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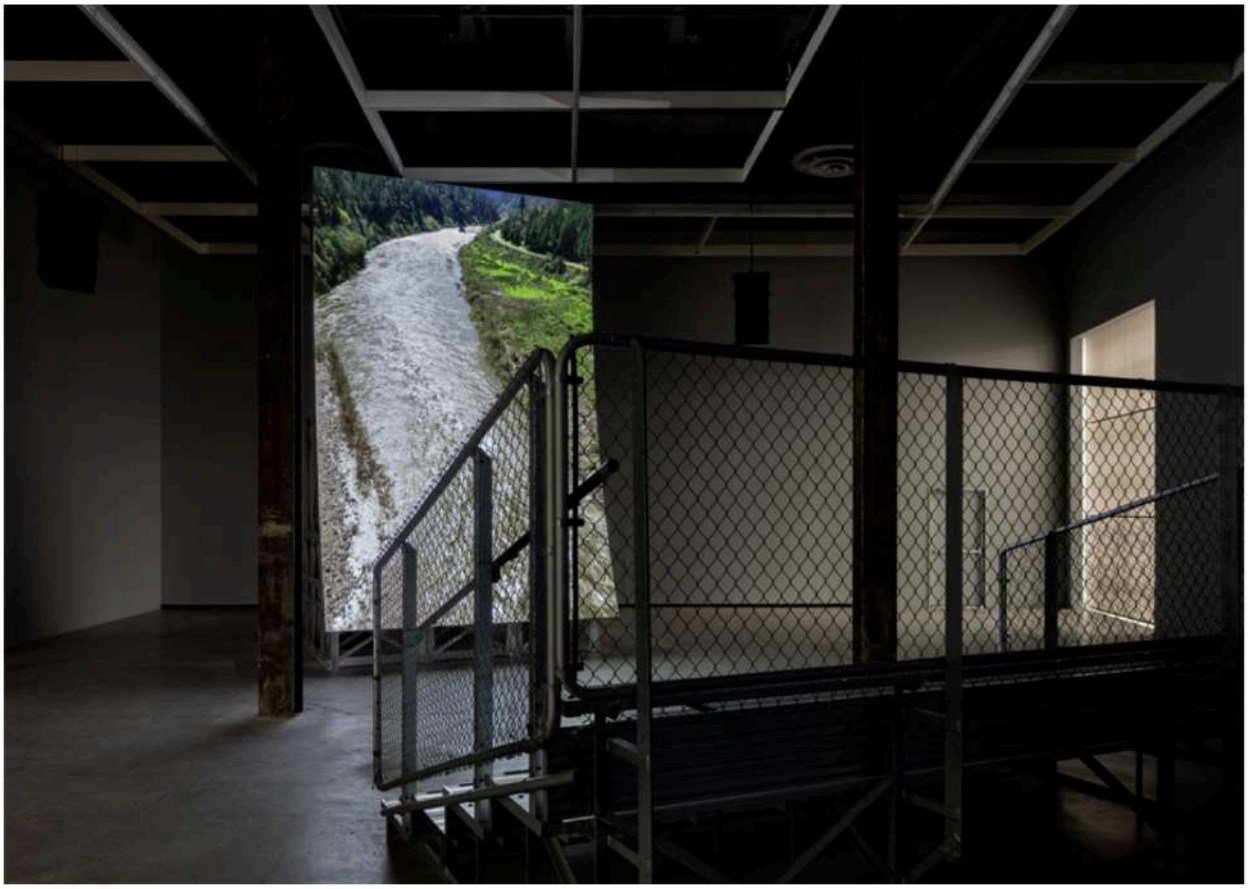
Lucy Raven Unleashes the Power of a Dam

At The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, the artist's video reckons with environmental engineering in the American West

BY **AKIVA BLANDER** IN **EXHIBITION REVIEWS** | 27 NOV 25

From the gliding perspective of a drone, we encounter the Copco Number 1 Dam on California's Klamath River: a monumental feat of earthwork and environmental engineering. The hulking concrete mass holds back an entire lacustrine ecosystem on one side and oversees a mostly dry riverbed on the other. This infrastructure, along with its surrounding ecology, is the protagonist of Lucy Raven's newest video installation, *Murderers Bar* (2025), a co-commission by the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vega Foundation. The single-channel, 42-minute video is currently on view in an eponymous exhibition at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, where it is displayed on a concave screen and viewable from spare bleacher seating (as is characteristic of Raven's installations). Aptly shot in portrait orientation, *Murderers Bar* narrates the moment at which our protagonist undergoes a life change.



Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar*, 2025, colour video, quadraphonic sound, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery; photograph: LF Documentation

The video shifts perspective and scale as a small raft ferries explosives through a tunnel into the dam's core, where engineers proceed to deftly prepare and place them. We are panoramic again: the humans are mere dots on a cliff, watching the fruits of their labour from a safe distance.

An anticipatory silence, and then a deep boom: decades of accumulated water and sediment gush through, the force of a reservoir spilling out in an instantaneous release of brute pressure. Airborne again, we trace the river's restored headwaters as they advance over the diminishingly dry riverbed, covering bends, crevices and rocks for the first time in a century. After a few minutes, the waters are reunited with the Pacific Ocean. As riverine and oceanic waters merge into one vast, saturated frame, our sense of scale is again collapsed. Then, the video's perspective turns and backtracks upstream, the camera skimming the revived river surface, punctuated by dips into the turbulent waters below.

Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar*, 2025, colour video, quadraphonic sound, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery; photograph: LF Documentation

Murderers Bar is the third and final instalment in Raven's film trilogy 'The Drumfire' (2021–25), which explores how forceful applications of earth, air and water have created and recreated the landscape of the American West. Seemingly the most technically and geographically ambitious of the three, it homes in on the unjustifiable divide between construction and destruction, natural and artificial. Is the demolition of a dam not also the composition of a new landscape? Is the 'renaturalized' river and ecosystem not also synthetic?

When we finally glimpse the once dammed side again, the lakebed is drained, deformed, grotesque. The dam removal project, completed in 2024, was an effort to replenish salmon populations that formed a cornerstone of the regional food supply and thus restore the river basin ecology. It was the culmination of decades of negotiations between local Indigenous nations, state governments and several private organizations. Seen in this context, many will reasonably read into *Murderers Bar* a hefty constellation of messages concerning hubristic efforts to overcome nature in the physical and symbolic making of the American West, or the long-standing commingling of the fight for environmental justice and Indigenous rights. Or, perhaps most pertinently, the murkier aspects of efforts to right past wrongs.

Raven revels in the inherently unresolvable nature of such quandaries, avoiding a neat exaltation of repair and restoration, let alone a sense of justice or closure. Eschewing limpidity, she offers a muddier, sediment-logged case study of one of our many acts of human folly. Her unconventional portrait is made both more vivid and more complex by her decision to repeatedly alternate between spatial scales and perspectives; temporal and geographical visions of the dam; and river extent and ocean expanse. We cannot fully know the downstream effects of our latest experiments in the Klamath – or any act of environmental engineering – but we may adopt a critical, alert curiosity as we watch its future flow.

Lucy Raven's 'Murderers Bar' is on view at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, until 22 March 2026. The work is also included in 'Lucy Raven: Rounds', on view at the Barbican Centre, London, until 4 January 2026, and at the Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, from 20 May 2026 to 6 September 2026

Main image: Lucy Raven, Murderers Bar, *2025, colour video, quadraphonic sound, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery; photograph: LF Documentation*

The Art Newspaper
16 October 2025

THE ART NEWSPAPER

At London's Barbican, Lucy Raven chronicles the destruction of a California dam

The artist's video installation explores devastating impacts on the environment and Indigenous communities

An image from Lucy Raven's video installation *Murderers Bar*, now on show at the Barbican © the artist; Courtesy of the Artist and Lisson Gallery

Between 2023 and 2024, four dams on the Klamath River in Oregon and California were blown up with dynamite after generations-long activism from Indigenous communities. This landmark moment in the fight against injustice for tribes including the Yurok, Karuk, Klamath, and Hoopa, and the Shasta Indian Nation, forms part of Lucy Raven's dramatic video installation, *Murderers Bar* (2025), which has its European première in The Curve at the Barbican.

As Shanay Jhaveri, the Barbican's head of visual arts, explains, the dam in the film, called Copco No. 1, was built in 1918. "It caused a huge detrimental impact to local ecosystems inhabiting the river, especially its salmon population, which was of great spiritual, cultural and nutritional value to the Indigenous people who lived across and alongside the river." There are no overt references in Raven's film to the communities' activism. "Her work is not documentary," Jhaveri says. "There are no talking-head interviews. But it's built on deep research and collaboration and engagement with the material that has been gathered by being in consultation with these tribes and the work that they've done."

Raven's video installation shows the deliberate destruction the Copco No. 1 dam in California © the artist; Courtesy of the Artist and Lisson Gallery

Build-up, collapse, release

Raven's film is the final part of a trilogy she calls *The Drumfire*, whose key linking thread, among others, is pressure. Each film deals with a different aspect of that force—broadly speaking: build-up, collapse and, in *Murderers Bar*, release. It is about "material states of change", Jhaveri says. The protagonist of this third film, Jhaveri suggests, "is the river itself". The piece begins with the laying of dynamite. But its key element is what happens next. "After its detonation," he explains, "you see the moment of release. And what you follow is the water or the dirt as it rushes out of the dam and starts to find its way to the ocean."

Characteristically, the New York-based Raven—who, as Jhaveri says, has long been "interested in histories of image production"—employed multiple techniques including aerial photography using helicopters and drones, and lidar and sonar animations. The feeling of "propulsiveness" from the release of the water is followed, once it reaches the Pacific, by "a hard turn", as Raven goes back to the dam, Jhaveri says. "And what you really see is a

landscape that has been transformed, deformed. But also [it has] potential now that it's been released."

Murderers Bar is "formally hugely accomplished", he says, with nods to particular psychological or horror films including the opening scenes of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), with its sequences shot from a helicopter moving over a lake, and Joseph Losey's cult movie *Figures in a Landscape* (1970) , which is "essentially a helicopter chase the whole way through", Jhaveri explains.

The near 100-year-old dam had long been seen as responsible for damaging delicate local eco-systems, and the homelands of indigenous groups from the region © the artist; Courtesy of the Artist and Lisson Gallery

States of change

Unusually for an exhibition in The Curve, which is a long and relatively narrow arc around the back of the Barbican Centre's theatre, Raven has chosen to focus on the space's height, Jhaveri says. "We have this vertical curved screen, which goes almost right to the top of the space."

