

Derosia

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# REGARDING 'MT RUSH': AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH ORR

(all images: Mt. Rush, Elizabeth Orr, video still, 2016)

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**Q: Tell us about MT RUSH. How did this piece come to exist, and why?**

**ORR:** One, This question presents a good opportunity to explain the exact dynamic between me and my project MT RUSH. I am working for MT RUSH. Locating the exact time or sequence of how I came to this movie is impossible, in a sense I have no idea how this came to be. But it's been amazing working on this piece and feeling like MT RUSH is not about me, it is outside of me, I am working for this piece.

Two, I know about our chronology.

Our history - a couple of years ago I donated money to advocate for abortion in congress. Since contributing, I have received hundreds of emails from the DCCC begging for funding, demanding I sign a petition or urging me to donate NOW to the Democratic Party. Although I could easily unsubscribe from these emails, I developed a fascination for the audacity of tone, combined with a pleading address - at times oddly personal (i.e. "Obama NEEDS YOU", or a subject line - "WE QUIT... BUT WE DON'T WANT TO QUIT"). In the process of becoming more aware of these marketing strategies, I began to see these mass political emails as a prime example of the current American Political system. Urgent and alarmist terms, guilt-tripping, deceptively personalized, and of course intricately engineered. As part of my research, I began to subscribe to the GOP emails, only to find that a similar strategy is used. The emails began to become a revealing representation of the American political climate. I began scheming of a way to incorporate these emails into a narrative and came to the idea of a solitary figure, a character memorialized in the Great American Outdoors - The National Park Service Ranger - Ann Ranger. Ann Ranger becomes the filter from which to look at these emails, creating a space of interpretation outside of the typical email interface. Where she can look at how alarmist, urgent and, at times, harassing fundraising strategies relate to the current political climate.

**Q: The piece exists as a performance and a film, can you tell us about working in those two different mediums? How do you approach the same theme and structure working live vs. working digitally?**

**ORR:** Part of working on MT RUSH was working with EMPAC (The Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) as an artist-in-residence. As part of the residency I decided to stage a scene of MT RUSH

as a live performance piece/video installation. I was excited to integrate the energy of a live performance into the finished piece. The scene is set in a video installation of four hanging flatscreens, as Ann Ranger accepts an award for "Most Likely to be a Whistleblower of the National Park Service User Experience." In this scene there is the undeniable tension and uncertainty between the live performer, in this case - Ann Ranger and the audience. Creating more fodder for the already awkward but strong character.

I see my role as directing performances for the camera, along with directing the choreography of the camera (incl. in this case animations) with the subject. I enjoy working with actors in my performances and movies who are not necessarily trained. This becomes symptomatic of the term type-casting. With type-casting you are using subjectivity of the performer which could be their identity, behavior, and emotional sensibility, as part in parcel of the character. The character and actor speak to one another, are unified.

**Q: How do you engage with themes of ecology and climate in MT RUSH?**

**ORR:** Questions of ecology and climate are part of MT RUSH, beginning with an inherent critique of the U.S.. While shooting at The Mount Rushmore National Memorial, I realized how much the piece became a study of the memorial itself and the politic of the memorial. I also began to see Mount Rushmore as a powerful land art sculpture, an homage to capitalism.

One example where critique plays a role - in the cinematography I focus on the rock formations which flank the heads, along with the debris that lays beneath the heads- When you imagine Mount Rushmore and the heads of the Presidents- which have been seen a million times before, captured in many different films and images, one has a familiarity of it. Mount Rushmore is a powerful, figurative, land art memorial that is both grounding and grotesque. While there, I was struck by the huge presence of the debris from the mountain. This debris is the rock, the remnants from when the sculptor and team strategically blew up parts of the mountain in order to carefully chip and sculpt the heads. The debris of rocks covers a larger surface area than the heads themselves. As you look at the memorial in person you are actually at eye level with the debris, not the presidents. The debris of the mountain, the action of blowing up the land, lays beneath the heads of the Presidents, creating a direct relation between the colonialism of the America, and in a sense- a turning of heads - from the reality



of that violence towards Native Americans, and the environment. Reflecting the care, precision, violence, and ambition that forms our country and government and the relationship with nature.

**Q: The animations become a character in the film, along with goats, landscapes, and Ann Rangers' sunglasses. Can you talk about the role of the non-human in the work throughout? What shapes Ann Rangers' interactions with the world around them?**

Yes, while MT RUSH is a one woman show, it also has these other characters that you mention. Specifically the emails, which take on the personality of the oddly personal, demanding, aggressive, and soothing tones. The animations of the e-blasts the (NPS UX- National Park User Interface) for Ann become a companion at the onset of the piece, appeasing and creating an outlet for interaction from the solitude of her day-to-day life. While Ann is alone she is not without input from these e-blasts, sexts from women, and nature.

**Q: Why do you make films?**

ORR: I both love being the director and the collaborative element of the process. I love having the opportunity to bring in different artists/performers/technicians into one project. Along with doing art direction, sound, editing video, the whole process, I love it all.

Video as a digital medium has such potential to reach a broad audience. Making single channel digital work has the capacity to be sent off anywhere, and be seen in many different places. I'm really invested in finding venues for this work all over the U.S. and not just in the certain culturally diverse and rich states. While MT RUSH will not be streaming online initially, the internet also takes on video and the reach of subject matter.

**Q: Can you talk about structures of gender in your films, and how you engage with them?**

ORR: Assuming Ann's Ranger is how I think about it. Ann Ranger just assumes her gender in her performance. She doesn't explain it. We assume





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that she is gay, queer, or androgynous- she never explicitly explains anything about it in the movie. She just acts as herself and herself is a gender that exists in the imagination and potentially in the desires of many of us. The lone ranger, a lone dyke female ranger.

It's funny how when one sees most media one assumes it has a heterosexuality. This as an idea is pretty amazing, that a piece of work, a video, a sculpture, an artwork, can have a sexuality. Ann is very queer, she sexts with women. Ann in the script describes herself as "A woman who texts other women." I identify MT RUSH, a movie, as a woman who texts other women.

**Q: Anything else you would like to add?**

**ORR:** MT RUSH premieres the first week of September at the Museum of Art and Design in NYC. I am currently looking for places all of the country to screen the piece before the 2016 Presidential Election. So if you want to screen, email me and we can talk logistics- etilburyorr@gmail.com

*Elizabeth Orr (b. 1984, Los Angeles, CA) is a filmmaker and interdisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Currently she is part of the collaborative group - No Total based at Artists Space Books and Talks, and is working on her first large-scale film Mt Rush. Orr is represented by Bodega gallery in NYC and is the manager of her late father, Light and Space artist- Eric Orr's Estate. She received her B.A. in Liberal Arts at Hampshire College and her M.F.A from Bard College in 2014. Her work has been featured in multiple organizations in the U.S and abroad including Artists Space Books and Talks, New York, Recess, NY, MoMA, NY, If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution, The Netherlands, ICA Philadelphia, PA, Harvard University Carpenter Center, MA, NurtureArt, NYC, and has been commissioned by MOCAtv, LA and the Museum of Art and Design.*

