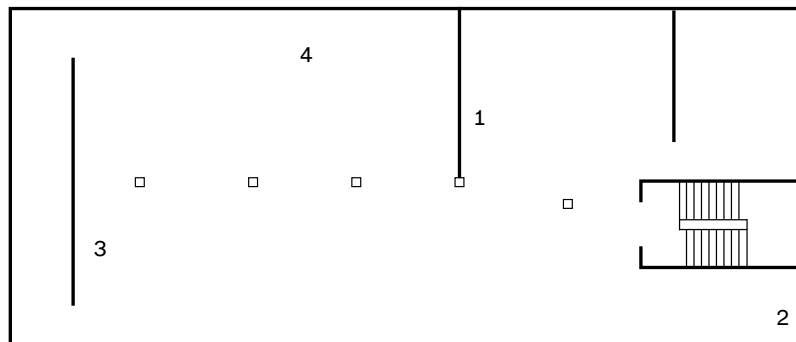


Tension is a central currency in the work of Rachel Reupke. There is a long-running fascination, morbid at times, with the aesthetic and political stakes of minor affects – with frustration, annoyance and paralysis. *Lean in* is the first retrospective of Reupke's work, spanning a period between 2006 until the present. Formulated in two parts, the exhibition focuses on Reupke's practice in the form of a survey of key works, alongside a temporary cinema. The latter with a curated programme featuring Loretta Fahrenholz, Peter Roehr and Owen Land, speaking of the work and its methods through the medium of film itself.

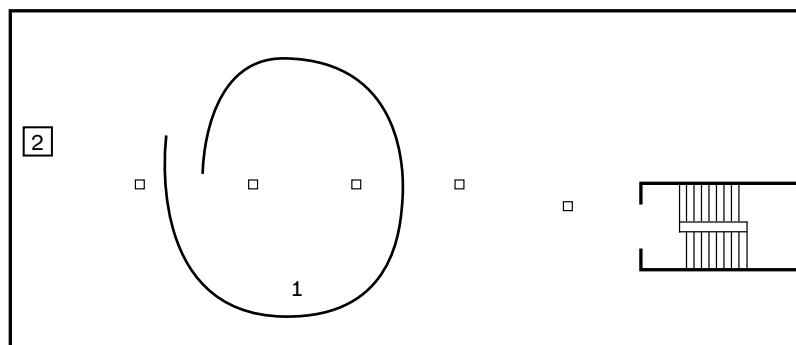
This guide contains an overview of the included works and a conversation with the artist, focusing in on Reupke's ongoing interest in the expressive properties of stock images and the ways in which they respond and transform, when coupled with stillness and awkwardness. It is a process of introducing a level of fragility and ambivalence into images that have been emptied of these properties.

## Level 4



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 <i>Department</i> , 2011, 3 min 30 sec,<br>no sound                                   | 3 <i>Letter of Complaint</i> , 2015,<br>10 min, sound   |
| 2 <i>Containing Matters of no very peaceable<br/>Colour</i> , 2009, 5 min 11 sec, sound | 4 <i>Wine &amp; Spirits</i> , 2013,<br>20 min, no sound |

## Level 2



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Rachel Reupke,<br><i>10 Seconds or Greater</i> , 2009, 15 min<br><br>Loretta Fahrenholz,<br><i>My Throat, My Air</i> , 2013, 17 min<br><br>Owen Land, <i>New Improved Institutional<br/>Quality: In the Environment of Liquids<br/>and Nasals a Parasitic Vowel Sometimes<br/>Develops</i> , 1976, 10 min<br><br>Peter Roehr, <i>Abfluß</i> , 1968, 1 min | This screening programme, selected<br>in conversation between Rachel<br>Reupke and Fatima Hellberg reflects<br>on some of the key strands of <i>Lean in</i><br>through the medium of moving image.<br><br>Running time: 43 min, continuous loop |
| 2 <i>Drops</i> (2006), 1 min 45 sec, no sound   |   |

## An interview with Rachel Reupke, by Fatima Hellberg

FH The image for *Lean in* is a tightly composed scene: the silhouettes of a man and a woman, nearly touching, and surrounded by a carefully placed assortment of props. There is a controlled and taut quality to the image, and yet something about the setup makes it appear ever so slightly 'off'. There is a heavy-handedness to how the image has been retouched – Photoshop smudges, a piggy nose, a subtle awkwardness of scale... What's the significance of this limping control?

RR As with most of my videos, the composition for *Department* came from a found image, a hand-painted advert for a café in Lisbon. Very badly rendered, old and weather beaten, the woman was drawn with an out-of-proportion cartoon profile, while the man looked more or less anatomically correct. The couple were also sitting awkwardly low to their table. What interested me about these imperfections was, firstly, the idea that the woman, a cartoon, is on a date with this man, a human. As if not awkward enough, their chairs were too low for the table – so this supposedly romantic scene, with candles and champagne etc., was made ridiculous, impotent and humiliating.

FH An important source and reference for this and other works are stock images – stereotypical expressions or narrative scenes produced for commercial use. Images that often occupy remarkable registers of genericness. How did this fascination start, and how does the reference to these images, and their production, shape your work?

RR The answer to this question is something to do with control – forcing the footage to do my bidding. Stock images are particularly open to manipulation because they have been designed precisely to be as universal as possible, and to work in a number of contexts. Often illustrating a particular concept rather than a material product, such as 'happiness' or 'stress' for example, they work upon some very common worries to do with money, or health, or status, and in so doing can be remarkably direct, but also sometimes sensitive or tender. I first came across this kind of footage when I was working as a graphic designer. Looking through a stock footage library, there is this very uncanny feeling of watching adverts without a product. Like adverts described in a novel, something fictional.

