

The Chase.

Clare Rae

A young woman is pursued by her double across a flat pastoral landscape. The two figures run in a tight circle around the viewer, dusk approaches. The second woman appears to bear an exact likeness to the first; she could be a twin, a doppelganger, or a phantasm. The immediate question this work presents is how we are to read the relationship between these two identical protagonists, who are engaged in what might be a game or a struggle. This problem is further complicated by the knowledge that it is the artist herself depicted in the work, as those familiar with Clare Rae's photographic and video practice will already be aware.

It appears safe to say that Rae's work is not a self-portrait; at least not in the sense that this genre is conventionally understood. Rae photographs herself not as a way of recording something of her personal life at a given moment. The camera is not made to reveal some truth which lies in the features of the face, or the surface of the skin. This is not to say that Rae's work doesn't explore personal experience, in fact quite the opposite is true. Rae's photographs are not really pictures of herself, in the way that a holiday snapshot might pertain to be. Instead her image is employed to construct a character; a kind of meta-person, not entirely dissolved from her 'self', but certainly a protagonist which she plays. Through the use of this character, a persona, a body, somewhat removed from her own; Rae can construct and explore somewhat strange or completely improbable situations. By being removed from the domain of empirical reality, the little explorations or experiments undertaken in her works are infused with an emotional and allegorical significance. Furthermore, the use of this detached character lets the viewer identify fully with her predicament, as we might when we engage with characters in a novel or film. Rae's ideas arise from her own experiences and perceptions, but these are explored through an image of herself which is somewhat distanced. This strategy allows you or I to place ourselves in the picture, and feel for ourselves the anxiety or excitement present in the situation.



Returning to *The Chase*, I would venture to suggest that the second protagonist in this video is not a doppelganger as such; not an intruder which has assumed Rae's form, or a simulacrum. Instead it constitutes a second instance of the self, a fragment or subsidiary, which could be the manifestation of an imagined identity, an anxiety, or a separate part of the psyche. This follower can be evaded, but not escaped, as they are instances which are bound in the same self. She is simultaneously the followed and the follower, unable to approach a simple unity. The third protagonist in the scene, the viewer around which the women must run, acts as the anchor point, a presence which forces them to circle indefinitely. This point functions like a gravitational pull, not unlike the part that gravity plays in Rae's still photographic work. Gravity, as it is literally employed in her photographs (Rae balances on chairs, hangs off the wall) or is alluded to through movement in this video work, could be understood as the medium in which the performative aspect of Rae's work functions. Her body assumes positions to resist or play against this force, and this force constitutes a presence which inhabits the various spaces employed in her works.

Rae's works are generally set in domestic spaces, unremarkable rooms and corners. These frame and situate the body, the photographic image adding a second level of framing. An unusual light or camera angle cause these environments to become foreign, and somewhat oppressive, in comparison to Rae's odd poses. Rae explores them tentatively, like a child might explore unfamiliar surroundings. The paddock in

which *The Chase* takes place is as much a constructed environment as these interior spaces. 'Man-made' is probably the appropriate term. Rae's work picks at the edges of what are highly constructed and heavily loaded spaces, and the cultural codes which accompany them.

It would not be incorrect to say that Rae's work is concerned with the representation of women. But to leave it at this would be too simplistic, perhaps even misleading. This work cannot escape having a significant relationship with the way women have been depicted historically, in art or otherwise, and the way in which feminine identities are constructed through contemporary media. But Rae's work is not primarily concerned with either a direct critique of these conditions, or with the suggestion of what might constitute an alternative feminine identity. The doubled or split depiction of the protagonist in *The Chase* is testament to this. Rae's work is concerned with a politics of identity, but engages with this problem on the level of the individual body in space.

Stephen Palmer
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Gallery Two

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