

Rosalind Nashashibi makes quiet, deliberate films that luxuriate in formal nuance and incidental details of the everyday. She works with raw frames of reality, as the happenings of life proceed before her camera in long, static takes. In this way she uses film quite literally as a recording device, but she never lets us escape the mediation of the artist's eye. Even as action unfolds completely naturally, Nashashibi's films are unabashedly framed, revealing themselves as the studied compositions of visual fabrication that they are. As she has said, "All of these things I have filmed go through my filter on the world, and they are very stubbornly from my point of view, look at it like this, from here, collaborate with me on that. That's the position: to get the viewer to collaborate with me on a particular way of seeing things."

Nashashibi shoots on 16mm, homing her sights on both interaction and environment in such a way that the inanimate is as much a subject of her films as are the people who appear. Her work *Eyeballling* (2005), for example, frames details of the built environment that resolve as the most basic suggestion of a human face: two buzzers arrayed above an intercom speaker, or two nail holes and a knot in a worn wooden floor. The images of abstracted faces are intercut with passages observing police outside a precinct station in lower Manhattan, subtly implicating issues of voyeurism and surveillance that are at the core of any observational film and our experience of it. At the other spectrum of Nashashibi's filmography, *Hreash House* (2004) is overtly narrative. In it she intimately records the daily life of a family in Nazareth, Israel. In the midst of an external reality of conflict, the internal reality of the family still relies on the performance of mundane rituals, and life goes on in spite of, or perhaps in defiance of, the larger political reality. Although the world as we know it is her frequent subject, Nashashibi's intent is not purely documentary—she isolates aspects of reality as a means to implicate the formal within the narrative, so her films are equally poetic and descriptive, allusive and associative.

Bachelor Machines Part I (2007) chronicles the voyage of the cargo vessel *Gran Bretagna* as it ventures from Italy to Sweden. Following the captain and crew as they go about their business, Nashashibi largely uses images, not words, to tell the story. The men talk sometimes, but not always in English, so we settle in to the task of intuiting emotion, motivation, and social relation through facial expressions and bodily cues. The men on ship form a closed company of subjects, made into "bachelors" through their isolation as a forced single-sex community for the three months of their confinement on this nautical machine. In their gendered segregation, the men carry on what the artist describes as an "interesting exaggeration of tendencies," while unifying stereotypical male and female labor on board. Because we witness their interactions in recreational and work contexts with the fixed detachment of an embedded participant-observer, it is easy to apply an anthropological scrutiny to their behavior. There are coded class and racial distinctions at play, rituals of



socialization to witness, but we come to realize that Nashashibi doesn't want us to see them as a lost tribe, nor does she give us enough detail to know them. So they remain emblematic of a certain kind of men, tied through the history of seafaring to the adventurers and explorers who have set out into the unknown.

With equal intensity, Nashashibi spies the ocean and the vessel itself. The framing of the oceanscape, bobbing with the rhythm of the waves through a porthole, transports us to the ship's deck, and we are distinctly apart from the world. The film's title evokes the ship's solitary condition—in mechanical terms a bachelor machine, once set in motion, continues its machinations unaided, in perpetual isolation, much like the ship as it sails its own course for months at a time. It is implicated as a protagonist, less a tool in the service of men than an entity that they must care for by oiling, cleaning, and adjusting its body. Surrounded by a vast horizon of nothingness, but containing us in a confined space, the ship has its own reality, its own time.

The film's measured pacing transposes this decelerated time into our reality; it condenses time in its duration, but protracts time in its effect. The image of the ocean is itself timeless, an eternity of shifting waves that have appeared the same since antediluvian times. Our collective fascination with the sea translates to a fascination with the eternal and the unknowable, and with her longing, lambent portrayal of the oceanscape, Nashashibi intentionally evokes this mythology of seafaring as it appears in literature, art, and film. She also exploits the filmic medium and ambient conditions to employ the romantic symbolism of light itself. In slow takes



she returns again and again to illumination in the form of the sun, or a blinking instrument panel, or a floodlight reflected in the slick surface of a rainy deck. But this engagement with eighteenth-century notions of the sublime, where elemental forces were viewed allegorically as emblems of turbulent and ungovernable human emotions, isn't satisfied by Nashashibi's portrayal of the men who sail the sea. There is a hesitance to romanticize, a desire to visualize the mundane reality of the voyage for what it is—a means of conveying goods from port to port.