- FH In *The Gentrification of the Mind*, writer and historian Sarah Schulman speaks of 'rituals of nothingness', of 'an acceptance of banality' and she asks, 'What is this process? This thing that homogenises?' The book is deeply personal, a memoir and a rant, yet there is something about its process, of trying to stay put and remaining with alienation, that makes me think of your work.
- RR I wonder if I am not so much commenting on the alienating effects of this banality, rather that by using these forms, some clichés, others just lacking any distinctive character, I am simplifying or distilling the work down to its essential elements. In this simplified world I present, any subtle aberration, or word or action that doesn't fit, becomes more pronounced. There is always the danger though, that the banality switches the viewer into a mode of acceptance or recognition of a situation (a kind of – 'oh, it's that'), that might actually work against this idea.
- FH One effect of this approach to me appears to be tension, both tension in the viewer and in the image. This question of discord and its containment enters the most recent work in this survey, *Letter of Complaint*. Yet there appears to be an underpinning ambivalence around the status of these feelings and their management. How did this work come about?
- RR I wanted to make a film about resentment, starting with two slightly different ideas. One was inspired by someone I knew, who, it felt to me, always read other people's actions as being somehow an affront; a kind of default position of general resentment and perceived insult. Secondly, a tendency I'd noticed in myself, where, when feeling aggrieved about something at work, for instance, instead of addressing my complaint to someone in a position to correct the problem, I would just bemoan the situation to my peers, who were powerless to help. So, misdirected complaints and resentment was my starting point. But then when I started researching and reading real letters of complaint, I became more interested in these writers as people empowering themselves by taking action, and the work took a more positive direction. So the tension, irritation or ambivalence in the film might partly be a residue from this changing thought process during its making.
- FH Do you think about gender in your work?
- RR Whereas I think male and female roles are quite clearly defined in the work, several times I have switched the gender of the speaker. In *Letter of Complaint*, for example, the letter about equal pay on the riveting job, is actually written by a man, but because the voice-over is female, it takes on this other layer to include a gender equality issue. Likewise, in *Department*, the line 'my father says I have the perfect walk' was actually said to me by a man, but said by a woman it perhaps takes on this slightly strange beauty contest connotation, whereas originally it was more a comment about muscular skeletal perfection.
- FH In the earlier work, landscape is a recurring motif, what's the significance of this, and why did you move away from it.
- RR I was very interested in the use of landscape as a protagonist or other character in cinema. Scenes like the Mount Rushmore chase scene in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), or even the scenes of ancient Rome, digitally rendered, in *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000), were a reference for me. I saw a landscape as being able to describe an era or an economy in one view – the landscape bearing all the signs of the age in its infrastructure and design. I was also reading J. G. Ballard at the time, and interested in his take on environmental and technological development and its influence on a society. I moved away from landscape as a subject when I started making work from a more personal position, at which time I refocussed from this macro kind of view, to study closer social relations. I zoomed in, so to speak.
- FH As part of *Lean in*, we have been in conversation about the 2nd floor screening programme, looking at ways to also speak about the work through the medium of film itself. Do you find that there is something in this medium that feels necessary or inevitable to your practice. I guess what I am saying is that the space you create, appears to be first and foremost the space that takes place inside the work itself, the space inside *10 Seconds or Greater*, *Department*, *Drops* and so on...
- RR This is something I find quite hard to articulate. The space inside the work, or how I might 'inhabit' an image, is a bit parasitic, like taking control of another organism, and almost to the point of killing it! For example, with *Drops*, each droplet is animated, placed on

the glass by me, the focus wobble is animated, total control. There is something perverse about painstakingly choreographing these imperfections. And so the same with the art direction, use of lighting and rigid compositions of the videos where I use actors, it is like getting inside the image (which is why the Owen Land film in the screening programme is such a great and literal reference for me...), thinking about its every detail, in order to understand it. Coming back to *Department*, a video that is perhaps pivotal to this show, my process could be described as follows: having seen the café advert, I couldn't stop thinking about it, and by making the video, reproducing it in this way, was a way to find out exactly why I was so fascinated by it.

*Department*, 2011, 3 min 30 sec



In Reupke's *Department*, a couple perch awkwardly behind a small table. Everything seems to teeter on the edge of collapse; an effect Reupke achieved in part by the use of visual effects and compositing software, layering the image of the empty room under the image of the couple.

*Containing Matters of no very peaceable Colour*, 2009, 5 min 11 sec



Arrangements of pristine towels are presented in isolation from their locations whilst a computer-generated narration lists keywords used to catalogue stock footage. The slow tracking shots cut to a flash photography scene of marble bathroom walls whilst Donna Summer's *Love Hangover*, reverberates against the hard surfaces.

*Letter of Complaint*, 2015, 10 min



This work draws on a combination of banal and desperate letters of complaint to communicate something that could be called celebratory.

*Wine & Spirits*, 2013, 20 min



Each scene in *Wine & Spirits* features the same actors playing different couples, in which their clothes, body language and choice of drink changes.

*Drops*, 2006, 1 min 45 sec



The lens of the camera autofocuses: moving between the seascape in the background and the foreground glass as water droplets land on it.

Rachel Reupke is a London-based artist and filmmaker. Recent solo exhibitions include Cubitt Gallery, London and Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle (both 2015) and Cell Project Space, London (2014). Her work has recently been shown at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China; Museum of Modern Art, Vienna, Austria; Wattis Institute, San Francisco, USA; Tate Britain, London; and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. She was short-listed for the 2014 Jarman Award.

*Lean in* at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart coincides with a presentation of Rachel Reupke's *Wine & Spirits* as part of the »*Silent*« Cinema series at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, June 2015.

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