The exhibition also includes a new kinetic sculpture, *Hardpan* (2025), which attempts to make physical some of the ideas explored in the film and takes inspiration from "centrifugal or rotating devices," Jhaveri says. "So, something that viscerally would manifest this idea of states of change and of force and pressure."

Hardpan is the first thing visitors see in The Curve, and even filters into the Barbican foyer. Encased in a cylindrical concrete aluminium structure is a spinning arm with lights, which is "going at very high speed", Jhaveri explains. "So it's almost like this beacon that you see from outside, going round and round, that pulls you in. And when you come in, you'll

immediately sense an atmospheric change because of the speed and noise of this physical thing that is just spinning away wildly by itself in this concrete bunker."

Hardpan reflects Raven's interest, explored elsewhere in her work, in "the language of tests—a very industrial language". For instance, she explored astronauts training in centrifuges, simulating states of change in space, "where you first lose colour vision, then vision, and then your consciousness altogether". Reassuringly, Jhaveri says, "we're not going to do that to our visitors". But, he hopes, the work provides a "very embodied, visceral experience that you take with you and carry forward to the film, where you see it play out in a very different way."

- Lucy Raven: Rounds, *The Barbican, London, until 4 January 2026*

Art Review
2 October 2025

ArtReview

Lucy Raven: A Controlled Explosion

Fi Churchman Features 02 October 2025 ArtReview

Raven captures the undoing and remaking of the American West's landscape, and why the process is both simpler and more complicated than it appears

Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar* (still), 2025, video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 41 min 40 sec, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

In stories told along the Klamath River, salmon are not simply a food source but are also considered kin who choose to give themselves to humans. Running from Oregon through Northern California before joining the Pacific, the river once supported some of the richest salmon runs on the West Coast. For the Yurok, Karuk, Hoopa, Shasta, Klamath and Modoc peoples, those fish (the Chinook and coho species) were inseparable from spiritual practice, diet, health, tradition and economy. Their yearly return up the river represents a cycle that binds water, land and people together. The fish are greeted with ceremony, thanked and then mourned when they depart for the sea. To see salmon is to know that lifecycles continue.

When construction of the first hydroelectric dam on the Klamath began in 1903, the cycle was broken. Three more such dams were built on the river's mainstem between then and 1964, resulting in the widescale disruption of the river's natural flow. Concrete walls blocked the fish from reaching their spawning grounds; reservoirs warmed the water, which encouraged the breeding of parasites and sped up the growth of toxic algae blooms; sediment clogged the riverbed. Lower sections of the river gradually became starved of vital nutrients. By the start of this century the once-thriving runs had collapsed: in 2002 tens of thousands of adult Chinook salmon were seen floating dead in the lower river. (The highest estimates put the number at around 70,000.) The loss was ecological, cultural and social. Ceremonies tied to the salmon could not be performed. Food sovereignty was eroded.

The removal of four dams – J.C. Boyle, Copco 1 and 2, and Iron Gate – was the largest project of its kind in US history. It was completed only in 2024, after decades of campaigning by tribes and environmental groups, lawsuits against the power company PacifiCorp (which owns the four dams) and a long process of negotiation with state and federal agencies. That removal is often framed as an environmental triumph, but it is also, in part, the undoing of an infrastructure built on a logic that finds provenance in the expansionist concept of Manifest Destiny (which, in short, treated First Nations rights as expendable). To some, a river is merely another natural resource to be exploited, diverted for industry, tapped, contained, controlled; for others, the river is part of a symbiotic ecosystem, a giver of life that should be treated with respect.

Murderers Bar, 2025 (installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery). Photo: Rachel Topham Photography. © the artist. Courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery

American artist Lucy Raven produces photography, video, sculpture and installation, often exploring systems of power. Her new videowork, *Murderers Bar* (2025), takes the abovementioned history as its backdrop. The title refers to the nineteenth-century name for Happy Camp, a town on the Klamath, and points directly to the violence of settler expansion: massacres, land seizures, the gold rush. Raven positions the dams within that lineage as a structure that extends a colonial worldview, one in which a river is to be tamed and exploited. But *Murderers Bar* does not explicitly narrate that history, nor does it speak on behalf of those who lived it. Instead it drops viewers into the process of the Copco 1 dam's dismantling, so that the material as much as the conceptual weight of the structure – and of its destruction – becomes the focus.

Projected on a freestanding aluminium frame, the 42-minute work immerses the viewer in shifting registers of image and sound. Dipping beneath a digital rendering of a brown body of water in an abstract landscape, viewers are taken on an 'underwater' tour of what appears to be the natural winding path of a riverbed that has been digitally modelled in 3D. (And based on data collected by the Yurok Tribe Fisheries Department.) What is visible above is not the same as what's actually below. As the viewpoint resurfaces, the video switches to real footage of the reservoir trapped behind Copco 1. Vast aerial shots pan the area around the dam, in part rendering it as set of abstract outlines. These sequences, shot from a distance, carry a kind of bureaucratic detachment, evoking the cold gaze of surveyors and regulators. Between these is more straightforward documentarylike footage of workers and machinery: shots of the dam and its

surrounding power plant, hard hats and high-vis vests, men drilling holes and shoving sticks of explosives into the concrete wall of the dam. In one scene, a worker stands at the base of the dam, and the scale of the manmade structure is colossal. *Murderers Bar* reaches its catalyst early on, with an explosion, a release of water through – given the scale and volume of water contained on the other side – what appears to be a too-narrow tunnel. Watching the pressure of the water flow is a visceral experience; it's as if watching oxygen flood the alveoli of a pair of air starved lungs. That embodied feeling is transmuted via closeup shots that skim the surface of the water, duck beneath and resurface – locating the viewer in the body of a fish. The sensation is of moving with the salmon themselves, catching light in the murky depths of the river, yet disoriented by its unsettled sediment.

Digital animations intersperse and occasionally overlay the footage: apart from the 3D renderings of the riverbed, a set of radar range rings floats over footage of the river; the movement of its dial gradually turns the footage from colour to black and white. These insertions and the extreme differences in viewpoint mark different ways of 'knowing' a landscape – to live in it, to fight for it, to render it as data, to control it. Raven refuses to reconcile them. Instead she makes the viewer toggle between perspectives: surveyor, salmon, worker and witness. The result is a fractured vision that mirrors the sediments and layered history of the river itself.

Murderers Bar (still), 2025, video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 41 min 40 sec, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

Murderers Bar is the concluding part of Raven's multimedia project *The Drumfire* (2020–25), which reshapes the Western landscape genre. *The Drumfire* does this by focusing on how the landscape's natural materials are placed under pressure, broken apart, reconstituted. In a new documentary about the series and more specifically about the making of *Murderers Bar*, titled *Lucy Raven: Pressure & Release* (2025), the artist describes this as an enquiry into the "kind of state change that creates structural, or in some ways infrastructural, violence on the landscape". *Ready Mix* (2021), the first video in the series, follows the mining of aggregate through to the production of cement at a plant in Idaho, where explosions, grinders and mixers turn rock into the base matter of construction. The two *Demolition of a Wall* films (*Album 1* and *Album 2*, both 2022) use highspeed cameras to record the shockwaves of controlled blasts detonated in the landscape at a military site in New Mexico, while the blast itself is left out of shot.

Demolition of a Wall (Album 1) (still), 2022, video, colour, quadrophonic sound, 20 min 58 sec, wood and aluminium screen, aluminium seating structure. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

Sometimes Raven approaches her subject from a more oblique angle: while making *Demolition*, she turned to photography. Her resulting photobook *Socorro!* (2023) is named after the town in which the explosives range is located; meaning 'succour', Socorro was named by sickly Spanish settlers who were provided water by the Piro Native Americans. Raven worked with the ballistics lab at New Mexico Tech to produce shadowgrams of projectiles fired into a sealed chamber – abstract grey images of airflows, inky-looking blooms and grids on photosensitive paper pockmarked with piercings from the impact of the projectiles' contents. The images in *Socorro!* hint at the ongoing violence that's shaped the American West while also recalling the history and use of photography in military science. And then there is *Depositions* (2024), a series of five works on silk Raven made while researching *Murderers Bar*: to create these works she constructed water chambers out of soil and cement, lined them with silk organza, then poured water in and let the water gradually drain away. Sediment shifts across the fabric, leaving behind delicate stains and residues that appear like an abstract landscape. But more literally, they represent the slow inscription of history onto a surface – the way water records both passage and obstruction, the way systems of extraction and containment leave marks, even when the structures themselves are dismantled.

Across these works Raven often uses surveillance cameras, infrared imaging, industrial processes and digital mapping – the very technologies that hide or rationalise systems of control. And in doing so, she lets the strangeness, the distortion and the sensory qualities of these technologies become the texture of the work. Manifest Destiny also maintains a spectral presence throughout the project: the ideology that justified westward expansion, displacement and conquest, written into the dams, mines, military bases and ballistic labs that shape the work.

Ready Mix (still), 2021, video, b/w, quadrophonic sound, 45 min, aluminium and plywood screen, aluminium seating structure. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

Deposition, Dam Breach, 17, 2024, sand, dirt, cement, saltwater, silk, wood and aluminium, 141 × 263 cm. Photo: Mark Waldhauser. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

As with the three earlier videoworks in *The Drumfire*, to watch *Murderers Bar* is to move between scales: from the technological distance of the aerial survey, to the embodied perspective of water rushing past, to the brute-force labour of demolition. Each view destabilises the others. Together they produce an image of the river that is unsettled, contradictory, unresolved. That refusal of closure matters, because while the Klamath now runs more freely, its future remains precarious: the release of the reservoirs has revealed altered habitats, and there is lingering contamination from the industrial plants. Restoration does not immediately mean resolution. The power of *Murderers Bar* lies in holding the viewer in suspense between the fractured imagery of ruin and renewal, in making palpable both the violence of infrastructure and the fragility of undoing it, and how power is built and how it comes apart, leaving uncertainty in its wake.

In October 2024, just months after the final reservoir was drained, the first Chinook were spotted moving through stretches of river that had been blocked for a century. Their passage is a sign of recovery, but it is not a clean slate. The

land carries indelible damage. The last of Raven's video footage shows the extent of the drowned land behind the dam: its draining reveals the remains of long-submerged trees, vast swathes of silt-clogged land, ancient spawning grounds that need to be revived and an altered landscape that communities who live beside the Klamath must now navigate. *Murderers Bar* holds us in that double vision – the flow of water resumes and salmon are returning to the river, but it's also a reminder that while cycles of life begin again, the scars left behind take longer to heal.

