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Nate Freeman, "Everything Is Not What It Fully Is on the Surface: Rachel Rose on 'Lake Valley' Her Beguiling Video in the Biennale," *ARTnews*, October 5, 2017

ARTNEWS

— 2017 VENICE BIENNALE — ARTISTS —

'Everything Is Not What It Fully Is on the Surface': Rachel Rose on 'Lake Valley,' Her Beguiling Video in the Biennale

BY **Nate Freeman** POSTED 05/10/17 11:42 AM



A still from Rachel Rose, *Lake Valley* (2016).
COURTESY THE ARTIST, PILLAR CORRIAS GALLERY AND GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE

A pet is in the kitchen of a suburban town, left behind by its owner, who's taking his daughter to school. A framed poster leans against the wall. An egg cracks to reveal a garish yellow yolk. Orange rinds are left on the stained back seat of a car. A girl dreams while floating a few feet above her bed. Fireworks explode into a swirling vortex.

These are scenes from Rachel Rose's *Lake Valley* (2016), one of the more beguiling things on view in the Central Pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year. Rose is known for inventive video works that she makes by layering film, collage, and found footage, with cuts at intervals that build texture into the process of seeing it. The body responds, the work presupposes, not to the image but to how one image flips to another.

Lake Valley is this, but with a twist: the composited images are taken from 19th-century children's books layered over with cel animation, done by hand, and requiring 12 hand-drawn frames per second. The result is a whoosh of sensory stimuli—when applied to the story of a furry creature trying to find a friend in a spooky dream forest, it's a pretty enchanting work.

On today's VIP preview day—it's crowded, and so I guess there are a lot of VIPs—I walked into the blackened theater to find it packed wall-to-wall and watched the loop twice but wanted to hear Rose explain it in her own words. We agreed to meet at the cafe just outside the Biennale gates, but it was closed for a private party (more VIPs) so we found something better: the steps down to the Grand Canal, the sun washing over the front of the Giardini. A sailboat wobbled in the distance. Waves lapped at the stone. A girl in a hat smoked a cigarette.

"I haven't sat by the water here yet," said Rose, who, at 30, is one of the youngest artists in the Biennale. The water was approaching our feet.

I asked her about the process putting together *Lake Valley*, which was first shown at Pilar Corrias in London last September. It's also going to be shown in New York this September, at her first show with Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

"I was thinking about self-development and adulthood," she said. "The separation between yourself as an adult and yourself as a child is modern, and these differentiations between selfhood seemed to happen at some time during the Renaissance." And this led to changes in the nature of children's books.

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“As I got thought about childhood, I looked at stories that were written about being a child, stories for children,” she said. “And one of the themes that just keeps on reoccurring is loneliness. A child abandoned by its family, or a child alone trying to get back to its family.”

From there, she developed a concept from which she could build a lonely-child narrative of her own. She created a fictional New York suburb called *Lake Valley*—“It’s from a suburban-housing-development name generator,” she explained—and went about mapping out a story.

“This creature is living in a home with a father and his daughter, and they’re going about their daily life, and all day this creature is just alone,” she said.

(To describe what the creature looks like, the wall text says it’s a “hybrid of a rabbit, a fox and a dog.”)

“It’s seeking moments of connection,” she said. “At night, he goes out for his walk, and he runs away. He goes to this forest, which is actually the only greenery in the suburban enclave. He thinks he’s making a friend, but in fact it was just his imagination—it’s a pile of trash with fireworks in it and the fireworks go off and they clear out what was a forest. And maybe that was all within his mind—it was the poster in the kitchen.”

A simple narrative, perhaps, but it took take an immense amount of work to get it done. In addition to the 12 frames per second needed to make the animations, there was the collaging of the images from old children’s books, to create the frame that the moving creatures would occupy. And the way in which the collages were made, they could be repositioned to resemble something else entirely, once placed in a new context. It’s what makes some of the familiar objects look hyperreal.

“All the familiar suburban landscapes—inside the house, the enclave, the office, the park, the car—I composed from these thousands of sources of children’s book illustrations that I compiled to create this heterotopic space: You’re looking at a boiling pot of pasta but that pasta is also hair.”

“Everything is not what it fully is on the surface,” she added. “Something about being in the state of loneliness, you’re separated from your environment, and it felt true to that state.”

After we chatted, I walked back to the Central Pavilion to catch *Lake Valley* one more time. Inside the room, there was barely a sense of that loneliness; the place was packed. A girl lay on the floor wearing bulbed sunglasses. An older gentleman checked his watch. A young boy took a picture of the screen.

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