

On *Kinetics in Blue*

I.

The protagonist of Atoosa Pour Hosseini's 'Kinetics in Blue' appears as a hybrid creature - part woman, part bird of prey - who roams the edges of the Blasket islands in a state of disorientation, as if plucked from her natural, mythological habitat and cruelly placed in unfamiliar territory. Pour Hosseini is interested in examining what she describes as 'the effects and side effects of immigration and displacement' but the narrative of alienation and alteration that weaves its way through the trilogy of 16mm films that feature in this exhibition is not overt or unambiguous in its significance. Central to this body of work in both form and concept is the prevalent use of superimposition, a device through which one image is placed over another which remains visible underneath. A powerful visual metaphor for the idea of split selves, Pour Hosseini repeatedly layers her protagonist over another version of herself, offering up two identical figures who exist simultaneously on separate planes. This effect is mirrored in the way the films' sound, composed by Karen Power, operates at a remove from the footage we see projected and on screen; while this strange and lonely figure explores the unoccupied island, we hear the sounds of high heeled footsteps, a distant train siren and the single sustained note of an engaged line or a lost signal, acute suggestions of channels of communications that are out of reach or permanently disconnected. A sense of detachment is perhaps heightened by the wordlessness of the environments evoked in Pour Hosseini's films, a feature that compounds a valid assumption that she is interested in a primeval world, one not beyond language but before it. This gesture towards the primeval (the sound of which spuriously ushers in an implication of malevolence) draws a connection with the Super 8 films of Derek Jarman, perhaps most clearly with the yellow-filtered *A Journey to Avebury* (1971) but also with his other more ritualist titles from this early period including *In the Shadow of the Sun* (1972) and *Sulphur* (1973) in which solitary, often masked figures carry out intuitive, pseudo-spiritual performances. Nowhere is Jarman more apparent however than in Pour Hosseini's choice of palette which is dominated by a pristine blue that recalls the shade used by the English director as the only visual component of his twelfth and final film, made and released just months before his death in early 1994. The narrator of Jarman's *Blue* (1993) describes how the colour 'transcends the solemn geography of human limits' and it is precisely this endeavour that preoccupies Pour Hosseini across her work as an artist and filmmaker. Pour Hosseini maintains a firm grasp of the integrity and distinction of her own practice throughout, offering up haunting guises of the same character that prompt us to wonder where revelation begins and aberration prevails.

- Alice Butler

II.

In *Superimposed Kinetics*, one of the three variants featured in Atoosa Pour Hosseini's most recent exhibition we are met first with overlapping images of landscapes shot on 16mm film off the West coast of Ireland. These images of land and sea evoke a tradition of landscape films that extends to works by artists such as Derek Jarman, Sharon Lockhart, and Rose Lowder. This set of film works represents Atoosa's first foray into shooting on 16mm and the works included here evoke a small catalogue of films each rooted in the particulars of a given landscape from Derek Jarman's *Journey to Avebury* from 1971 (that early work was shot on Super 8, a medium Atoosa also worked with extensively before her recent shift to 16), Sharon Lockhart's account of a single female clam digger at work in *Double Tide* (2009) and Rose Lowder's *Bouquets* series (1994-95). Each of those films had a particular set of rhythms- from Jarman's constantly shifting travelogue in which he manipulates time and texture by shooting at different speed settings, or Lowder's minute long studies with their constantly flickering images of gardens and

flowers, to the beautifully elongated and breathtakingly slow fixed frame long takes of Sharon Lockhart. In *Superimposed Kinetics* we begin on land, looking out at images of sky and sea, the pink hues of a rising sun colliding with the discolorations particular to 16mm processes. This landscape will eventually be interrupted by a human presence however, a presence that comes into focus over the course of the three films that are central to this exhibition, along with a series of Polaroids and a number of sculptural interventions. This figure evokes something else entirely however, something outside the traditions of landscape films. In doing so Atoosa brings the landscape film into conversation with a cinematic folk horror tradition most typically invoked through films like Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973) or Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968). This cinematic subgenre is typically thought of as a particularly British phenomena but the environments we encounter through Atoosa's films are recognisable as belonging to a group of islands off Ireland's Atlantic coast. When the genre was in its heyday in the 1960s and '70s Ireland barely had any film industry to speak, never mind catering to a genre as specific as 'folk horror'. Atoosa makes us wonder here about what an Irish cinematic folk horror tradition might have looked like and the ways it would have been likely to differ from its British counterpart. What is it then that is specific to this particular subgenre, what makes it distinct from the horror film proper? There are for example a particular set of tropes extending from ritualistic behaviour rooted in pagan belief systems to a clash between old worlds and new. First and foremost what seemed to distinguish this tradition is a set of concerns rooted not in plot or incident but in the particulars of a given landscape or environment. This 'landscape-first' approach is ultimately what defines this rural tradition. A recent conference on the subject of folk horror spoke of a "profound and unsettling impact on the imaginative perception of landscape, identity, time and the past".¹ This impact is experienced as a breach, a form of transgression and we encounter something similar here. The relationship with the 'imaginative perception' described above also becomes here a relationship with the imaginative perception of the 'landscape film' itself, interrupted here by the arrival of a masked female figure. Atoosa's *Kinetics in Blue* is a thinking through and about the particulars of a given landscape that never settles on the merely picturesque or idyllic choosing instead to disrupt and interrupt.

- Daniel Fitzpatrick

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¹ Conference notes from 'A Fiend in the Furrows: Perspectives on 'Folk Horror' in Literature, Film and Music', Queen's University Belfast, 19-21 November, 2004.