

# VAULT™

Australasian Art & Culture



AUS \$24.95 NZ \$29.95  
ISSN 2208-3057 3 9  
9 4772208 305706

10 YEARS OF VAULT · AUGUST to OCTOBER 2021

Patrick Dagg, Rineke Dijkstra, eX de Medici, Marco Fusinato, George Gittoes, Gordon Hookey, Emily Karaka, Catherine Martin, David McDiarmid, Julie Rrap, Rachel Rose, Gail Sorronda, Angela Valamanesh, Walter Van Beirendonck & more

# RACHEL ROSE

# DIGITAL ALCHEMY



For more than a decade, New York-based artist Rachel Rose's hallucinatory films have inspired an overtly embodied reaction in her audience. Emma O'Neill talks to the artist about her work, which draws on everything from art history to space exploration and early capitalist structures.

FEATURE *by* EMMA O'NEILL



For Rachel Rose, doubt is a generative force. “I always have profound doubts about making art. I wish I didn’t, and I envy friends that don’t,” she tells me. Since threatening to abandon art completely during her MFA in 2012, Rose says that doubt emboldened her to turn from abstract painting to the plurality of digital mediums. This sustained uncertainty has also created a practice that, a decade later, is still driven by the pursuit of discovery instead of mastery. “The crisis never really ended, for me,” says Rose. “[Now] rather than think of my doubt as an unruly shadow self that I carry on my back, I use it to try new things with greater confidence. If I’m going to be here doing this, I might as well accept the humility of making art in the larger world context and do the best I can.”

Doubt is also an inescapable part of contemplating the expansive subject matter of Rose’s work: being, consciousness, infinity, time, death. Through immersive installations of sound, video, installation, painting and sculpture, the artist investigates potentially sentimental themes to achieve an emotional register that eschews portentousness. The soundtrack of her 2015 breakout work *Everything*

and *More*, for example, includes the wordless vocals of Aretha Franklin, electronic dance music and the astronaut David Wolf recounting his 1997 visit to space. In his interview with Rose, Wolf describes the infinite darkness of space and the perceptual reality of returning to Earth: the immense weight of a wristwatch, the obscenity of smells he had become accustomed to living without. This audio is sutured with footage of a neutral-buoyancy lab where astronauts learn to walk, and a shimmering swirl of liquid. The resulting 11-minute video mines the sublimity of nothingness, inviting viewers to oscillate between the hyperreal and the heady lull that happens between wakefulness and sleep.

Debuted at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2015, *Everything and More* set the tone for Rose’s career with a ripple of critical praise from *The New York Times*, *Artforum* and *The New Yorker*, as well as the preeminent curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. In its execution and installation, the exhibition revealed Rose’s talent for affecting embodied reactions in her audience.

So too did the *Palisades*, staged that same year for Rose’s inaugural London solo in the Sackler Gallery at the Serpentine. The exhibition comprised two works:

Top, left to right  
Installation view  
RACHEL ROSE  
*Palisades*, 2015  
Serpentine Sackler  
Gallery, London  
Photo: © readsreads.info

RACHEL ROSE  
*Palisades* (still), 2014  
HD video, 9 mins 31 secs.

RACHEL ROSE  
*Palisades* (still), 2014  
HD video, 9 mins 31 secs.

Courtesy the artist and  
Pilar Corrias, London

Bottom and page 33  
all images,  
Installation view  
RACHEL ROSE  
*Enclosure*, 2022  
Pilar Corrias Eastcastle  
Street and Pilar Corrias  
Savile Row, London  
Photo: Andrea Rossetti

Page 30-31  
RACHEL ROSE  
*Colore* (1779), 2022  
Iridescence and color  
pigment, metallic powders,  
color photograph of  
JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY,  
*Virgil’s Tomb by Moonlight,  
with Silius Italicus*, ca. 1779  
128.1 x 154 x 3.5 cm

