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ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

## Rah Eleh

"My perspective is that of an exilic and diasporic artist who is questioning while also trying to assert gender and cultural identity." - Rah Eleh

July 28, 2020



Rah Eleh, SuperNova Installation, commissioned by CUAG and curated by Heather Anderson, Photo credit Justin Wonnacott

In my work, I focus on and critique the visual stereotypes and performative aspects that shape female gender identity and national identity. My perspective is that of an exilic and diasporic artist who is questioning while also trying to assert gender and cultural identity. In particular, I focus on the performances through which individuals express such identities and I critique the value and legitimacy of identity and cultural expression. Moreover, I am interested in how race and gender are performed from multiple-layered perspectives: exilic, decolonial, queer and diasporic.

I have three characters that explore issues of nationalism, temporality and spatiality. My neo-orientalist character *Fatimeh*, crosses ethical boundaries as I perform a caricature of the ethnic *other*. *Oreoemerged* out of the prior development of *Fatimeh* and performs in racial drag; the work is dedicated to an investigation of contemporary and gendered whiteness. My multi-faceted and futuristic character, *Coco*, communicates through movement, and here, I want to foster and encourage identification with liminal subjects like myself.



Rah Eleh, #oreo\_liveitwhite, Net Art and Installation Project, SPAO, 2019

**AGO: What was the inspiration for this artwork or series?**

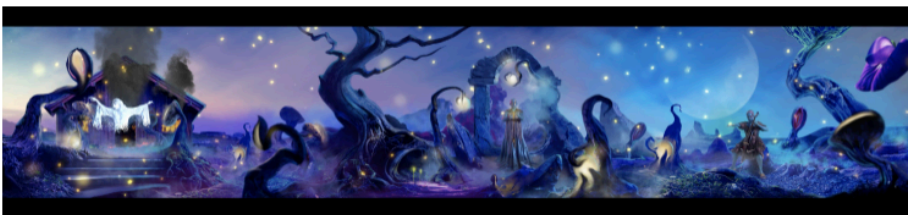
**Eleh:** SuperNova is a talent show parody where I transform myself artistically into multiple characters and I draw from my own experiences as an individual who has to negotiate multiple racial and linguistic frameworks. SuperNova is inspired by drag, camp aesthetics and comedy. The SuperNova installation was a sculptural response and adaptation of the concept of liminality set forth by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep

**AGO: Tell us about a place or a space where you most love making your work?**

**Eleh:** In 2014, I did an artist residency in Vienna at a studio complex with twenty local creative practitioners and the environment was so stimulating that since, I've visited the city several times to research archives and exhibit my work. I feel inspired by its history of arts, music and philosophy. There is a quaint two-screen movie house called Top Kino that is home to a small local cafe, and I have done some of my best writing and reflecting in that space.

**AGO: Are you in dialogue with any other artists or creative peers about your practice? If so, how does this dialogue feed your work?**

**Eleh:** The interdisciplinary nature of my practice appeals to diverse audiences. Creatives and art historians who are interested in critical race theory, intersectional feminism, ethnic futurism, ethnonationalism, digital arts and pop culture are the individuals who express the most excitement about my work. I am always initiating conversation with curators, historians and other artists. It is a privilege to engage and connect with the community and any feedback and critique is invaluable to the development of the work and my artistic growth.



Rah Eleh, #BlueGirl, 2020, Work-in-Progress