

Alice Channer

R o c k f a l l

February 13–May 31, 2015



Fast but Slow

Courtenay Finn

“A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called the Grand Canyon. A room could be made to take on the immensity of the solar system. Scale depends on one’s capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception.”

—Robert Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty” (1972)

Alice Channer’s work often begins with something small—a tiny detail, an overlooked object, a common part of our everyday that we take for granted. By expanding, stretching, and enlarging this element, she makes visible not only an inherent intricacy, but also an awkward intimacy. We know what the object is, but not in this form—making us both familiar with and nervous around it. What we expected has shifted, changed shape or scale, and become something new. In this way, Channer challenges traditional notions of “mass production”: behind the construction of her work is a human author, whether at the drawing board, operating a machine, or piecing something together by hand.

Working in London, a major city constantly retooling, rebuilding, and reinventing itself, Channer is surrounded by a landscape of acceleration. For the first time in history, urban populations outweigh nonurban. And as they grow and shift, so does the infrastructure that supports and surrounds them; buildings, roads, and ruins merge

and melt into new structures, attempting to preserve the past while simultaneously look to the future. Grappling with the gravity of time, the metropolis shapes its inhabitants as much as they shape it. And unlike in the natural world, where things slow down as they increase in size, the urban landscape speeds up as it grows, racing farther and farther ahead.

Near her studio, Channer began to notice the concrete debris of construction sites, fragments of the city's acceleration. Making 3-D scans of these "non-rock" rocklike forms, she digitally stretched them to change their shape and size. Channer then used a CNC router (computer-controlled cutting machine) to make foam objects from the images, with which she created molds and cast the objects in aluminum, concrete, and Cor-Ten steel. Going through several different processes before arriving at their finished form, the pieces pick up the residue of each stage, illuminating how objects can embody and reveal their own history.

At first glance, the seven pieces that make up *Rockfall* appear to be depictions of actual rocks, yet moving around them, they begin to construct an uncanny space, a confluence of the visible and nonvisible. Channer's use of stretching allows us to see something frozen in their elongated state. Paused in an unfolding transition or a passage, the rocks seem to be reaching for something or someplace else, and we move through them in anticipation of arriving somewhere new.

Rockfall is also an investigation into the relationship between time and space; the interface between permanence and transience that makes us question our traditional understanding of the natural landscape. Channer's layering of time—perhaps the work's most potent and poetic aspect—encompasses industrial time (the material and way in which the object is manufactured), postindustrial time (the 3-D scanning and use of a digital platform to alter, crop, and shape the image), and present time: by our mere presence, we become acutely aware of our body in space and our manner of observation. Yet, rather than embodying cyclical time, Channer's *Rockfall* presents a long, unending line, stretching forward and back like the horizon. Both fast and slow, the work integrates not only our understanding of history, but also the development of our physical landscape.

"Time is not just a mental concept or mathematical abstraction... The rocks in the distance are ageless; they have been deposited in layers of over hundreds of thousands of years. Time takes on a physical presence."

—Nancy Holt, "Sun Tunnels" (1973–76)

The tradition of art engaging with the landscape is pervasive and varied, from the tumultuous paintings of Turner, to the mid-nineteenth-century Hudson River School, the earthworks of the 1960s and seventies, through to Michael Heizer's *Levitated Mass* (2012; a 340-

ton granite megalith transported across the country). It is not just a fascination with the beauty of the untouched natural world, but also our relationship to the postindustrial, entropic landscape of urban environments that captures our romanticism. Our characterization of the outside world continues to be tied to the landscape—myths of reinvention, endless possibility, and inevitable promise.

Aspen, surrounded on all sides by vast mountains that carry within them a natural geological time, occupies an in-between space, both manmade and natural, a place whose identity is embedded within its landscape. Situated within the history and timeline of humankind and shaped by tectonic plate movement and glaciers, Colorado's mountain ranges are, in part, perpetually remolded by rockfalls and landslides. Arising from a loss of support underneath or the detachment from a larger rock mass, a natural rockfall is the result of destabilization, a steep slope, and gravity.

Channer's *Rockfall* charts our engagement with the landscape, illuminating a pattern of use and our connection with the earth. In each rock's form as well as in its installation, Channer uses horizontality to acknowledge and point to our normal position of verticality. This is further expounded by the fact that as you look at the piece, stretched across the museum's Sculpture Garden, your eyes are pulled upwards to the immense, monumental verticality

of the mountains. In creating a horizontal rockfall, Channer plays with the notion of the horizon as a clear marker of separation between humankind and the land, distinguishing the limits between what is possible to comprehend or imagine. By destabilizing this structure, Channer challenges the terms by which we locate ourselves, serving to present and re-present our relationship to place.

"There are 'forms' to be found within the activity of making as much as within the end products."

—Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* (1969–70)

Rockfall incorporates a series of different changes in its state of being—vertical to horizontal, solid to liquid, hot to cold, flat to volume—and though each rock requires a multitude of processes, there is an immediacy and simplicity to the work. Each piece is elegant, precise, and refined. They capture something Joan Didion once said about artist Ed Ruscha's works, describing them as "distillations, the thing compressed to its most pure essence." Each rock occupies a site of memory—etched into its form is the means of its making—and through interaction, the distance between here and there collapses as well as how we understand the process of time itself.





Exhibition Checklist

Rockfall 2015

Cast concrete, cast Cor-Ten steel,
cast aluminum
Dimensions variable

Courtesy Lisa Cooley, New York,
and The Approach, London

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