

SARAH LASLEY

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Artist Statement

There is a parallel between how a culture values women and how it values nature. Cast as a long-time supporting actress, backdrop, and accessory to man's narrative of exploration and conquest, Nature has been categorized, contained, pruned and groomed to satisfy aesthetic cravings and support an American mythology. Categorization is never neutral and is defined to cater to the categorizer. My work connects the colonial gaze upon a landscape to the patriarchal control over female-identifying bodies and looks at how fantasy, simulation, and alter-cenes support both the processing and avoidance of difficult realities.

Through the rise and fall of visual verisimilitude in my highly-composited images, I aim to expose cracks and pathways in and out of our current socio-political moment. The myth of American exceptionalism hinges on the exploitation of the continent's natural resources, disenfranchising of its native inhabitants, and the use of enslaved people as capital. White women both benefit from and are oppressed by these mythologies. It's our responsibility to confront and dismantle whiteness in effort to be better allies, yet whiteness is slippery. Defined not by what it *is* but by what it is *not* - the racialized other - it hinges on the other to exist while simultaneously erasing the other from existence. A double-bind is also present in gender expectations and biases, and these conundrums of power pervade my work. How to hear the voice of the dominated in the archive of the dominant? How to resist objectification while working within the objectified frame?

In response, my films adopt a more feminine film form, valuing non-linear, sensorial experience over conventional, dialogue-driven narrative, and I use individual subjectivity to illuminate broader social issues. While my projects are conceptually rigorous, my filming process is highly intuitive and collaborative. I shoot alone with my subjects, without crew or assistants. Through this intimate working method, I create trust, openness, and equal partnership with the performers in my work. The camera follows their improvised performances, and we find the film together by framing and reframing this spontaneous action. I also make solo films, which are a collaboration between only the camera and me. The intimacy of these on-set collaborations persist even as I weave a structure into the film through the editing and visual effects. Green screen compositing allows for a final layer of collaboration in which isolated performers engage with simulated environments, triangulating the viewer, performer, and nature in intimate distance.