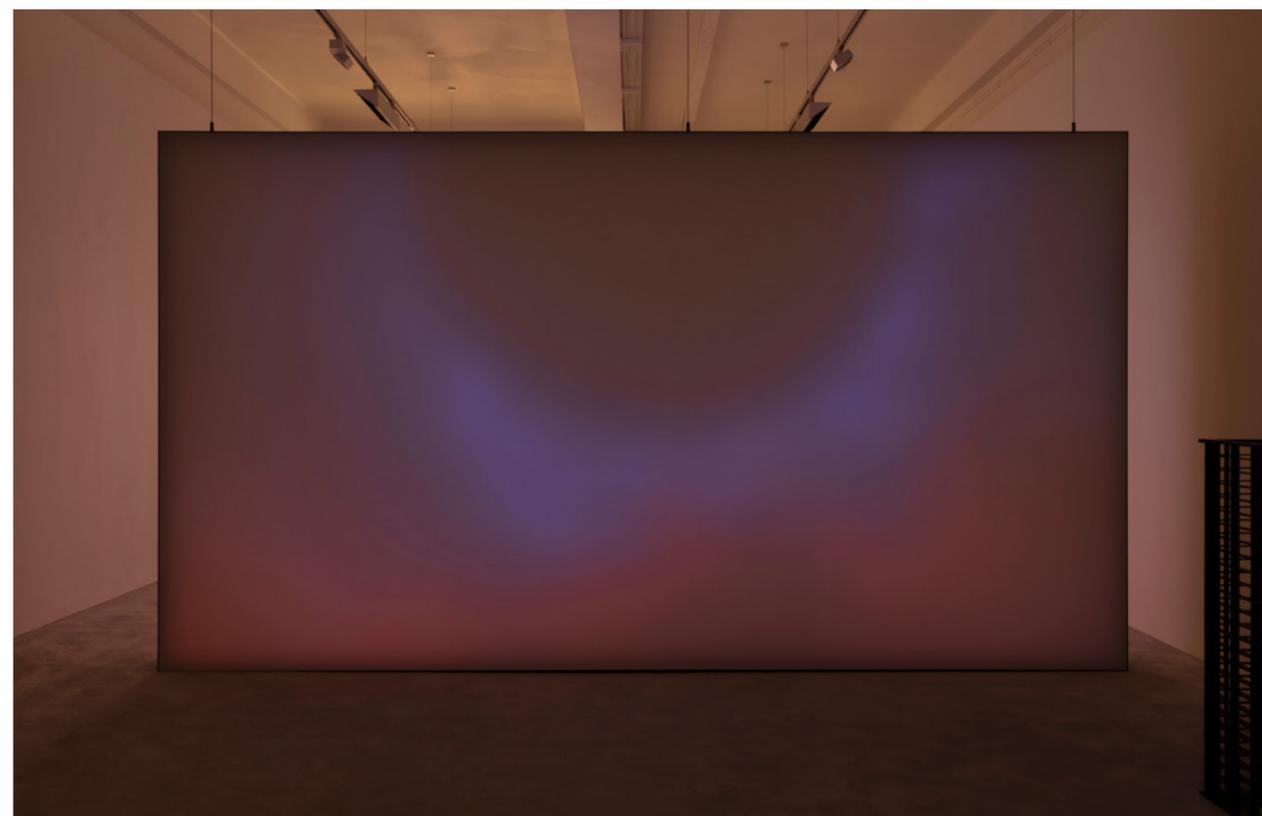
Courtesy the artist and  
Pilar Corrias, London



*Palisades in Palisades* and *A Minute Ago* (both 2014). The latter emerged from a moment in which a sudden gust of wind entered the threshold of a coffee shop, bringing the outside forces of nature inside and alarming the patrons. It begins with a sudden hailstorm on a quiet beach in which half-naked swimmers run for cover to the tune of Pink Floyd’s ‘Echoes’. The scene cuts to a tour of Philip Johnson’s iconic Modernist Glass House guided by the late architect himself, eerily rotoscoped from an old VHS. The iconic building is suddenly bombarded with hailstones; cheers roar out from the live audience of ‘Echoes’; “It was a [sic] perfect weather a minute ago,” a subtitle reads; the house explodes into pixels.