Murderers Bar is on show as part of Lucy Raven:* Rounds*, at The Curve in the Barbican, London, 9 October–4 January. The film will also be on view at The Power Plant, Toronto, 7 November–22 March; the documentary* Lucy Raven: Pressure & Release *can be watched for free

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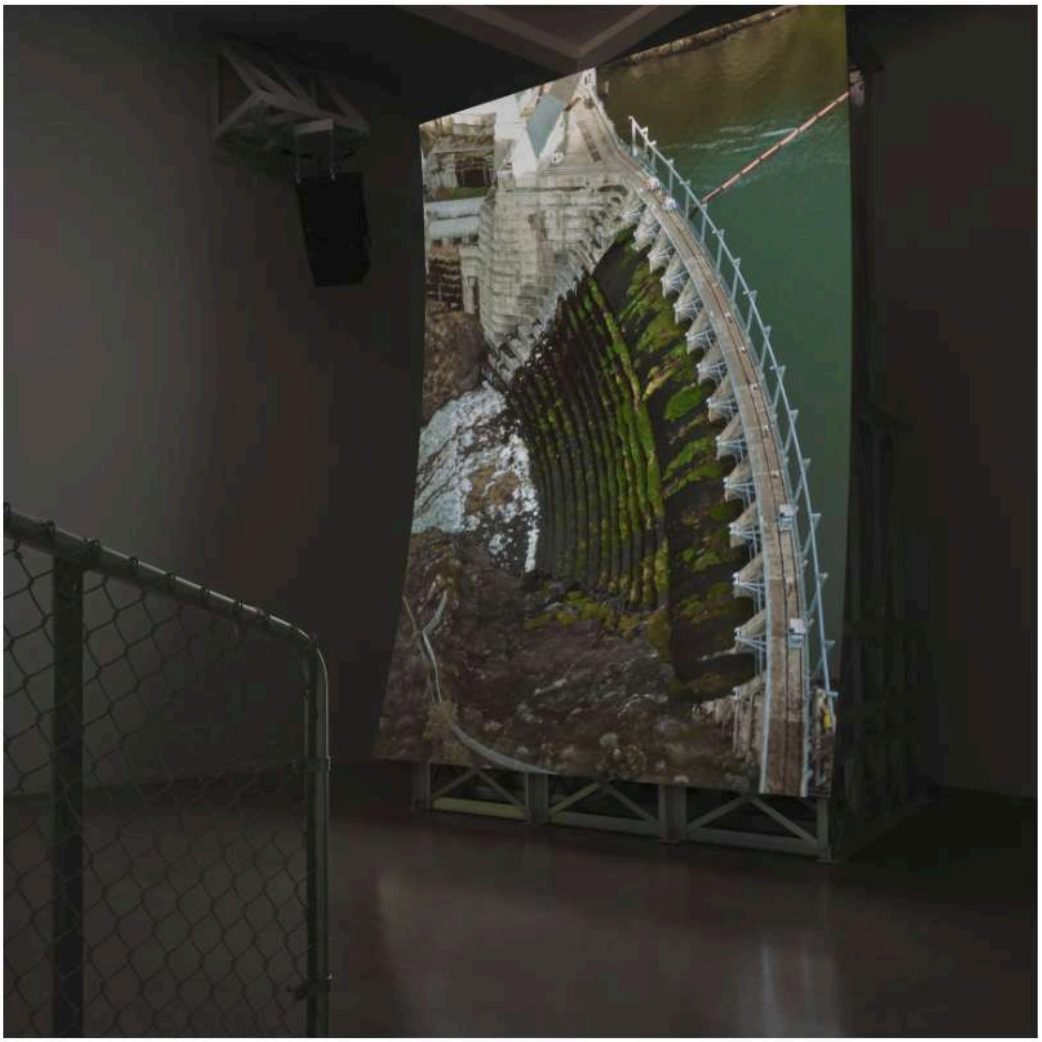
LISSON GALLERY

Art Forum
1 October 2025

ARTFORUM

LUCY RAVEN'S *MURDERERS BAR*, 2025

By Anne Reeve



Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar*, 2025, 4K video (color and black-and-white, sound, 41 minutes 40 seconds), aluminum and plywood screen, aluminum seating structure. Installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery. From the series "The Drumfire," 2021–25.

THE OMINOUSLY TITLED *Murderers Bar*, 2025, is the culmination of artist Lucy Raven's multiyear, multipronged series focused on the American West. Collectively called "The Drumfire," 2021–25, this opus (which includes works in varying media) is anchored by three feature-length video presentations, each devoted to a different agent of what Raven calls "material state change"[1]—in other words, matter under pressure. The first video work in the series, *Ready Mix*, 2021, follows the strangely hypnotic rumble of cement production at an Idaho mixing plant, from sand to finished block. The second, *Demolition of a Wall* (in two parts, *Albums 1* and *2*, 2022), charts the eerie staccato of airflow disrupted by shock waves at a blast-testing range in New Mexico. *Murderers Bar*, which was co-commissioned by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Toronto's Vega Foundation, takes on a third kind of elemental transformation: the largest dam-removal project in US history, concluded last year on the Klamath River in Northern California. This final installment in Raven's project will be shown at Toronto's Power Plant from November 7, and is part of a solo exhibition at the Barbican Centre, London, opening on October 9 and traveling to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, in May 2026.

Raven is part of an artistic generation intent on reading the landscape as a text, rather than as a muted slate. Hers is not the passive tabula of 1960s Land art; instead, she approaches the West as a symbol of the American imaginary and a sphere where extractive and militarized forces contend with nature, the social fabric, and each other. "The Drumfire"—named after a term originally coined in reference to the percussive thrum of artillery bombing that was omnipresent for German frontline soldiers in World War I—constitutes a meditative if sinister investigation, offering up an American West that is forensically measured by its resources: earth, air, and now water.

Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar*, 2025, still from the 4K video component (color and black-and-white, sound, 41 minutes 40 seconds) of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising an aluminum and plywood screen and an aluminum seating structure. From the series "The Drumfire," 2021–25.

The moniker "Murderers Bar" is said to refer to a site along the Klamath River where white settlers and Indigenous residents repeatedly and violently clashed during the California Gold Rush era. (A nineteenth-century settler renamed the area "Happy Camp" in an attempt to recoup its image; Google Maps and the US Census Bureau still use this name today.) In the twentieth century, hydroelectric dams were erected along the river, catalyzing development in the area but decimating natural ecosystems, including the run paths of the Coho and Chinook salmon integral to local First Nations communities whose livelihoods and traditions were tightly tied to the river. Following decades of complex public/private negotiations advanced by a consortium of environmental and Native advocates—including representatives from the Hoopa, Karuk, and Klamath Tribes, the Shasta Indian Nation, and the Yurok Tribe—the dams' ultimate removal marked a notable, and arguably unprecedented, political achievement.

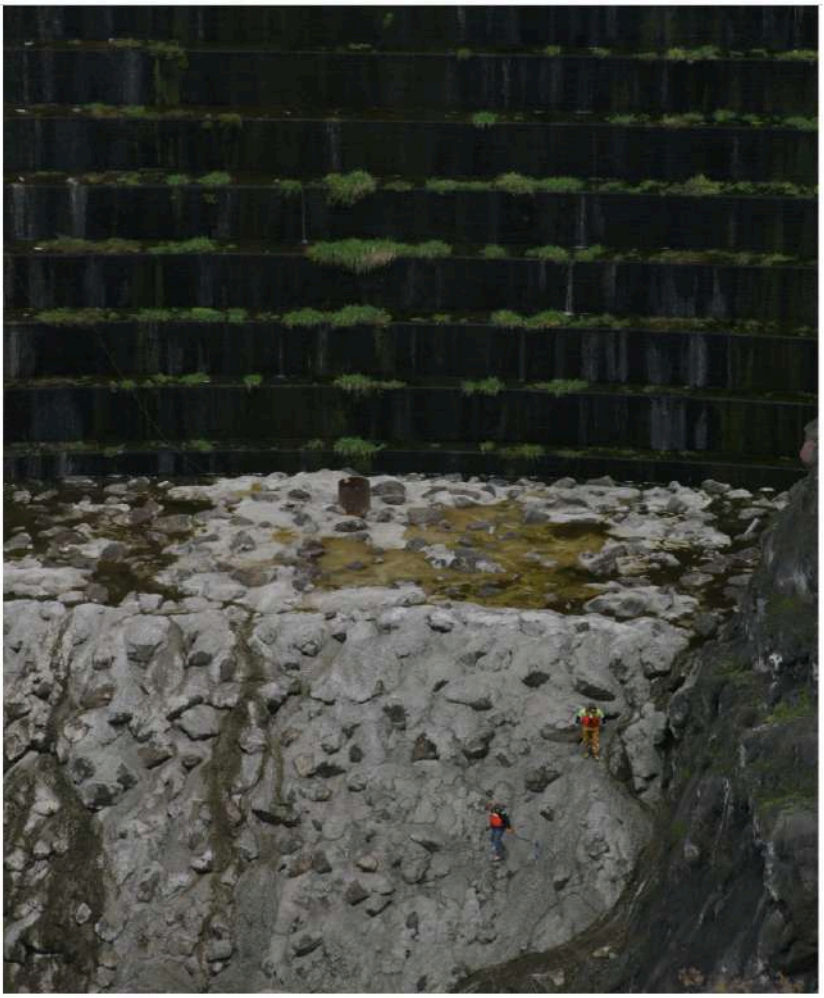
Running just under forty-two minutes and shot primarily from helicopters and drones, *Murderers Bar* documents the drawdown of Copco 1, the oldest of the dams along the lower Klamath Valley. Raven is characteristically deliberate when it comes to each aspect of the work's staging: The single-channel video is projected with quadrophonic sound onto a monumentally scaled scaffolded vertical screen that curves slightly inward at top and bottom. It is an imposing object/surface hybrid, something akin to a portrait-mode fever dream bisected by the impressive image of the river running through it, like a Barnett Newman zip. The screen's bulk and curvature strain outward to encroach upon viewers, who watch from tiered bleachers enclosed on three sides by a chain-link fence. The installation recalls a barricade, a prison yard, a drive-in, and a construction site, all in one immersive and unsettling package.

Murderers Bar drafts the Klamath River's portrait in a collage that unfurls less like a naturalist's record and more like a lab experiment in semi-real time: Here are the conditions, here is the pressure exerted on those conditions, here is the aftermath.

Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar*, 2025, still from the 4K video component (color and black-and-white, sound, 41 minutes 40 seconds) of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising an aluminum and plywood screen and an aluminum seating structure. From the series "The Drumfire," 2021–25.

