



## Rosalind Nashashibi Recent films

This autumn, SAMPLE LINE is pleased to screen a selection of recent films by Rosalind Nashashibi, including her new two-part film commissioned by Edinburgh Art Festival and shown at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art over the summer of 2019.

Nashashibi is a filmmaker and painter, and over the course of her career, she has made a wide-ranging body of film. The diversity of her film work is reflected in the locations and circumstances of the films screening here. They were filmed respectively in Gaza, in Guatemala, and in London, Edinburgh and in Lithuania in various shared domestic spaces and outdoor environments, and they each in different ways meditate on notions of family or community, the structures, rituals and minutiae through which we come together, maintain our bonds, and endure in them.

*Electrical Gaza* developed as a response to the rapidly unfolding political situation in Gaza in June 2014 where Nashashibi had arrived to begin work on a new film commission. By

Sat 12 October – Sat 14 December 2019  
Thurs–Sat, 11am–5pm or by appointment  
Admission free

contrast, her 2017 film *Vivian's Garden* offers a slow and embedded view into the lives of two Swiss/Austrian artists Vivian Suter and Elisabeth Wild who Nashashibi filmed at their home in Panajachel over three visits. Most recently, Nashashibi's two-part film for Edinburgh Art Festival features her children and close friends and evokes a literary source – a short science fiction story by Ursula K. Le Guin – that has had particular resonance for her in its consideration of how we might re-envision the ways we come together and live as communities or families.

Nashashibi has said, 'I think there is a sense of enclosure in most of my films, and I really like to look closely at a situation I am in whether it's what happens between two people, or what happens between a group, or a group of houses, or closed communities. There is always that limit, and within that limit I think I can talk about wider models or archetypes or ways of living with others, and living with objects and in institutions.'

## Sat 12 October – Sat 16 November

*Part One: Where there is a joyous mood, there a comrade will appear to share a glass of wine* (2018)

*Part Two: The moon nearly at the full. The team horse goes astray* (2019)

Running time: 46mins

Nashashibi's new two-part film was shot in Lithuania, London and Edinburgh. Featuring the artist and her children, as well as close friends who she considers extended family, it takes its starting point from *The Shobies' Story* (1994), a short story by the science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin, which follows a group of individuals coming together in preparation for an experiment in space travel using non-linear time. Nashashibi has said she was interested by Le Guin's approach to the writing of science fiction 'as anthropology', and that her work and thought contained 'speculation about different ways of living.' In particular *The Shobies' Story* interested Nashashibi as a study of 'how a group mentality is formed and how it might be transformed.' Her own film 'evokes' Le Guin's story and indeed its two-part structure draws on the structure in *The Shobies' Story* in setting out first the bonding of the crew and then their undertaking of their mission.

In *Part One*, Nashashibi, her children and their close friends embark upon a period akin to what Le Guin in her story terms isyeye – 'making a beginning together' or 'beginning to be together'. In the film, these scenes were mostly shot in Nida in Lithuania, around a house that the group were sharing or in the coastal dunes. Those filmed in the latter bring to mind Le Guin's story most closely, but the film is in no sense a straightforward evocation – at various points the group attempts to grapple with Le Guin's ideas and Nashashibi herself is variously behind the camera and then in front of it, often at the centre of the discussion. The enterprise that this group is engaged in (to make a film together) sits in a dynamic parallel relationship to the enterprise of the fictional group in *The Shobies' Story* (to undertake non-linear space travel using a new technology).

Both parts are interspersed with shots of Nashashibi's own paintings, as well as works by German Expressionist painter Emil Nolde that were filmed by Nashashibi in the recent survey show of his work at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in 2018. Nolde's works offer an enigmatic and otherworldly aspect to the unfolding of the situation, which is heightened by the film's sound, which includes passages of unsynchronised voiceover alongside ambient compositions by Tom Drew and Joan Sutherland singing 'Tu virgingum corona' from Mozart's *Exultate, Jubilate* (1773).

*Part Two* begins from a markedly different point, and reflects a shift in Le Guin's story from the initial period of the crew's bonding and conviviality to the implementation of the crew's mission to achieve non-linear space travel. The sense of a governing or authorial presence is introduced in *Part Two* as an expanded group assemble in a lecture hall to receive their direction. Confusion, fragmentation and resistance are already making themselves apparent even as the 'Nida crew' are formally recognised as such, and these increase amongst the group as *Part Two* progresses. Nida itself doubles in this part of the film as the site of 'unduration', the destination arrived at through non-linear travel, which prompts a radical unravelling of communal experience along with the group's ability to communicate with each other. Of *The Shobies' Story*, Nashashibi herself explains, 'at the end someone lights a fire and then as the fire brings them all into the same space, one by one they all tell what happened – the storytelling re-establishes linearity.' For their part, the Nida crew bathe together, reciting poetry and sharing stories. The final vision of the Nida horizon is a communal one. As Le Guin says in her story: 'They were nowhere, but they were nowhere together.'