Equally disorientating, *Palisades in Palisades* shares its namesake with the work’s setting of Palisades Interstate Park in New Jersey. Erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the park presents a thin veil of social history set amidst an ancient rock formation. Rose collapses time using a remote-control camera rig to swoop from panoramic landscapes to extreme close-ups of park-goers’ clothing. A trompe-l’œil form of digital editing fuses video footage and historical illustration. A painting of a deer, for example, zooms in to reveal a bullet lurching into a body; a view inside the animal’s stomach becomes a strewn plastic bag. Temporal disorientation is amplified by a soundtrack of tonal whirring and the lilt of Nancy Sinatra. Despite the mélange of source material, Rose’s technical prowess renders the found and created footage indistinguishable.

Above all, the artist embraces the pleasure of the process for its own sake. New production and postproduction





Top to bottom  
 RACHEL ROSE  
*Colore (1794), 2022*  
 iridescence and color  
 pigment, metallic powders,  
 color photograph of  
 JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY,  
*Landscape with a  
 Rainbow, ca. 1794*  
 95.2 x 125.3 cm

RACHEL ROSE  
*Colore (1820), 2022*  
 iridescence and color  
 pigment, metallic powders,  
 color photograph of  
 JOHN CONSTABLE,  
*Dedham Lock, ca. 1820*  
 60 x 76.2 x 2.5 cm  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 Pilar Corrias, London



*“Rather than think of my  
 doubt as an unruly shadow  
 self that I carry on my back,  
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 with greater confidence.  
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 the humility of making art  
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technologies, including different cameras, lenses and software, are adopted to resonate with the conceptual and formal elements of whatever subject she is engaging with. At times, however, her solutions are surprisingly low-tech. The swirl of liquid in *Everything and More* comprises olive oil, baby oil, milk and food dyes filmed close up. More recently, a painterly gesture of Vaseline on a camera lens blurred the imagery and colour of an otherwise pared-back set for a SS22 Prada campaign.

With her extensive development process – her works involve interviews with specialists as well as site visits across the US, ranging from robotics facilities to zoos, cryogenics labs, museums and architectural monuments – Rose can no longer sustain her earlier production time of one year for each work. The demands

of a full exhibition schedule and a young family have changed the pace at which she produces. “I used to be entirely focused on one thing and one thing only, in this very concentrated and minimal kind of way. Everything went into a single container,” she explains. “That’s certainly changed as I’ve gotten older and have different kinds of limits on my reality.”

Even with less time available for making, recent works have extended into longer-form, more narrative films such as *Enclosure* (2019). Set in fictionalised rural 17<sup>th</sup> century England, the work is centred on the enclosure movement, a precursor to today’s capitalism, which saw the mass privatisation of land, necessitated wage labour and deepened class-divide. In the 30-minute narrative film, the protagonist is both a villainous agent of privatisation and an alchemist. In addition to a book about the making process of *Enclosure*, the artist is currently developing a sci-fi feature film.

Motherhood has further elevated the frequency at which Rose operates day-to-day. “I never expected that it would open up this kind of sensual feedback loop within daily life,” she tells me. When we speak, she is working on a suite of paintings that draw from the *Madonna and Child* paintings of Flemish Renaissance painter Joachim Patinir (c. 1480 – October 5, 1524). “I have been thinking about the borderless, psychedelic and emotionally complex landscape between me and my two children.” Forthcoming works also reflect on “the ambivalence and depression and ecstasy that happens” as one body becomes two.

In conversation and in art, Rose toggles between history, everyday moments, existential questions and the state of the world. She draws parallels between her making process and her new preoccupation with cooking, describing how the addition of a single “surreal” spice can transform the chemistry of basic ingredients. Acutely attuned to the sensitivities of her audience, “Rachel is about mixed realities,” Obrist says. “She thinks AI, she thinks augmented reality, she thinks VR; she’s analogue, she’s digital.” A digital alchemist, Rose melts together disparate ideas, imagery and sound to create filmic tapestries that are sensual, disturbing and poetic in equal measure. **V**

Rachel Rose is represented by Pilar Corrias, London.  
 Rachel Rose will have her first solo show in Belgium at Kabinet Cultuurcentrum Strombeek, Grimbergen, Belgium from October 14 to December 14, 2022.  
[ccstrombeek.be](http://ccstrombeek.be)  
[pilarcorrias.com](http://pilarcorrias.com)

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*Colore (1820), 2022*  
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