And so Nashashibi locates the film distinctly in the present tense, the *Gran Bretagna* carrying containers of unknown commodities, one cog in the colossal machine of global capitalism. But far from an expected image of accelerated commerce in an ever-shrinking world, *Bachelor Machines Part I* visualizes the real factors of labor, time, and distance and the global patterns of exchange writ small, localized to one ship. Progress implies the speeding up of time, but the reality is that time as understood on the sea has changed little since the eighteenth century. Despite our jet-fueled abstractions of the shrinking global marketplace, most goods still traverse the globe at this pace, on slow, hulking machines. In this way the ship becomes as much a protagonist as the men who sail it or the ocean that carries them all.

Bachelor Machines Part I chronicles a journey—we leave land and sail for thirty minutes before returning to shore—but it serves more as a meditation than a strict narration. As much as a subject, the ship serves as a formal playground for Nashashibi to indulge in explorations of sublime vistas, exploit the inherent properties

of film as a medium of light, and create studied abstractions from the machinery and mechanics of the ship. Still, these formal devices cannot be divorced from the larger context of the narrative passages; on a metaphorical level they support and extend the film's inquiry into the maritime genre—a history of representation of the sea, and the psychological, cultural, romantic, economic, social, and geographic aspects that this association implies.

Elizabeth Thomas
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

Rosalind Nashashibi was born in 1973 and lives and works in London. Her work has been shown in exhibitions internationally, including the Palestine International Film Festival, 3rd Biennial for Video Art, Mecheelen, Belgium; British Art Show 6, Momentum 2006: Nordic Festival of Contemporary Art; the Scottish Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale; and at venues such as Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; ICA, London; Frankfurter Kunstverein; and UCLA Hammer Museum. Solo presentations of her work have been mounted at Tate Britain, London; Art and Industry Biennial, Christchurch, New Zealand; Kunsthalle

Basel; Transmission Gallery, Glasgow; and Chisenhale Gallery, London. Nashashibi received her B.A. in painting from Sheffield Hallam University and her M.F.A. from Glasgow School of Art (with an exchange at California Institute of the Arts). She received a Decibel Art Award in 2006, and in 2003 was the first woman to win the prestigious Beck's Futures Award for young British artists. She has been awarded residencies through the Al-Ma'mal Foundation and the British Council, The Scottish Arts Council, the Office for Contemporary Art in Oslo, and IASPIS in Stockholm.





PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Artist's Talk

Thursday, October 4, 6 p.m.

Reception to follow
Free admission

BAM Galleries
2626 Bancroft Way, Berkeley
Gallery Information (510) 642-0808
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cover caps.....

[1] Rosalind Nashashibi: *Eyeballing*, 2005; 16mm film installation, 10 min.; courtesy of Harris Lieberman, New York and doggerfisher, Glasgow.

[2] Rosalind Nashashibi: *Hreash House*, 2004; 16mm film transferred to dvd, 20 min.; courtesy of Harris Lieberman, New York and doggerfisher, Glasgow.

[3,5,6] Rosalind Nashashibi: *Bachelor Machines Part 1*, 2007; 16mm film installation, 31 min.; courtesy of Harris Lieberman, New York, and doggerfisher, Glasgow. Photo: Antonio Olmos. "AO"

[4] Rosalind Nashashibi: *Bachelor Machines Part 1*, 2007; 16mm film installation, 31 min.; courtesy of Harris Lieberman, New York, and doggerfisher, Glasgow. Photo: Polly Braden. "PB"

Bachelor Machines Part I was originally commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London and Picture This, Bristol.

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Rosalind Nashashibi
Bachelor Machines Part I