We are flipped from the jump. The opening image somersaults backward twice before settling quietly just over the surface of an undisturbed reservoir, then submerging to reveal digital animation of its underwater topography. When the frame shifts up and over the reservoir's edge, Copco 1 appears as a concrete colossus, standing sentry over the river naively burbling below. Humans are bit players here. We see them scramble down the dam's facade like ants and lay explosives deep within the structure's core, then again as tiny dots on an adjacent cliff, watching the opening of the tunnel and waiting for the blast. When it comes, liquid appears to be shattered by matter, carrying a century's worth of sediment through the tunnel and into the river in a violent, pressurized instant.

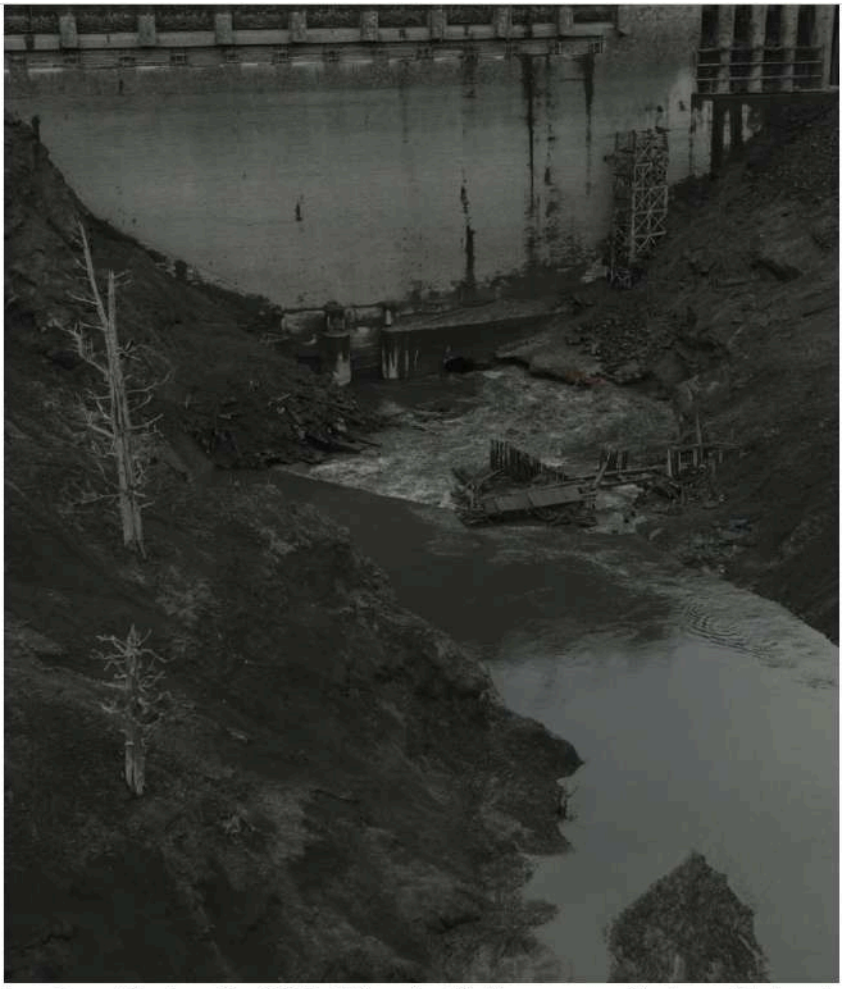
The camera stalks the flow of the deposit as it overtakes the riverbed inch by inch, mile by mile. When it encounters a convergence, the earth barrels through clear water, spreading dark matter like ink. Jump cuts punctuated by the sound of explosions move us incrementally downstream, ultimately out and over the Pacific Ocean. But there we are flipped again, as the video changes from color to black-and-white and we begin a gasping and erratic push back upriver. The camera intermittently dives below the surface and breaks above it; underwater, the rushing sound is constant and suffocating, as we travel through a murky parallel world where muck-filled water slams against the lens. It is a reprieve to reemerge from the water and see the dam once again, but now the structure looms as something alien—a mammoth grayscale ghost (and a neat addition, perhaps, to Bernd and Hilla Becher's deadpan photographic typologies of industrial buildings). The video's final scenes return us up and over the dam and stealthily back to color, to what is now a newly drained reservoir. Raven tracks miles of freshly unearthed landscape left waterlogged in the wake, a desolate swath through which the renewed Klamath already carves a steady and sinuous channel. The video loops, and we begin again.



Lucy Raven, ***Murderers Bar*****, 2025,** still from the 4K video component (color and black-and-white, sound, 41 minutes 40 seconds) of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising an aluminum and plywood screen and an aluminum seating structure. From the series "The Drumfire," 2021–25.

The lushness on-screen hits hard, and the scale of the enterprise (both as image and experience) is physically and sensorially overwhelming. Of all the "Drumfire"works, this is the most visually indulgent, redolent with the seductive grandeur of the American West as captured in the aloof, muscular images of proselytizers from Ansel Adams to Michael Heizer. Unlike these predecessors, however, Raven portrays the river as a medium with its own agenda: a line drawing that charges its way through the valley, an object whose contours strain against efforts to contain it, and a moving image of roiling abstraction. *Murderers Bar* drafts the Klamath's portrait in a collage that unfurls less like a naturalist's record and more like a lab experiment in semi-real time: Here are the conditions, here is the pressure exerted on those conditions, here is the aftermath. Notwithstanding the beauty—and it is staggering—I found myself thinking less of nineteenth-century landscape painter Albert Bierstadt and more of the apocalyptic sublime of Bruce Conner's 1976 film *Crossroads* (featuring a nuclear explosion in slow motion) or the flow state inscribed by Lynda Benglis's latex pours and lavalike seepages—sculptures that are hardened in place mid-slump like remnants from a crime scene.

A crime scene, indeed. Raven is ever attentive to the imaging of the West as a kind of battleground, where surveillance (and the camera's inexorable links to the military apparatus) tussles with sentimentality in a centuries-long project from which the national psyche cannot seem to unlatch. Her work also alludes to the cinematic genre of the western, with its flat-footed gaze and violence-as-theater, as well as to the aggression of man-made development, with its presumptuous sprawl. In the end, *Murderers Bar* is a site wherethese many legacies of violence coalesce. This is the American West actualized and disoriented, where humans are an afterthought. To view the work is to withstand an episode of forced disequilibrium underscored by shifting pace, vertical compression, and relentless churn. (Raven deliberately overrode the mechanism that stabilizes the camera's horizon line—there is no fixed position here.) Composer Deantoni Parks's score sustains and amplifies the tension, heightening the creeping pretense of water rushing forward and the punishing breathlessness of struggling back upstream. *Murderers Bar* shows us the sum of industrial achievement and the stakes of its devastation, human-made but altogether more than human. We cannot untangle ourselves. It is mutually assured destruction.



Lucy Raven, *Murderers Bar*, 2025, still from the 4K video component (color and black-and-white, sound, 41 minutes 40 seconds) of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising an aluminum and plywood screen and an aluminum seating structure. From the series "The Drumfire," 2021–25.

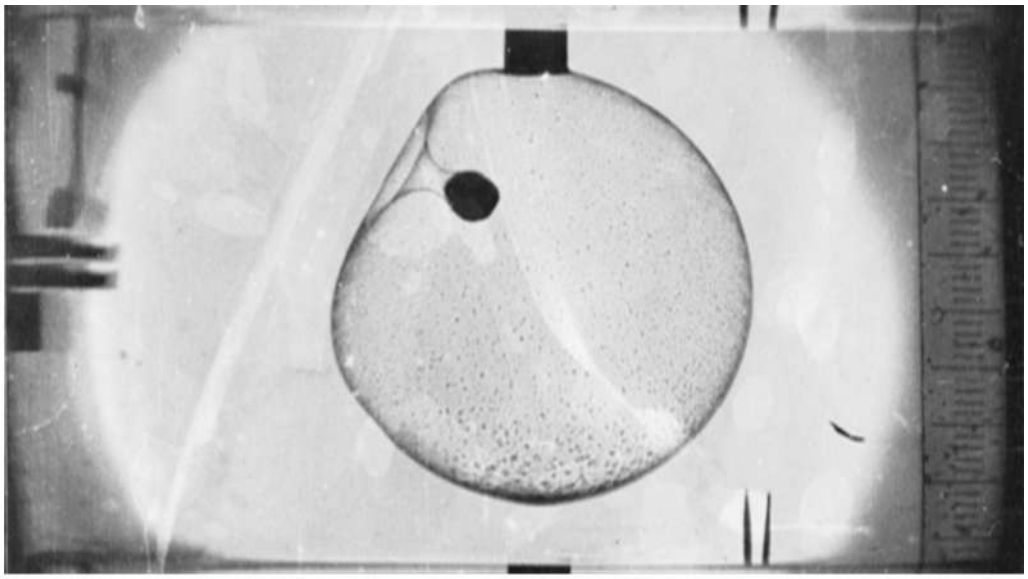
What happens once the damage is done? It has been intriguing to see news reports of the river valley's renewal since the dam's removal last year. Words and images attest to the remarkable swiftness with which salmon have resumed their run, flora have blossomed, and traces of the former reservoir are being smoothed away. This past summer, a group of Indigenous high schoolers set out to raft one hundred uninterrupted miles of the river, undertaking a journey that would have been impossible a century ago. And yet. At the time of writing, federal funding committed to rehabilitating the Klamath Valley is under threat.[2] Whether or how such efforts will proceed remains to be seen. Raven's marvel of a case study recapitulates the dissonance whereby cycles—political, social, structural, ecological—continue, monuments are created and destroyed and momentum is incited and frustrated, all while costs continue to mount. The river is the first to remind us that stoppage is a fallacy, hubris. Progress is a phantom. We are above the surface and below, clear and clouded, rendered in images and data points that never fully align. We advance only to be whipped back to the start, where we will begin again, changed and still the same. From *Murderers Bar* to Happy Camp. We are out to sea. We turn back. What could go wrong?

The Brooklyn Rail
November 2023

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Two Observations on Early Origins of the Western: Pressure Studies

By Lucy Raven



Lucien Bull (in the studio of Etienne Jules Marey), *Bullet Piercing a Soap Bubble*, 1904.

I.

