

Laura McLean-Ferris, "Rachel Rose," *ArtReview*, March, 2014

ArtReview

Rachel Rose



I once made the mistake of tasting cured, decomposed shark meat, which was served as a small, neat, innocuous-looking cube of very pale pink flesh. I can only describe what followed as being like tasting years and years of death at sea, as though everything the shark had ever killed was rotting in my mouth at rapid, time-lapsed speed. I was brought back to this experience by the young American artist Rachel Rose's latest videowork, *Palisades in Palisades* (2014), shot on the cliffs overlooking the Hudson River from New York and New Jersey. It features a friend of the artist, who acts as something of a double or stand-in. The camera gets very tight in on the subject, allowing you to see everything from the pores on her face to the fibres of her top. The sound is close, heavy and often shockingly sharp – the girl's eyelashes, covered in clumps of black and cobalt-blue mascara, make noises like falling jewellery as they blink. But suddenly the camera pulls away fast from her, and zooms in microscopically close to a papery, yellowing leaf throbbing with dark veins in a tree far above her. The picture flickers,

alternating with the inky lines of a monoprint behind it, the first in a tour of extreme closeups of images of artworks that depict the Palisades, most notably paintings and prints featuring George Washington directing troops during a battle from the American Revolutionary War that was fought on the site. Rose edits sharply back and forth, strobing through various forms of image-making technology: her camera searches the background of a painting and finds an image of an animal, zooming in close before cutting to an interior shot of its belly as it is entered by a bullet. As the camera pulls out, though, it appears to be leaving not a dead animal, but an orange plastic bag discarded in the Palisades a few feet away from the female subject of the video, her hair flicking in the breeze. Every object makes a dense sound as the camera passes through it, and every material is layered up as if expressing stratified periods

Palisades in Palisades, 2014, video, 9 min 31 sec.
Courtesy the artist

of time, such that the girl is depicted as being tied to the fabric of the world and to the history of the place with an extreme intensity.

Rose's rhythmic and haptic editing is exquisite, and the artist's background in painting does much to inform the way that she builds up tranches of sound and footage as though she were working up layers of paint on canvas. For a previous videowork, *Sitting, Feeding, Sleeping* (2013), produced in a moment of crisis about continuing to make art, and prompting her to investigate a feeling of 'deathfulness' that had settled on her, the artist went on several research trips to get close to entities that were almost human, or almost dead, such as advanced AI-controlled robots, cryogenically frozen dead bodies and zoo animals. The result is a deeply thought video essay on living and material, spoken by Rose's Auto-Tuned voice, that asks the central question, "What are you sitting, feeding, sleeping, for?", eventually arriving at the proposition that perhaps we are here "for the mutations that we make".

selected by Laura McLean-Ferris