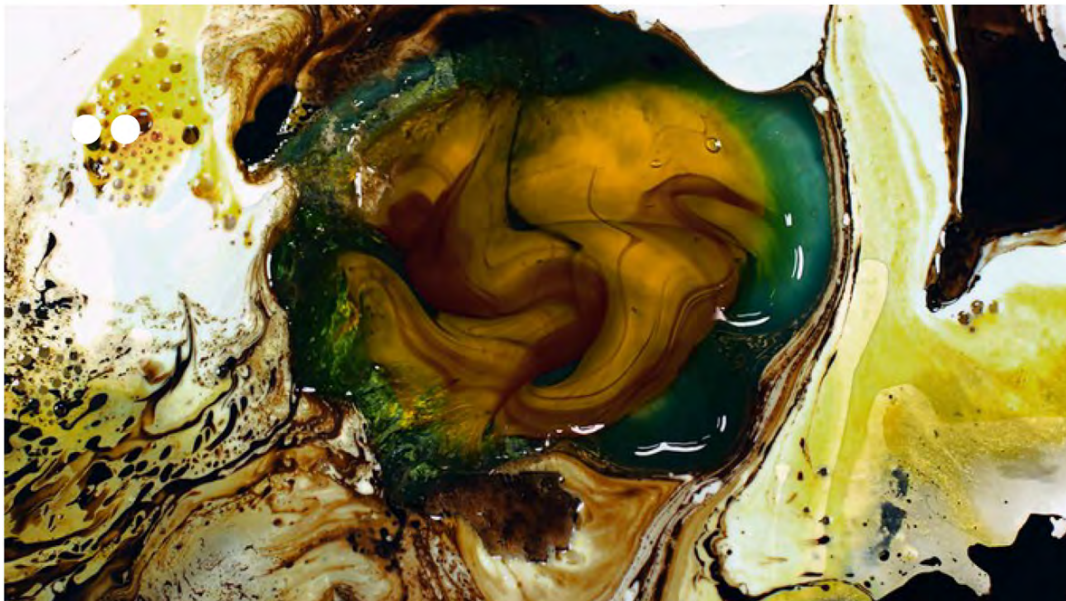
As the Whitney curator Chrissie Iles observes of Rose’s immersive work, “It deals with big questions—consciousness, time, infinity, death, space. Rachel is very good at creating poetic narratives that are quite disturbing, but presenting them in a very rich, visual, sensual way so that you get drawn into those questions.” The edges between viewer and work blur, as images transition from saturated color and hallucinogenic abstractions to found and factual footage.

Rose pays a lot of attention to sound and light, wrapping audio around a gallery, experimenting with scrims, “knit” screens, and the effects of daylight filtering through windows. Segues are her brushstrokes. “Rachel has an outstanding capacity to bring images together, to make junctions between them and link them to all kinds of different stories,” Obrist says. “In an age where we live in a more and more exponential explosion of images and information, it’s amazing that someone can create her own amalgam of images in such a precise way.”



An installation view of *A Minute Ago*, 2014, at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, in 2015.

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A film still from Everything and More, 2015.



Still of Wil-o-Wisp.

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Rose, in her Manhattan studio, wearing her own clothing.
Photograph by Susan Meiselas/Magnum Photos; Styled by Felicia Garcia-Rivera.

Rose lives on the Lower East Side with her husband, Ian Cheng. Like her, Cheng is a dynamic digital artist getting attention and heat. “We met in art,” she says loosely. “It’s nice. You can relate to someone about what you’re doing.” She grew up on a farm in northern Westchester County, outside New York, with a sister who was 14 years older.

“I’d entertain myself by making things,” she says. Rose comes from a prominent real estate family who have, over several generations, donated generously to New York institutions such as Lincoln Center and the American Museum of Natural History, although visual art was not a specific theme. “I grew up more around music,” she says. “My dad had an experimental-jazz record label.” Her parents, Jonathan Rose and Diana Cal-thorpe Rose, also founded the Garrison Institute, a spiritual retreat in upstate New York dedicated to protecting the environment and social justice.

If her parents were children of the ’60s, Rose is part of an equally world-changing generation. “You can’t even say it’s post-Internet,” Iles says. “The Internet is our world; it’s the air we breathe. Rachel emerged just at a moment when that was becoming the case, and one of the ways in which she’s unusual is that she’s transcended technology. She just absorbs it. She’s talking about robotics and time travel, or cryogenics or drones one minute, and thinking about history, including painting, and 19th-century children’s-book illustrations the next; it’s all just material to her.” Wielding this plurality, both with her camera and in the edit suite, has allowed her to create a vivid new aesthetic language. “Rachel is about mixed realities,” Obrist says. “She thinks AI, she thinks augmented reality, she thinks VR; she’s analog, she’s digital.”

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An installation view of *Everything and More*, at the Whitney, in 2015.

Next up for her is *Enclosure*, a joint commission for the Luma Foundation, in Arles, France, where it will premiere in early summer, and the Park Avenue Armory, in New York, where it will debut in 2020. The new piece, filmed with actors and a script, returns to the agrarian England of *Wil-o-Wisp*, but from a new perspective. “I was interested in the people who were seizing the land,” she says.

“It has a very different narrative and aesthetic, but is also concerned with magic.” After that, she has still bigger plans: “I want to make feature films. It feels like a natural step for me to develop, especially because I’m so interested in story.” She considers the prospect, calm and steady. “Of course, that creates a whole different set of expectations.”