Surface tension: Bullet Piercing a Soap Bubble (or: Solid Chunk piercing Hollow Round), 1904

Lit in silhouette, a bubble is suspended from a short rod, filling most of a vignetted black-and-white frame. Immediately a solid form enters from the left, headed directly for the delicate sphere. The contour of this smaller round is irregular. Excreted from an unseen ejector, its stuttered trail reveals it traveled faster, thus farther, between film frames than was captured, but not by much. The bubble absorbs this intrusion. It conforms its surface around the foreign object as it moves. It forms the model of a gravitational black hole around the thing, growing deeper and narrower as the shadowed shape travels inward until its force stretches the bubble's outer limits, and the

chunk is inside. The bubble is intact. Its contour has reformed around the projectile still hurtling through its interior. Now it arrives at the far side of the bubble's inner boundary, which at last it punctures as it stays its straight course. The perfect soapy circumference dissipates backward from the break in a shrinking arc, a hemispheric droplet in the last frame precisely as the bullet passes out of it.

There is a ruler on the right, a frame counter at the bottom edge, and the silhouette of other instruments on the left. The film is a demonstration, made in a controlled interior environment: an early studio film. The footage is looped at several speeds in the movie that circulates of the event, lengthening through repetition this very short, short where a glistening globe is punctured, reformed, then destroyed anew.

Annie Oakley (with her husband, sharpshooter Frank Butler, as assistant, in Thomas Edison's Black Maria Studio produced by WKL Dickson and filmed by William Heise, for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show) 1894.

II. Pressure chamber: Annie Oakley (or: In order to capture smoke from a discharged rifle)

The action has already begun. Lit harshly against flat black, a woman donning a cowboy hat and a long dress with fringed sleeves cocks a rifle and aims across the frame toward a vertical white sheet hung with seven rounded targets. The targets' angle is the only indication of scale in this interior, revealing a room barely bigger than the shooter and the assistant behind her, who wears a collared shirt, a vest, and an Alpine Derby hat. With each rapid

discharge and reload, the shooter hits another mark until the paper has seven holes where the targets used to be. In the same beat she kneels and picks up a second rifle from the ground as her assistant strides across the frame while loading his right hand with objects he holds in his left. In near synchrony he kneels while tossing one of them into the air as the rifle is raised and fired. A contrail of smoke traces each vector. Every impact takes place above the top edge of the frame but one after another, through a fading smoke cloud each falls, dead weight, back into it.

The featureless, darkened interior is a vanishing point zoomed all the way in: The absorption of frontier. A negative horizon turned inside out to make a small room.

Contributor

Lucy Raven
Lucy Raven is an artist who lives and works in New York City.

The Wall Street Journal
30th December 2023

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

ICONS

New Art for a New Year

Five artists discuss their plans for 2023, from drawing and painting to sound sculpture and performance art

Nick Cave, 'Hustle Coat' (2021). MIDGE WATTLES/SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION

By Susan Delson
Dec. 30, 2022 3:30 pm ET

In 2022 the art world roared back from Covid hibernation, with artists and museums staging postponed exhibitions and completing long-term projects. Now many artists are looking forward to 2023 with a heightened sense of possibility and fresh directions.

Anicka Yi with her installation 'In Love With the World' at the Tate Modern in London.
PHOTO: JOE HUMPHRYS/TATE

Anicka Yi, 51, a Korean-American artist whose work blends biological and technological forms, describes her recent installation at Tate Modern in London as "the realization of my wildest dreams." Three years in the making, "In Love With The World" filled the Tate's Turbine Hall—which once housed a power plant—with airborne machines based on ocean life-forms and mushrooms, their behavior determined by an artificial life simulation program. In the spring, "Metaspore," Ms. Yi's first major survey show, opened at Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan. The artist found that seeing "over a decade of my practice condensed in a single location" brought unexpected insights into her own work. That sense of reflection also sparked her first experiments in painting. In the coming year, Ms. Yi says she is looking forward to being an artist in residence at Stanford, where she plans to build a community of thinkers connecting the art world, the natural sciences and emerging technologies.

One artist whom Ms. Yi finds "radically inspiring" is Guadalupe Maravilla, whose work draws on his own experiences of migration, illness and healing. Mr. Maravilla, 46, came to the U.S. in 1984 as an undocumented, unaccompanied 8-year-old fleeing civil war in El Salvador. As an adult, he was diagnosed with cancer, leading him to explore indigenous healing practices such as sound baths: "Sound, to me, is medicine," he has written. In 2022 he exhibited his work at four museums, including MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum, staging ritual healing performances that involved his

'Mariposa Relampago,' a work in progress by Guadalupe Maravilla.
PHOTO: GUADALUPE MARAVILLA/P.P.O.W NEW YORK

Mr. Maravilla is now immersed in a project that will be the centerpiece of his late-spring show at the ICA Watershed in Boston. Working with mechanics, artisans and shamans, he is transforming a school bus into an outsize sound sculpture. Bureaucratic snarl-ups prevented the "healing bus" from following its intended route from El Salvador. Instead, it will travel from Mexico to Boston, where it will be activated as a massive "vibrational healing instrument," says Mr. Maravilla.

In 2023, film artist Lucy Raven, 45, plans to complete a trilogy of moving-image installations that she refers to as "Westerns." The first, the critically acclaimed "Ready Mix" (2021), was filmed at an industrial cement plant in Idaho, translating its mechanical processes into a succession of striking, near-abstract images. The two parts of the second installment, "Demolition of a Wall" (2022), were filmed last spring at an explosives range in New Mexico, using a variety of imaging techniques to depict pressure-blast shock waves moving through the air. Ms. Raven is now in preproduction on the third installment, which will focus on "the role of water and fluid dynamics, pressures, breaches, diversions" to examine hydropower in the Western U.S.

A 2021 installation by Lucy Raven at the Dia Art Foundation in New York.
PHOTO: BILL JACOBSON STUDIO/DIA ART FOUNDATION

"Nick Cave: Forothermore," now on view at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, offers a career-spanning retrospective of the Chicago-based artist best known for his "Soundsuits"—wearable sculptures that are ornate and colorful, often incorporating found objects. Mr. Cave, 63, made repeat visits to the exhibition in its debut run at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago last spring, which helped him realize how deeply his work has been rooted in "the subject of racism and profiling and injustice."

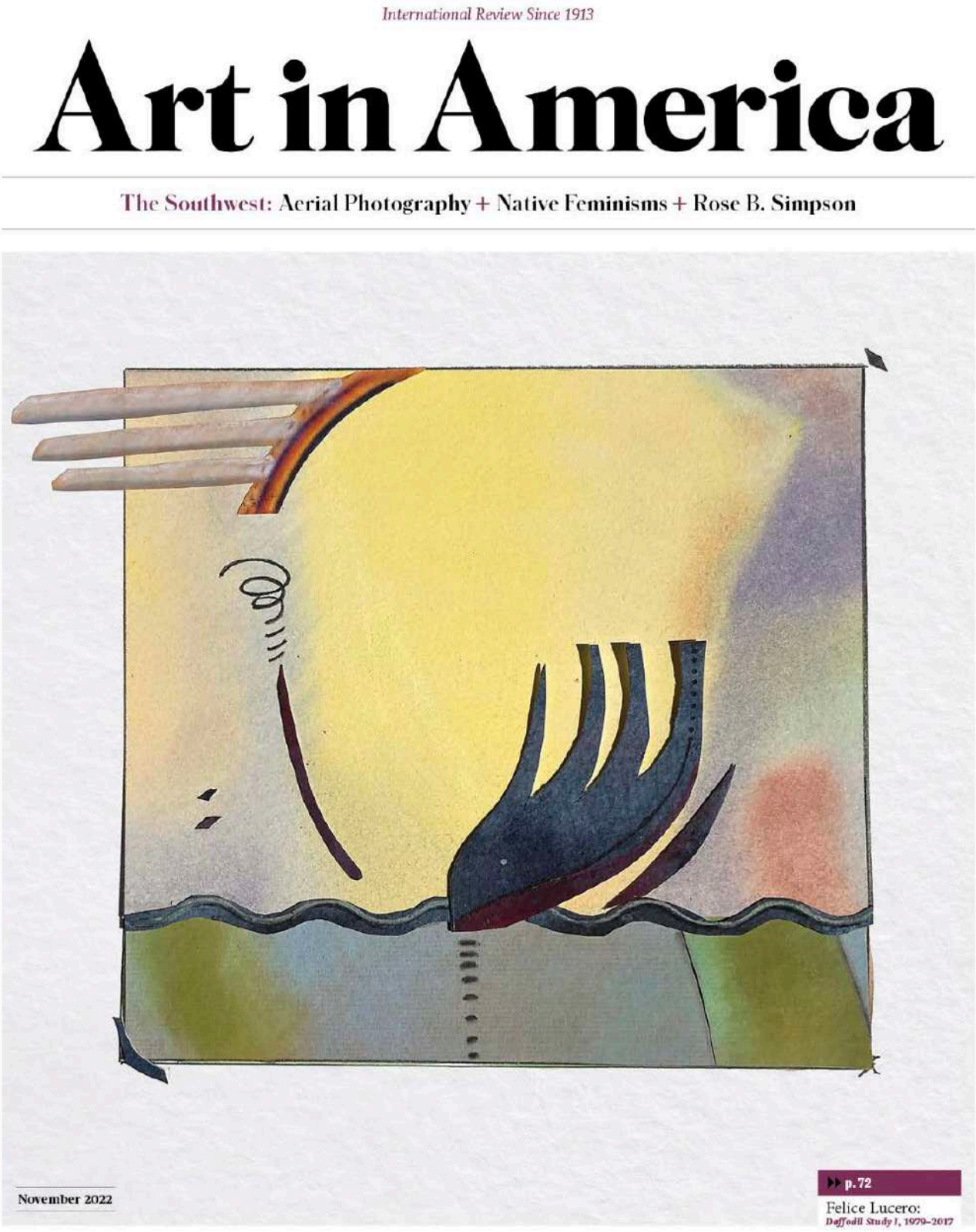
Seeing that so plainly, he says, "gave me permission to close this chapter of my practice and to ask other questions...I don't know quite what that means or what it's going to look like," he says, but "I am prepping for a new body of work." Meanwhile, he is focusing on "Mammoth," a performance piece sparked by "that moment of recognition and transition" in bringing the "Soundsuits" to a close. In this piece he is "thinking about preservation, and how do we hold onto a memory? What could that look like?"

Richard Serra, 'Four Rounds: Equal Weight, Unequal Measure' (2017).
PHOTO: GLENSTONE MUSEUM

The sculptor Richard Serra recently collaborated on the design of a building that opened this summer at Glenstone, the contemporary art museum in Potomac, Md., that houses his monumental 2017 sculpture "Four Rounds: Equal Weight, Unequal Measure." As he heads into the new year, the 84-year-old artist acknowledges that he is slowing down but says he continues to draw every day. "I have drawn from the time I was a kid," he explains. Asked to summarize his thinking about art in the new year, Mr. Serra distills a single flinty phrase: "Keep at it."

