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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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Rosalind Nashashibi

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Organized jointly by the ICA and the Bergen Kunsthall in Norway, this first major survey of Rosalind Nashashibi's reflexive cinematic investigations into visual gestalts, surveillance systems, and perceptual memory included five 16-mm films and two photographic projects. In *Rehearsal*, 2009, greeted visitors first, a photographic installation of ninety-six medium-size shots of an opera rehearsal in Berlin, their unspectacular documentary views capturing the actors' transformation into fictional roles. Serving as an apt analogue for Nashashibi's practice, the piece stages representation as a performative act of becoming—an act that, as it deliberately frames and thereby constructs visual reality, is never presumed to be innocent.

In *Rehearsal* prepared visitors well for the powerful second room, which contained an enclosed chamber at its center projecting three interlinked films on opposing walls. Ten minutes in length, *Eyeballing*, 2005, juxtaposes documentary footage of New York policemen standing around outside their TriBeCa precinct house with fixed-frame close-ups of architectural details in which the camera discovers bizarre schematic "faces." (Nashashibi employs a similar device in four prints from the photographic series "Abbeys," 2006.) The relation between the two registers of *Eyeballing* remains indeterminate but suggestive. The work gestures toward a critical exploration of police perception, whereby any random collection of visual data can be construed as a recognizable sign, a potentially paranoid vision that endlessly detects phantoms hidden in the city's fabric. The nearby *Bachelor Machines Part 2*, 2007, integrates blurred excerpts from *Eyeballing*, pairing them with shots of a nude woman on a couch—borrowed from Alexander Kluge's 1968 film *Artists Under the Big Top: Perplexed*—and black-and-white footage of the artist Thomas Bayrle and his wife, Helke. As the Bayrles are shown loosely reenacting the Kluge scene, which concerns the protagonist Leni's quest for advice from an older confidant as she seeks to re-create the circus run by her late father, the film comes to articulate Nashashibi's own gradual identification with the Bayrles as adoptive "artist-parents." Overlying these cross-references is a rambling, fragmented voice-over in which Bayrle relays his experiences of attending church, abruptly concluding with an allusion to an

Rosalind Nashashibi,
Jack Straw's Castle,
2009, color film in
16 mm, 17 minutes.



unspecified catastrophe. A third film, *Footnote*, 2008, shows Helke reading in bed and Thomas sleeping in the blurred background. When she lowers her eyes to a page of her book as if looking at a footnote, the one-minute-long looping film cuts to a shot of a garden sculpture of a

frog, which appears alternately in naturalistic and artificially colored tones. The film's inexplicable opacity appears to be the point: Nashashibi's cinema of nonidentification and perceptual indeterminacy defies the controlling (masculine) inspection of the police as presented in *Eyeballing*.

Upstairs was a new film, *Jack Straw's Castle*, 2009, shot in a wooded area known to be a cruising ground in London's Hampstead Heath. Voyeuristic and fleeting shots of solitary men gradually give way to footage of people building a stage set in the park, as if the artist's awkward intrusion into an all-male environment were being bizarrely theatricalized, the tables on her voyeurism turned. Most powerful, however, was *The Prisoner*, 2008, presented next door—a double 16-mm film showing a woman (the artist Anna Gaskell) walking briskly through the Brutalist architecture of London's South Bank in black tights and stilettos. Her staccato footsteps on concrete counterpoint a suspenseful excerpt from Sergey Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead* (1909)—the same music used in Chantal Akerman's film *The Captive*, 2000. With its single reel looping through two projectors simultaneously, the film is shown doubled, the second projection with a six-second delay. In the inevitable perceptual differences engendered by the repetition, Nashashibi seems to perpetually reinvent the singularity of cinematic looking.

—T. J. Demos