

Rachel Rose  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
99 Gansevoort Street  
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Rachel Rose, still from *Everything and More*, 2015, HD video, color, sound, 11 minutes 33 seconds

Amidst the budget cuts and publicity disasters of NASA's recent years, we have also seen a resurgence of interest in space exploration at the box office. Major studio releases like *Gravity* and *The Martian* take as their subjects the physics of space and the ingenuity of its travelers, rather than the more familiar distant future fictions or threats and thrills of alien agents. There is an apparent investment in the accessibility of space in our time, perhaps for some as a theoretical escape route and for others as a fantasy of perfect conflict: a place where the violence is absolute and unsullied by doctrine or demagoguery. Tellingly, the preceding descriptor *outer* has fallen into colloquial disuse, creating an unspoken assurance of continuity between our world and the rest.

*Everything and More*, Rachel Rose's latest video, is currently installed in the 5th floor Kaufman Gallery at the Whitney Museum of American Art, projected onto a semi-transparent scrim in front of a wall of windows, themselves tinted to a shade borrowed from a few hours into the future. When the video goes dark enough, we are paradoxically brought back into the room, able to see the cropped tops of Manhattan's West Village beyond an outsized Frank Stella gloss-and-matte jumping jack on the balcony. The shifts in focus from the video pane to the beyond and back are always subtle, lifting and landing the viewer gently among reminders of the room, skyline views, vast depths, great heights, thick crowds, stark distance, all with the light touch of assured control.

Throughout the video, Rose approximates space with a science fair melange of oils, milks, and dyes, home-brewed in her New York studio and photographed in deliciously high definition under glass. The use of vivid colors avoids the obvious space sights and ensures the concoctions coalesce just as often into a bloodstream or a brainscan. The effect is convincing, a trade of the miniature for the maximal: the universe as seen in your morning coffee.

"When I first came back to Earth after 128 days in space, I thought I had ruined my life," reports astronaut David Wolf, previously in orbit on the Mir Space Station. In excerpts from phone interviews

with Rose, Wolf describes his return to Earth as it were an alien planet. He is overpowered by its gravity. His wristwatch “feels like a bowling ball.” His ears are suddenly too heavy for his head. “It must be like a dog feels,” he says, of the heightened sense of smell that accompanies his prostration. Wolf’s testimony is not always entirely audible against throbbing bass tones, velcro-peel cheers, Aretha Franklin’s manipulated warm-up vamping, seabird squawks, and all other manner of near-and-far exotica Rose weaves into the soundtrack. At times, her wandering camera-body can seem to lose interest only to regain it in a sudden change of surroundings, plunging into water, submerging the narration in a gurgling high-pass filter.

Traversing the depths of a neutral buoyancy pool (intended to simulate the feeling of space for astronauts-in-training,) we see a landing vessel named Euclid through scuba bubbles. The fluorescent lighting array on the vaulted ceiling of the facility is distorted once through the water’s surface and again through a digital mirroring effect. In bursting tendril-brushstrokes, this image gives way to the purposeful, programmed disorientations of a dance music festival, strobing in colored light. The euphoric congregation raises arms in unison as their demands are met: a performer bounds onto a stage off of which he (a hologram?) will later levitate. A black and white geometric abstraction kaleidoscopes like stadium lights at the edge of a quarterback’s consciousness.

Several versions of rippling portal animation bring us back to the training facility. The frame becomes increasingly fractured, shattered, streaked with artifacts of interruptions. As we near a spacesuit/wetsuit hung near the water’s edge, these distortions accumulate to a sense of a border. As if privy to the margins of an incomplete 3-D model, we seem to occupy an angle unaccounted for by the designer. Moments like this are common to Rose’s small body of work. In *A Minute Ago* (2014), occupants of Philip Johnson’s Glass House are rendered as if through a fogged shower door, the ostensible object of interest somehow always falling out of focus. In *Palisades in Palisades* (2014), Rose deploys artificial glare spots to various effect: as facial redactions, as reminders of the surface beneath, as the light created by a cannon blast. Editorial interventions appear first as error and then as correction, building to a critical mass of manipulation in which the image might assume properties usually reserved for objects. With a background in art history and abstract painting, Rose seems predisposed to the urgencies of a process which stretches, thins, and even breaks the ground onto which it is applied.

This installation, Rose’s first solo exhibition in the United States, arrives on a cloud of artworld ardor. She is the recent recipient of excellent press, impressive awards, and enthusiastic supporters. In the same breath that I add to her adoring chorus, I should also mention the disadvantages of all this attention. Certain of her commendations seem at pains to justify the express ascension of a 28-year-old with only four short videos to her name. Curator Christopher Y. Lew’s exhibition essay adds emphasis to the “long periods of research” which precede her videos, assigns superlatives for going “as far as studying how the light interacts with the space,” and somehow compares her mylar window shades to John Cage’s prepared piano works. Even if this sort of aggrandizement passes for appropriate or obligatory in institutional circles, the overstatement of the practical or theoretical dimensions of a work is a disservice to both the artist and her audience, serving to push comprehension away from those to whom it might have come readily, sequestering the palpable behind the perplexing. As if to illustrate the havoc undue verbiage can wreak, at least two reviewers have been led to believe that Rose utilized “an astronomical instrument” to edit audio for this piece. It seems they are referring to the waveform visualizations of Ableton, a widely-used prosumer software program.

Thankfully, one is not likely to begrudge Rose any of this while viewing the work, which impressively outpaces its hype, lucidly deploying distinct, disparate elements, found and made, to

create a vast catalogue of inference and association in a brisk 11 ½ minutes. The result is solid enough to maintain relative focus, but porous enough to accommodate expansive interpretation. It is clearly *about* space, for instance, but the recurrent use of wordless audio samples from a 1972 Aretha Franklin performance may reference the abstractions of another sort of blackness, as well. More could be said, too, on the representation of the masses in the concert footage, the way images of entertainment have begun to resemble images of resistance and emergency (or who might be cribbing what from whom.) These avenues are intrinsic to the work, well evidenced but entirely optional. This same video might be right at home in the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum, an engaging document of manned space travel with pleasant, viscous illustrations of the view.

Just before what I take to be the loop point, a sudden flash of white screen, Rose's liquid measurements begin to look finally and strikingly like a swirling starry night into which telltale bubbles and breaks begin to appear. We hear what must be the voice of the artist just once: a resonant "Mmm" after Wolf describes the Earth as another spacecraft, one looking like a jewel.

— *Maxwell Paparella*