LISSON GALLERY

Art in America
November 2022



Lucy Raven: *Demolition of a Wall (Album 1)*, 2022, video, 20 minutes, 58 seconds. The diagonal line at lower right is a shock wave filmed at high speed.

Shock Waves & Wet Concrete

Lucy Raven in conversation with Andy Battaglia

Born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, Lucy Raven has engaged the Southwest as a subject in multiple mediums in various ways. Among her most notable recent works are *Ready Mix* (2021), an immersive film installation featuring earthy and abstract footage from a concrete plant in Bellevue, Idaho, and *Demolition of a Wall* (*Album 1* and *2*), a pair of related films from this year focused on blast waves captured via high-speed camera technology at an explosives range in Socorro, New Mexico. Other works related to the region include *China Town* (2009), an animated projection piece drawing on thousands of photographs that trace the production of copper wire, beginning with the mining of ore in Nevada. *Ready Mix* was made on commission for the Dia Art Foundation, whose connection to the Southwest involves overseeing Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, and Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels*. *Demolition of a Wall (Album 1)* was shown as part of the 2022 Whitney Biennial. During a discussion at her studio in New York, where she is currently based, Raven talked about her upbringing, the evolution of recent artworks, and how she came to know more—and less—about the Southwest from afar.

Opposite: Courtesy Lisson Gallery, New York/© Lucy Raven

ANDY BATTAGLIA When did you first become conscious of the fact that you lived in the Southwest?

LUCY RAVEN My dad is from New York, and we would visit now and then when I was a kid. My first visit was when I was 5. We went to MoMA. We went to the Bronx, where my grandma lived. It made a big impact on me, and that was the first time I was conscious of where we lived as being really "other." There was a kind of grounding, another pole, one being Arizona and the other New York.

BATTAGLIA What do you remember first feeling was distinctive about Arizona?

RAVEN One part of it is sensation-based and the other is visual. I still have a physical memory of the feeling of getting into a car on a 110-degree day, when you breathe in and everything around you is hotter than your body temperature. That feels very Tucson-summer to me. It's hard to place if this came later or not, but visually I remember the horizon. Everywhere you looked would be a horizon, because Tucson is in a basin and there are very few multistory buildings. But it's not a flat horizon like in Montana or Wyoming—there are mountains all around, so as a kid I had the sense that I was bound by a square. The horizon didn't feel infinite. There was also something about the way that the streets go through the entire flat city, and then certain of them end and a handful become viaducts into the surrounding desert. I remember traveling through that while looking through a backseat window.

BATTAGLIA Do you remember when you first thought of Arizona as a distinct place within the region as a whole?

RAVEN Growing up, I was conscious of it as a very conservative state. Tucson is a Democratic island in the middle of it, and there's a rivalry between Tucson and Phoenix, part of which has to do with politics, part with sports. I was aware of our proximity to the border with Mexico and spent time around it on both sides. I knew that Arizona was thought of as conservative, but I didn't realize to what extent until I moved to New York [in 2001, after graduating from the University of Arizona] and saw people's reactions when I said I was from there. Until this year, I thought the political situation might be changing, but the tide seems to be turning back again, hard.

BATTAGLIA How would you characterize Arizona's status within the region itself? In what way is it most unique?

RAVEN This is an area that feels tricky, because it's hard not to essentialize. I'm interested in the notion of regionalism, but I'm also skeptical of it. Coming up with the core sentiment or property or whatever it is that is Arizona ... I don't know. It's like I never knew, and I almost know less now. The more I've worked out West and also read about it and watched and talked to people, the less I feel like I know. But I do have an immovable relationship to the landscape. It's embedded in how I look at the world and my relationship to space.

BATTAGLIA When did you first engage with Land art? How far back does that go?

RAVEN I didn't know much about it in high school, but when I was in college I got really interested in geography and photography, and then the history of large-format and landscape photography. I wrote for a history of photography class on the Central Arizona Project Photographic Survey, which documented the massive aqueduct that brings water from the Colorado River to Tucson. Later, I encountered the work of artists associated with Land art—Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria—and then more process-oriented stuff like work by Robert Morris. One early memory I have is taking off from the Tucson airport and seeing the sewage treatment plants as brightly gradated shapes**.** I can see now that I first encountered those aspects of industry as an abstraction**.**

BATTAGLIA When did you begin to think of making artwork related to the Southwest as a subject?

RAVEN I met someone who turned me on to Matthew Coolidge and his Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI). I ended up doing a residency there on and off for three years, out of which came several works, including *China Town*. It was really from New York that I began to think more critically about "the West" as such. The residency was pretty much a trailer on the airstrip of a decommissioned military air base in Wendover, Utah, right on the border of Nevada. When I first got there, Matthew met me, showed me around, took me for lunch at a casino, and told me, "Have a good month." It was totally independent. There was a map with points of interest, with *Spiral Jetty*, *Sun Tunnels*, and other things that were within driving distance. I explored all that stuff from there, but I hadn't been to any of them before. I just went to *The Lightning Field* a couple years ago, which was fantastic, interesting, weird.

BATTAGLIA What did you work on during your CLUI residency?

RAVEN My original idea was to make a piece at the Bingham Canyon Mine, which is a massive pit that Smithson wrote about in an essay, describing a proposal for a piece he never made. If you fly into Salt Lake City, you can see it as you're landing—you see the Great Salt Lake from one side of the airplane and the Bingham pit on the other. You can see it from the moon. It's one of the biggest holes in the world. It was started and owned by the Guggenheim family. The money that came from their smelting company went into making the museum in New York. It's an interesting history. But it was tricky to film there to the extent that I wanted, so I ended up making a different project about a real estate development that the current mining company was building atop the old tailings ponds.

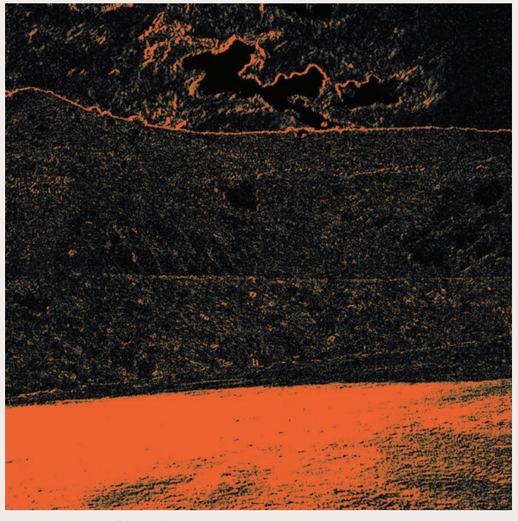
China Town started at a different mine, not too far away in Nevada. Where I was staying, in Wendover, a very loud truck would barrel down the otherwise rarely used road every hour, 24 hours a day. It looked like it was carrying ore. I followed one of them one day, and it led me to another mine where they were excavating copper ore, processing it partially on-site, then sending that material to China to be smelted, refined, and sold there. I didn't set out to make a work about the West. *China Town* started with questions about a source that was also a giant void—the excavation of a resource that would get broken down and reformed into a conduit of connection through an extremely discontinuous, globalized production process. The recent work I'm thinking of much more as a kind of riff on the genre of the Western.

BATTAGLIA When did you first see Walter De Maria's 1969 film *Hard Core*?

RAVEN I saw that in the context of making an "Artists on Artists" piece for Dia with Deantoni Parks. I'd known for a number of years that De Maria was a drummer for the Primitives, a rock band that prefigured the Velvet Underground with members also including Lou Reed and John Cale—who, coincidentally, Deantoni now drums for. The fact that De Maria was a drummer inflected how I thought about his work—the rhythms he set up within individual pieces—and seemed like a way into the relationships in his work between violence, abstraction, and materiality, which I was also thinking about. I was surprised to see *Hard Core* because it was connected to other structural film that I'm interested in but hadn't associated with De Maria. It's really homemade in a way that his sculpture isn't—you get the sense that he and Michael Heizer are just handing a camera back and forth while doing their shootout scene at the end. There's a humor to it, despite the long-duration shots and the genre violence. It's a kind of droll Western.

BATTAGLIA What was the genesis of the idea for *Ready Mix*?

RAVEN It started in some ways with a residency I did in the Philippines. The location where I found myself was in the lowlands below Mount Pinatubo, which is a massive volcano and the site of one of the largest volcanic eruptions in the 20th century, in 1991. I landed at Clark Air Force Base, the largest base outside the United States. I had been taught in school that the Philippines was a Spanish colony—but not what happened after, when the US purchased it from Spain, along with Puerto Rico and Guam,



Demolition of a Wall (Album 2), 2022, video with quadraphonic sound, 15 minutes, 31 seconds.

Courtesy Lisson Gallery, New York/©Lucy Raven

Print Insert: *Working drawing for Demolition of a Wall (Album 1)*, 2022, pen on paper. This drawing emerged as part of research and development undertaken for Raven's recent project filmed in Socorro, New Mexico.

in 1898, and ruled it as a colonizing power for the next 48 years. There were protests over the presence of Clark for decades after the Philippines gained independence, but the US refused to leave. When Mount Pinatubo erupted, it was so powerful that it extruded lahars, a kind of ashy pyroclastic flow. They're brutal because they flow like lava and can engulf entire towns and then harden. They call it "wet concrete." Entire areas were destroyed. The event and its aftermath are what finally pushed the US off the Air Force Base, though it left a Superfund site behind.

Manila is also largely a concrete city, and the master plan in its city center was designed by Daniel Burnham, the grandfather of city planning in the United States. I got interested in that moment in US history when the Gold Rush had ended in California—and with it, some idea of the frontier myth—and the concept of Manifest Destiny was projected farther west. From the Pacific Coast at that time, the Philippines could be seen as an extension of the Western frontier.

BATTAGLIA How do these ideas relate to the form that *Ready Mix* took?

RAVEN I spend a lot of time in Idaho and knew someone with a concrete plant, so I visited that to see what it was like. One of the things I felt was important to me while thinking through these questions was the material state change that was an element of the lahars. When I went to the concrete plant and saw what could happen there, I started doing some camera experiments, with drones and with different kinds of close-up camerawork. Then Dia got involved.

BATTAGLIA How did that change or inflect your thinking, given Dia's history?

