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Rising star Rachel Rose invites Frieze visitors to take a walk on the wild side

The artist's installation shows how the foxes and mice of Regent's Park experience the fair

by CHARLOTTE BURNS | 14 October 2015



Rachel Rose. Photo: David Owens

Visitors to Frieze London this year can experience the art fair as it might be seen and heard by one of the fish, foxes, mice, newts or robins native to Regent's Park. This portal into the animal kingdom has been created by the New York-based artist Rachel Rose, the recipient of this year's Frieze Artist Award. Together with the sensory ecologist Martin Stevens, Rose has worked with a sound engineer and a lighting designer to create a scaled-down version of the Frieze tent within the main tent. "The sound is filtered through the frequency within the sound spectrum that an animal, such as a mouse, has access to. Same for the light," Rose says. "The result is that you hear and see as a mouse might. It's an attempt to enter into another being's way of perceiving."

As with much of Rose's work, the piece is about human limitations and our complicated relationships with the wider world. "If our bodies were designed differently, we would have access to a whole other range of frequencies," the artist says. "Humans exist within the limits of their spectrum, and Frieze, a fair within a park, felt like a representation of that. It's in a place where all these other beings see and feel totally differently to how we do."

So, for example, because foxes see strongly in blues and greens, those colours are more vibrant. Sounds that might be heard in and around the fair, such as a Justin Bieber song, are filtered or specially re-recorded. "A newt hears with its bones, the way sound exists in outer space, whereas a robin hears almost just like we do," Rose says. "It's fascinating to hear how another being hears."

Hans Ulrich Obrist, the co-director of London's Serpentine Gallery and a member of the selection committee for the Frieze Artist Award, calls Rose "one of the great artists of her generation". The Serpentine's Sackler Gallery is hosting the artist's first solo show in London (Rachel Rose: Palisades, until 8 November), in which she interweaves two videos, Palisades in Palisades and A Minute Ago, to create an immersive installation.

The former is a nine-minute video set in the Palisades Interstate Park on the western shore of the Hudson River in New Jersey. It mainly switches between footage of Rose's friend in the park and shots of an oil painting of the Revolutionary War, parts of which took place there. Rose overlays details to merge the site's different histories; for example, a forensic shot of the pores on the girl's face merges into an extreme close-up of dimples in the canvas of the painting.

Rose plays with surfaces, hinting at their mutability (we see a shot of a stone that has presumably seen it all, though will not tell) and the ways in which appearances are vulnerable to manipulation (a bullet enters an animal's hide and the camera follows its trajectory through what seems to be viscous body matter but turns out to be an orange plastic bag).

Catastrophic nature

A Minute Ago focuses on two pieces of footage: a YouTube video of holidaymakers escaping a freak hailstorm on a Siberian beach and a tour of Philip Johnson's Glass House in Connecticut, given by the architect a few years before he died.

The work focuses on man's defencelessness in the face of catastrophic nature (the Glass House ultimately disintegrates into exploding pixels). The palpable sense of dread is underscored by a recording of Pink Floyd's 1971 concert at the ancient Roman amphitheatre in Pompeii, in which the band famously played a live set with no audience present—a concert to the dead.

Rose has "wrapped one film around another film" for her installation at the Serpentine by isolating

sounds from the work, such as birds squawking, and rooting them in different speakers around the gallery. “While you’re watching *A Minute Ago*, you’ll hear what sounds like the outside—but it’s actually the inside—of Palisades in Palisades,” she says. “I’m using this installation to reflect on the meaning of both works and to look at the thresholds between inside and outside.”

She says that each project is a “container for a certain amount of experimentation”. This room for manoeuvre appeals to Rose, who initially trained as a painter (she also gained an MA in history of art from London’s Courtauld Institute of Art). “I am so grateful for these opportunities to show work and not just be painting. It’s such an expansive way to work, when you think of the exhibition itself as a work,” she says.

Rose is taking a new twist on the limits of human perception for her forthcoming show at New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art, her first solo show in a US institution and one of the debut exhibitions in the museum’s new emerging artist programme (*Rachel Rose: Everything and More*, 30 October-7 February 2016).

She has made a new video based on interviews with the Nasa astronaut David Wolf about his time aboard the Mir Space Station in the late 1990s. Rose focuses on Wolf’s “walk in outer space, away from the space station and over Earth. He was close enough to Earth that he couldn’t see the edges—he was right up against it and the Atlantic. It produced for him a sense that Earth didn’t exist, because all he could see was blackness and a few stars.” Rose’s fixation with the limits of her own body, and her sense of uneasy detachment, found a parallel in Wolf’s story.

Floating in space

Overlaying Wolf’s narrative with visual and aural footage, Rose aims to create a sense of a human floating in space (“this thing released from humanness, but still human”, she says). The work will be projected on to a glass window in the Whitney’s fifth-floor galleries. “I wanted the projection to be in relation with the sun—this projected light which comes towards us, but which is the same light that makes clear that we are in a larger system,” she says. “For much of the video, you’ll just be watching, but when the light within the video gets really dark, the projector will end up revealing what’s outside the video, so you oscillate between a virtual space and a very real and grounded space,” she says.

“I hope it works. Honestly, I have no idea. I try to take a feeling that won’t leave the back of my mind and use making a work as a way to figure out what that feeling is, and to locate it in time by rooting it in sites—real places like Regent’s Park, the Glass House, the Serpentine or the Whitney. I always try to start with a truthful feeling I am having about something, which is often unease,” she says. “Maybe it’s because I am an anxious person. I have unease about being alive,” she says, bursting into peals of laughter.

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