



## *Excerpts from The Impossible Blue Rose*

*A response to the work of Lisa Lipton by Emily Doucet*

## 1-800-true-love: Lisa Lipton's *The Impossible Blue Rose*

Begun in 2012, Lisa Lipton's *The Impossible Blue Rose* project falls somewhere between the genres of essay film, fairy-tale and autobiography—or, in her words, “docu-fiction.” (1) Blending performance, film, sculpture and installation, the project follows Frankie, Lipton's alter-ego, on a journey. A recurring lurid blue liquor filling martini glasses signals the disillusioned transportation of intoxication, of altered states, of romantic love, of tropical tourism. The blue drink “allows access to a realm where anything can happen, where the moon falls from the sky and a constellation—Orion's Belt (The Three Mothers)—finds its voice and lesson by way of song.” (2) Slurping neon the intoxication afforded by the drink makes space for Frankie's desire for a love story of their own. The transcendent quality of the blue liquid is echoed in the film's kitschy props, from bedazzled smiley faces on logs to holographic palm tree paperweights, sculptural forms which iterate across the multiple chapters of the film and in the varied installations of the project.

Out of the blue to déjà vu. A visit to a psychic before beginning the trip sets the scene. Some lines thrown to the wind in this exchange:

*“When do you think you'll find the end of the journey?”*

*“I don't know.”*

*“Babe you don't have to be scared....You don't think that you're good enough?”*

*“Yes I do! I'm tired of feeling small. It is like a working dialogue with myself.”*

*The Impossible Blue Rose* is this working dialogue. A roll of gold dice. The narrative arc of the project fills the space travelled in the making of a film, the survival of a creative process, falling in love—living, generally. Featuring fractal selves swimming in the idiomatic language of self-help employed against itself, Lipton's dizzying journey to the end of utopia ends (unsurprisingly) in no real place—ostensibly Hawaii but narratively inconclusive as to whether Frankie, the film's protagonist, has achieved “happiness” or “true love.”

A couple of words end up on the proverbial tip of the tongue:

Millennial: the generation born beginning in the early 1980s and coming into adulthood around the new millennium—a word of the times, cringe-worthy. Assumed responsible for everything bad, from social media addiction to mountains of personal debt; assumed to have no real future.

Millenarianism: a belief in radical changes to society after a future cataclysmic event, often but not always associated with religious movements.

(1) Lisa Lipton cited in Ray Cronin, “Lisa Lipton's Road Show: Rambling Rose,” *Canadian Art* (Winter 2016), 122.

(2) Lisa Lipton cited in Ashley Bedet, “The Epic of The Impossible Blue Rose,” *Luma* 3:1(Winter 2016),

The religious character of youth culture acts as an antidote to dystopia. Lipton's references to the early 1990s American sitcom *Saved by the Bell* act as a narrative cue. Teen sitcom tropes of love mark an obsession with happy endings—one model for future thinking. Parental figures are asked a series of repetitive questions—do you believe in happy endings? Their answers underline a belief in the importance of linear narratives for the understanding of self, a structure the film works actively against, modelling a world in which futures hover between self-made and inherited destiny.

The space travelled across the film's iterative chapters moves between these two concepts of the future asking, is it possible? In this sense, Lipton's episodic film embodies a culturally specific moment of journeys into the future via nostalgic detour, the adverb "yet" figuring our period's relationship to history—"I haven't made a film yet" or "our holiday isn't for weeks yet." This rhetorical tension colours (blue) the expansiveness of Frankie's journey.

Another hesitation. I like *like* you. The grammar of an infectious pop song featured in the film signals the difficulty of transcending irony and affected speech to communicate love, the words I like you falling flat without the repetition of the key verb. This repetitive gesture structures the film, a pointing to or through to condense meaning, an aesthetic of repetition in which duplicate Frankie's play across the screen with trademark hat, glasses and hair.

Like "millennial" and the future it entails, the word "like" has been maligned as a kind of stutter, a lack in the linguistic prowess of those who use it. As John McWhorter has suggested, however, while the "like" is often "associated with hesitation" and "a fear of venturing a definitive statement," it is more accurately the case that the "like has morphed into a modal marker of the human mind at work in conversation" and further that "the meaning of *like* suggests that people are claiming that everything is "like" itself rather than itself." (3) These two understandings of the *like*—as a sign for process or a measure of an unsure foothold in reality parallel the two visions of the future I mentioned above. Is the future something tenuous and in the making or is it an alternate reality?

The last chapter of the film concludes somewhere between a beach and a pool in Hawaii—two different bodies of water (one real, one fake?). Sleepy, slurry, dreaming on film, Frankie is reunited with their true love, but as the film has warmed us up to conclude: it's hard to know if you're in paradise. Is the intoxication or sleepiness that overcomes Frankie in the final chapter a marker of their inability to push hard enough into the future or "keep on trying again," as the parental figures gently insist one must, or is it a kind of present refusal to proclaim a clarity of direction when, of course, there can't be any such thing? Swirling, slurring, reaching... a happy ending in the form of a golden heart-shaped rock might be as good as any we've come up with yet.

Emily Doucet, 2018

**Lisa Lipton** is a multidisciplinary visual artist, musician and director whose projects explore the potential for crossing genres of film, mixed-media installation, performance, theatre and music. Her visions reflect an interest in directorial and curatorial practices, collaboration and social interaction, as well as working within non-traditional contexts to explore the boundaries of performance and filmic production. Lipton was shortlisted for a Sobey Art Award in 2015, and longlisted in 2017, 2016, 2013 and 2012. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and she recently released a new sci-fi project, "Soon All Your Memories Will Be With Me", at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Alberta College of Art + Design, where she also works as an instructor in sculpture. She received her BFA from NSCAD University and MFA from the University of Windsor.

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IMAGE | Lisa Lipton, still from *The Impossible Blue*  
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