RAVEN Many of the artists Dia has worked with are part of my personal art history, so a lot of affinities were there already. What was transformative was the support, in every way—production support, but also the legacy of how Dia had worked in decades past supporting ideas for longer-term projects, allowing the scale to take shape in a way that didn't feel restricted.

BATTAGLIA What was the genesis of the idea for your *Demolition of a Wall* works?

RAVEN I had been researching various imaging techniques through which you can arrive at an image without an object—without a subject, essentially—while still capturing movement. I had been looking at several 19th-century techniques that can register changes in light's movement, through heat or pressure, as a density gradient. In some ways my interest in this dates back to the initial CLUI residency in 2005, because that airport in Wendover is where the *Enola Gay* took off from to drop the atomic bomb. I became very interested in Harold Edgerton's work and the images he made of the early stages of atomic bomb detonation: those images look cellular. They were made with a rapatronic camera that Edgerton developed as a commission from the military to understand what the bomb looked like before a mushroom cloud formed. The kind of camera I used for *Demolition of a Wall* is a different system, but comes out of an evolution of those ideas. I spent some time in Berlin and did research in Ernst Mach's photographic archives there. He was the first person to photograph shock waves; we got "Mach speed" from him.

BATTAGLIA Why did you choose New Mexico as a setting for the *Demolition* works?

RAVEN I knew I wanted the landscape to be primary to the piece, which meant shooting outside. The techniques I used are more often employed in an interior lab context, but in pursuing what might be possible on an outdoor explosives range, I was introduced to an engineering professor specializing in optics, Michael Hargather, at New Mexico Tech, a mining college in Socorro that's connected to a blast site. I think of the *Demolition* works as series of short films, rather than one longer narrative film. It's more in the tradition of what Tom Gunning called the "cinema of attractions," very early pre-narrative cinema where just one thing happens and makes up a film—one gag, one spectacle, one gesture. Shock waves from one explosion pass across the screen, that's the movie.

BATTAGLIA You've talked about *Ready Mix* and *Demolition of a Wall* as two parts of a trilogy of Westerns. What does that mean to you exactly?

RAVEN My focus, rather than being based on narrative or characters, is on material and material state change. I think of *Ready Mix* as something to do with solids moving into a granular form and then into sludge before being reformed back into a solid. *Demolition of a Wall* has to do with air, pressure, force, extreme speed, histories of speed tests, and legacies of nuclear radiation and fallout. The third part of the trilogy will have to do more with fluid dynamics and water.

We all have an idea of what a "Western" is in our minds, and, with that as a baseline, I like thinking about it as a genre category. There are other genres I'm thinking about too, most specifically horror. But there's a way to think of Westerns as horror too, if a Western is the telling of the genocidal fighting-it-out for property and land ownership. ●

Demolition of a Wall (Album 1), 2022, on view at the Whitney Biennial, 2022.

Courtesy Lisson Gallery, New York/©Lucy Raven (2); Below right: Photo Ron Amstutz

The New York Times
15 April 2021

The New York Times

CRITIC'S PICK

Dia Chelsea, Keeper of the Avant-Garde Flame

A home of Minimalism has reopened after a transformative renovation and expansion, its purifying vision intact.

Lucy Raven's "Ready Mix," a film that was shot over two years at a concrete plant in Bellevue, Idaho, shown in the newly renovated and expanded Dia Chelsea. Lucy Raven and Dia Art Foundation; Bill Jacobson

By Roberta Smith
April 15, 2021

The saga of the Dia Art Foundation, New York's venerable nonprofit, begins a new chapter with its return to West Chelsea. Of course it never really left when it decamped for the Hudson Valley. But a welcome back feels appropriate, given the impeccable

But a welcome back feels appropriate, given the impeccable renovation of 20,000 square feet of public space across three buildings, and including a revived bookstore — all reconfigured and unified by Architecture Research Office (ARO).

Dia arrived on the block from SoHo in 1987, rehabilitating a big industrial building from the early 1900s that became its flagship, and staging a string of stunning exhibitions. It triggered the influx of commercial galleries that, for better and worse, made West Chelsea what it is today while also depressing its own attendance: Dia charged admission, the galleries did not. But it didn't charge admission to its spacious ground-floor bookstore, which was spectacularly tiled and furnished in shades of orange, yellow and turquoise by the artist Jorge Pardo in 2000. The bookstore became a literary magnet, a place for running into people and occasionally buying.

In 2003 the foundation rocked the art world by relocating most operations to Beacon, N.Y., and a much bigger flagship: a 300,000-square-foot factory that it renovated into Dia Beacon. The foundation maintained a foothold in Chelsea: two one-story buildings where exhibitions continued to be staged and, next to it, a six-story building that provided Dia with office space and rental income. But Dia had in reality disappeared from the neighborhood or at least gone underground. Chelsea felt diminished.

The one-story buildings are now the freshly redesigned East Gallery and West Gallery of the new Dia Chelsea. They have been joined to the ground floor of the building next door, which adds a new entrance, lobby, large lecture room and the bookstore. These spaces are united by a subtly patterned brick facade.

The result feels and mostly is new, inside and out, and has a real street presence. The proportions and detail of the exterior — the brickwork for example — make many of the other buildings on the street seem vaguely unkempt or worse. With the completion of this renovation came the announcement that admission would be free.

Dia Chelsea, encompassing three buildings along West 22nd Street, feels new inside and out. Elizabeth Felicella

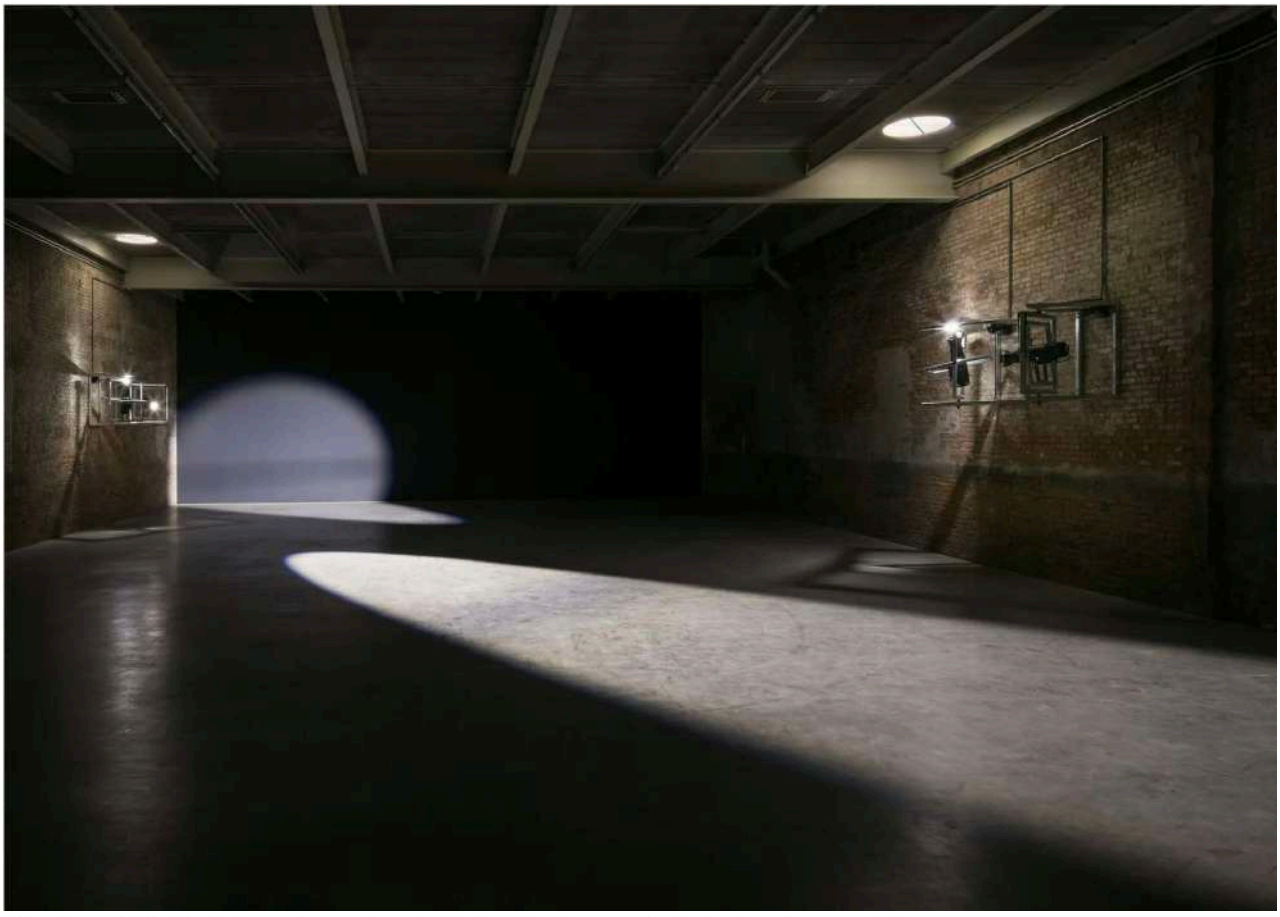
The reopening is being christened by two pieces commissioned from the installation artist Lucy Raven, known for her work with sound, animation and especially documentary film that explores issues of labor, technology, the mineral wealth and exploitation of the American West, along with the nature of film itself.

Dia has come a long way from its start in SoHo in 1974. In those days it was a boys' club that showered money and real estate upon a few anointed Minimal, Conceptual and earthwork artists like Walter de Maria, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and John Chamberlain. Although nonprofit, young Dia was essentially the first mega gallery. Its subtext: money is no object and only a very few artists really merit attention.

But Dia's spending was curtailed by a near-death brush with financial ruin in the 1990s. And with time, its roster became more

diverse. Its main female member early on was the German Conceptualist Hanne Darboven. Over the decades, she was joined by artists like Agnes Martin, Bridget Riley, Louise Bourgeois, Joan Jonas, Louise Lawler, Mary Corse and Dorothea Rockburne — and now, Lucy Raven.

Yet Dia remains very much the keeper of the Minimal-Conceptual-earthwork flame. Here, as in the looming hush of Dia Beacon, it is still possible to believe in modernist art as a fairly linear progression of abstract, stripped-down-to-essences art movements. Dia is our academy. Its constancy recalls Paul Valéry's adage that "Everything changes but the avant-garde."



Lucy Raven's kinetic light sculpture sends spotlights beaming through Dia Chelsea's newly renovated gallery. Lucy Raven and Dia Art Foundation; Bill Jacobson

Raven's commissions form a perfect inaugural pair. They are remarkably different; one is excellent, the other is fairly weak and the combination makes you think about both the potential and the limitations of Dia's mandarin point of view.

