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### **Symbiosis: The Eroticism of Violence in the Films of Isabel Rocamora**

Review of Isabel Rocamora's "Ecstatic Solitudes."  
"Body of War (2010)," and "Horizon of Exile (2007)," Dual Channel Installation  
on view at Shaw Gallery, Weber State University, September 1 to November 11, 2017.

Isabel Rocamora, British-Spanish filmmaker and anti-gravity performance artist, is a poet of the violent gesture. As the name of the exhibit suggests, Rocamora's two films, "Body of War," and the diptych film "Horizon of Exile," immerse the viewer in an ecstatic contemplation of violence, loss and the body. The landscape of causality is examined closely: the symbiotic relationship between violence and exile, trauma and flight is made as plain as the line separating land from sky. The two films, played opposite one another in the gallery, painted black for the exhibit, seduce the viewer through the elegant gestures of deconstructed violence. In both films, Rocamora creates a character of place, whether on the windswept beach of Néville-sur-Mer in Normandy or the dazzling salt flats of the Atacama Desert; but the sensation of dislocation overwhelms the viewer, and one must retreat into the powerful poetic litany of the bodies in motion.

"Horizon of Exile" focuses on two women, portrayed hauntingly by Paulina Garrido and Camila Valenzuela, engaged in a physical enactment of exile, self-discovery and denigration across a barren desert landscape. The sound accompaniment of Djivan Gasparyan lends an eerie and visceral element to the film, as do the voice-over stories of displacement from Iraqi women, which are dispersed throughout. Rocamora has created a pastiche of suffering and exaltation out of the disparate vocal and performative gestures of the women, raising the visual poetics from a mere statement of feminist existentialism to a sublime testimony of overwhelming and searing beauty.

"Body of War," by contrast, is set in a more muted panoramic, but is no less intense. The physicality of soldiers in hand-to-hand combat becomes a dance, the slowed and stylized movements filmed with an intimate closeness. While the women in "Exile" suggest a remove, of immersion in landscape, the men are enlarged so their hulking

figures create a confrontational atmosphere. The overlaying Gregorian chanting stretches languorously into the aggressive dance. The sounds, alternately grunts and chants, create anxiety in the viewer, who, by bearing witness to the gorgeous choreography of biting, kicking, eye-gouging, becomes a culpable participant. Sympathetically, our viewing bodies recoil and lunge in unison, while Rocamora deftly bares the primal desires of brutality that reside in our humanity.

Within the Shaw Gallery, where these two films have come together for the first time, one feels immersed, swept into the foreignness of the human body enacting the primal gesture, in landscapes shimmering with light and elemental features. Both films instill a sense of exile in the viewer, one where the bodies and states of existence we know are a veneer over a deeper substantive reality. Outside the gallery, where the Wasatch Range stretches away into salt flats and sparkling cerulean lakes, we feel the lingering histories of exodus and unspeakable bloodshed staining our own ground. Rocamora's films are painstakingly choreographed tales of inherited culpabilities and sensual lineages, and she masterfully reveals a fragmented humanity that leaves her viewer stunned and breathless.