## Sat 16 November – Sat 14 December

*Electrical Gaza* (2015, 17min 53sec)

*Vivian's Garden* (2017, 29min 50sec)

Running time: 48mins

Rosalind Nashashibi has suggested that it took her four years to get to Gaza, following an initial invitation in 2010 from The Imperial War Museum, London, to submit a proposal for a new work about the territory. She eventually travelled to Gaza in June 2014 to begin work on the commission only for her trip to be curtailed by unfolding political events. The day before she arrived, three Israeli teenagers had been kidnapped and were later found killed. This was the catalyst for the 2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict, which lasted 50 days and killed over 2200 people, mostly Gazan civilians.

Nashashibi's film captures the time between the kidnapping and the conflict, a period in which tensions built and Nashashibi herself recalled a sense of 'the oncoming of violence.' Though the film begins with scenes at the Rafah Border Crossing between Gaza and Egypt, *Electrical Gaza* does not convey the rising political tensions or threat of violence in any direct sense. Instead we see the day-to-day realities of living in Gaza under the blockade; we are amidst a crowd jostling, we encounter children as they play in the street, or people as they mill around shops and market stalls, and in a number of truly remarkable shots, we see horses cool off in the Mediterranean sea.

The human cost of the growing tension lies less with the live footage, however, and is perhaps more palpably suggested by the animations that punctuate the film's flow. The animated scenes directly transcribe frames of live footage, and whereas the live footage is often shot at close proximity, the animations perhaps suggest a life lived at a remove from reality, or to reveal what the camera does not capture (or have been allowed to capture). At one point you can hear Nashashibi's breathe, and at another, a black circle expands across the screen obscuring the footage beneath as a premonition of what is to come. Of the film Nashashibi has said: 'It's meant to be a very subjective film – I'm showing what it was like for me, it's not an objective study.'

*Vivian's Garden* was commissioned for Documenta, a large-scale exhibition of contemporary art that takes place in Kassel, Germany, every five years, and most recently in 2017. It concentrates on Swiss-Austrian painter Vivian Suter and her mother, the artist Elisabeth Wild, who is now in her 90s, and their life in Panajachel, Guatemala. As Nashashibi has noted, much like *Electrical Gaza*, this film begins with a boundary, the crossing of a threshold – in this case the gate to the Panajachel compound that Suter and Wild occupy. We barely glimpse the world beyond; however, within the compound is a rich world where interior and exterior flow easily one to the other. Nashashibi's camera slowly wanders over the lush garden flora and then seamlessly into their home. We encounter an extended household around Suter and Wild, engaged in tasks or the rituals of eating for instance, and functioning to all intent and purpose as its own community.

At the centre of the film is the deep and affecting relationship between Suter and Wild. Nashashibi filmed both artists working and includes footage of Suter's studio and work in particular, as well as in more intimate moments, where for instance, Suter is packing for a forthcoming trip. That Nashashibi is absorbed into this community is clear; occasionally we are aware that Suter is addressing her behind the camera. Nashashibi herself has said that much of the footage she captured was observational, although on occasion she suggests she had Suter and Wild stage tasks or scenarios that they might routinely undertake. It is perhaps through their dialogue that we are able to sense the precariousness of their existence; as Suter and Wild relate for instance that following a recent hurricane they had been forced to remain within the compound. Briefly, their vulnerability is palpable. Nashashibi has said, 'for me, it was a really incredible place – a magical, healing place ...It helped me – I visited at an important time in my life.'

Rosalind Nashashibi (born Croydon) lives and works in London.

Exhibitions of her work have been presented at Secession, Vienna (2019); GRIMM, New York (2019); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2019); Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw (2018); Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2018); The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL (2018); Murray Guy, New York (2016).

Nashashibi was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2017, represented Scotland in the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), and her work was included in Documenta 14 (2007), Sharjah Biennial 10 (2011) and Manifesta 7 (2017). She was awarded the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists (2014) and was shortlisted for the Northern Art Prize (2013).

Cover image: Rosalind Nashashibi, ‘Part One: where there is a joyous mood, there a comrade will appear to share a glass of wine’ (detail), (video still), 2018, digital transfer from 16mm film. Courtesy of the artist.

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All quotations in the text are from the following sources

Rosalind Nashashibi, short film made for the occasion of the Turner Prize 2017, 4min 56sec  
<https://youtu.be/fYeaPfkMgs>

Rosalind Nashashibi, short film made for the occasion of Stories for an Uncertain World, July-Aug 2019, Edinburgh Art Festival, 4min 9sec  
[Vimeo.com/352510800](https://vimeo.com/352510800)

Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘The Shobies’ Story,’ (1990), published in The Fisherman of the Inland Sea (1994), New York: Harper Prism.

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