



Rachel Rose:
A Minute Ago, 2014,
high-definition
video, approx.
8¾ minutes.
Courtesy Pilar
Corrias, London.

Rachel Rose

by William S. Smith

"IT WAS PERFECT weather a minute ago." This ominous line that gives a title to Rachel Rose's video *A Minute Ago* (2014) comes from its opening scene. The artist appropriated a YouTube video showing the moment when a day of summer leisure on the banks of a Siberian river is suddenly disrupted by a violent hailstorm. As bathers dash for cover, the thoughts of the amateur cameraman narrating the havoc turn to mortality: "If we die, know that I love you." Rose's video suddenly becomes tranquil again as we see Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, Conn., on a beautiful day. Rose superimposed blurred images of the elderly architect giving a tour of the site, taken from a found video, over her own shots of the iconic residence. The celebrated building—where glass-and-steel modernist forms exist in harmony with a verdant setting—harbors a kind of deathly unconscious. Johnson claims he was inspired to build the austere residence after seeing a burned village where nothing remained of many structures but their foundations and chimneys.

Based in New York, 28-year-old Rose has garnered attention recently because her work seems to express widely shared contemporary anxieties about humanity's changing relationship to the natural world on the one hand and advanced technology on the other. The 2014 Taipei Biennial, "The Great Acceleration," featured her film *Sitting Feeding*

Sleeping (2013), an essayistic examination of zoo animals, intelligent robots and life-extending cryonic research—all subjects connected under the artist's concept of "deathfulness." Yet the video's foreboding tone is offset by imagery that conveys the essential pleasure of visual and embodied experience: shots of jellyfish moving through a clear blue ocean, slow-motion images of a peacock wandering through an aviary.

In addition to the extensive catalogue of cinematic references she draws upon—from Italian Neorealism to the work of Chris Marker to the innovative didactic films of Charles and Ray Eames—Rose, who received an MA in art history from London's Courtauld Institute, often makes explicit reference to a longer pictorial tradition. *A Minute Ago* includes extended shots of Poussin's *The Burial of Phocion* (1648), one of the only artworks Johnson kept in the Glass House. In this classicizing painting, the body of a hero falsely accused of treason and thus forced to drink hemlock is carried on a stretcher away from an otherwise peaceful village. It is an image of political violence and death in a pastoral landscape. Rose shot the painting through Johnson's glass walls, emphasizing the play of reflections, shadows and glares. Through her cinematic work, Rose reanimates the still painting, and, I think, casts it as a tragic point of reference for the supposedly new challenges to human existence in the present. ○

COMING SOON
Rose's site-specific
project at Governor's
Island, New York,
on view beginning
this summer.