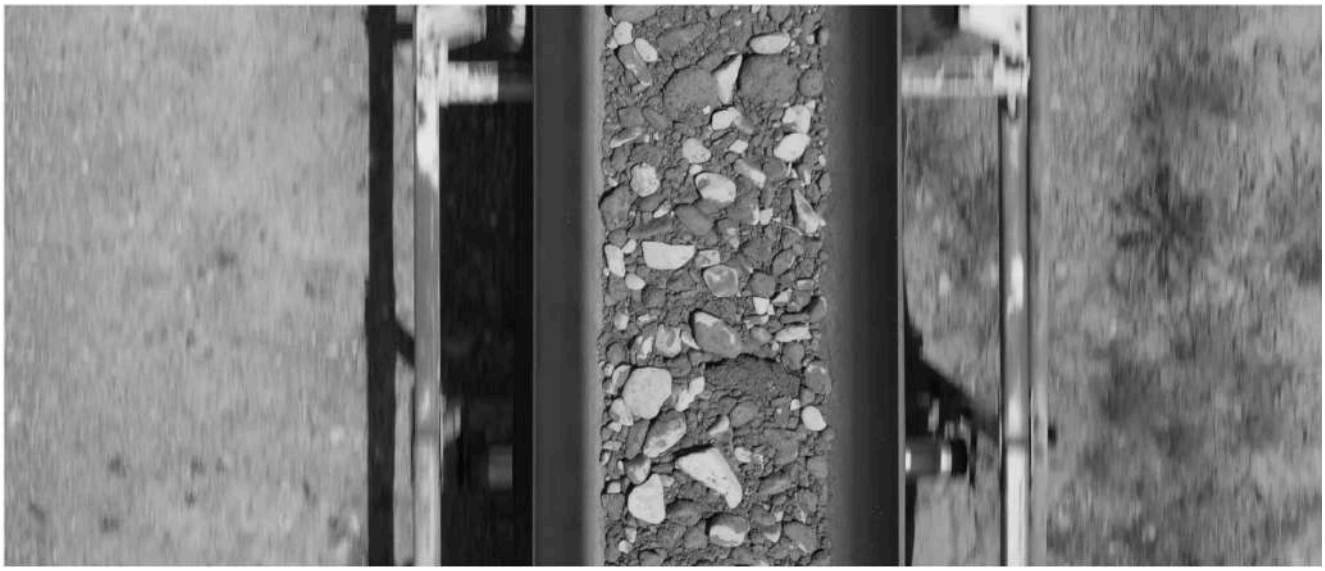
Installed in the smaller East Gallery, the weaker work is from the artist's "Caster" series. It consists of two pairs of spotlights whose customized armatures allow them to swivel and point in most directions while remaining attached to the wall, directed by a computer program written by the artist. The four spots roam the floor, walls and ceilings at various speeds, changing in shape, size and crispness as they move. They highlight this interior — with its newly restored steel beams and raw brick walls — bit by bit. But except for its digital precision, the exercise adds little to Minimalism's vaunted obsession with space and the lengthy tradition of nearly empty galleries as art. It veers too close to an old theater trick of wandering spotlights on an empty stage, making me wish for unseen actors speaking dialogue. Beckett perhaps?

Entering the larger West Gallery for "Ready Mix," Raven's second commission, it initially seems possible that this film installation will also ask more than it gives, but no. "Ready Mix" is a real achievement, perhaps a masterpiece. It follows the life cycle of concrete, from the extraction of gravel to large cast forms typical of post-9/11 barricades. The film builds on the aspects of Minimal, Conceptual and Earth art fundamental to the Dia vision, adding layers of economic, ecological and cultural meaning, and providing plenty to look at and think about.

An installation view of "Ready Mix" by Lucy Raven, which recounts the lifecycle of concrete from the extraction of gravel to cast-forms used for walls and barricades. Lucy Raven and Dia Art Foundation; Bill Jacobson

"Ready Mix" is projected on a nearly floor-to-ceiling curved screen held in place by a handsome structure of aluminum beams. The artist had in mind drive-in movies, although the aluminum bleachers from which the film can be viewed are more redolent of summertime outdoor movies.

All the silvery aluminum complements the elegant tones of this black-and-white film, creating a color-free world in which a tale of two instruments, metaphorically speaking, unfolds. The first is that of a giant open-air complex of machines and sites that, ultimately, yield the concrete. It encompasses gravel pits, earthmovers, blocklong dump trucks, even longer conveyor belts, immense chutes and concrete mixing trucks. All of these are arrayed in the flat, sunstruck emptiness of Idaho and seem to operate on their own, without a person in sight until the very end.



Detail of a conveyor belt from Raven's "Ready Mix," which our critic calls "beautiful, enthralling and sobering," shows Dia still embracing the legacy of the land artists it introduced in the 70s. Lucy Raven

The second is the camera itself, recording this implicitly brutal process through a disorienting combination of close-ups that sometimes take us inside the machines or look down in dazzling aerial views shot using a drone. We see masses of rocks and pebbles being mechanically sorted fill the screen. Different grades of gravel are sometimes still and nearly abstract; other times they rush past in a blur. Then the action jumps to a bird's-eye view as the camera wheels in sync with the earth movers or conveyor belts. Either way, scale can become mutable, hard to measure, which is riveting.

This a beautiful, enthralling, sobering film. It is also a compelling one, its inherent drama enhanced by a soundtrack that combines recorded ambient sound with tracks of performed and digital music, achieved by Raven in collaboration with the composer and percussionist Deantoni Parks. Altogether it provides an indelible view of the relentless giantism of 21st-century industry and its tendencies to ruin, overbuild, waste and pollute. At the end, we see concrete cast into huge building blocks that are hoisted into rows as if to wall out the world outside.

The excellence of "Ready Mix" exemplifies the singularity and importance of Dia and its sometimes narrow faith in artistic progress, just as the all-but-new building reflects its high standards of design. On both counts, it is beyond great to see its purifying vision back on West 22nd Street. In the city that never sleeps, the Dia Art Foundation seems, after a hiatus, fully awake.

Lucy Raven

Through Jan. 2022, Dia Chelsea, 537 West 22nd Street, 845-231-0811; diaart.org. Timed entry tickets required.

Artforum
13 April 2021

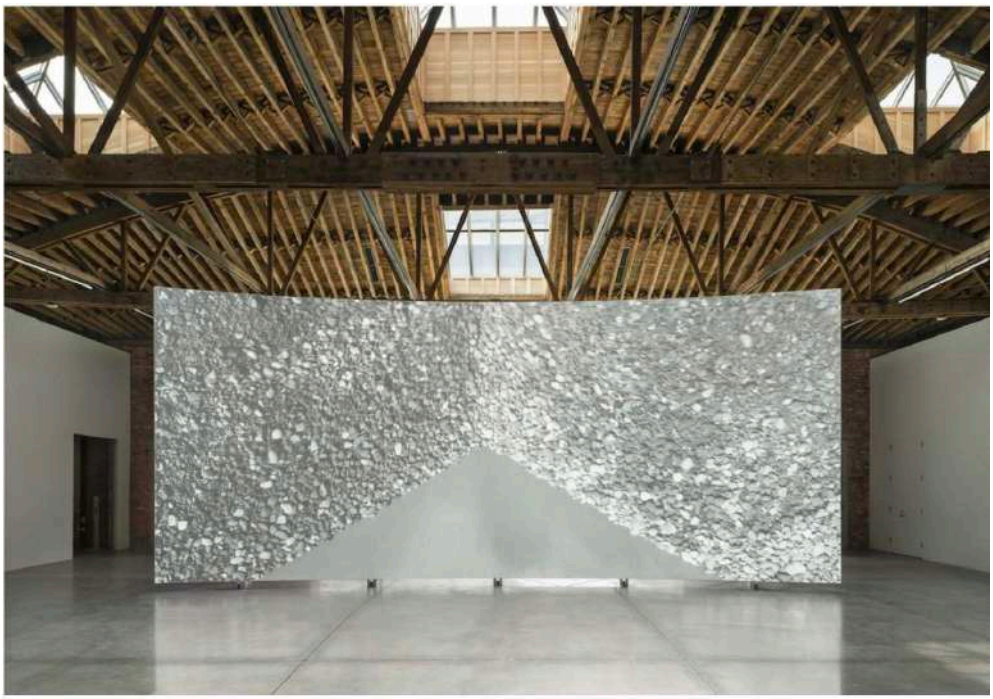
ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

LUCY RAVEN

Lucy Raven on "concrete cinema" and reimagining the genre of the western

April 13, 2021



View of *Ready Mix*, 2020, Dia:Chelsea, 2021. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio.

Lucy Raven has dedicated much of her work to the revisualization of the American West, both in its literal, topographic emplacement and within a historical imaginary. Between film, light sculptures, installation, and stereoscopic animation, her examinations of terrestrial surveying and digital visualities, as well as the spectacular constructions and everyday mundanities of the built landscape, offer a fascinating peek into a postindustrial frontier and its extractive economies. Raven's newest exhibition continues her work with light installation and includes the forty-five-minute film Ready Mix*, which documents the workings of an Idaho concrete plant through a series of optical and durational experiments. The show runs from April 16 through January 2022 at Dia Chelsea in New York.*

I WAS BORN IN TUSCON and grew up there. I feel a strong connection to Arizona, to the West, and a number of states that I've spent time in: California, Utah, Nevada, Idaho. But at the same time it always felt kind of arbitrary that I grew there, so far from where generations of my family had been before, coming from Eastern Europe through Canada on one side and New York on the other, before my mother's parents moved to Tucson. Looking back, I can see that I had a relationship with the landscape that in one sense was very embodied, and at the same time existed independently of me, with a history that preceded and did not include me. There were moments of physical remove, like getting on an airplane for the first time as a kid and seeing the desert landscape from above, the drainage ponds and agricultural fields. A very abstracted, geometric view.

That sense of abstraction in relation to the place was imprinted on me from very early on but was also hard to parse. On one hand, I could clearly see geomorphic and infrastructural forms in proximity all around me; and junk, leftovers from old ideas and ambitions that are still laying around. But I also grew up understanding that there are more things present that you can't see. There is a kind of vagueness to the physical experience of being in the desert, as opposed to how it's often pictured. It's not always clear where the foreground ends and the background begins, and the iconic image of a lone figure in the open landscape, something typical like a cowboy riding into the sunset, is evasive. Posing alternatives to linear, fixed-point perspective, a vanishing point on the horizon, is something I thought a lot about when making *Ready Mix*.

Lucy Raven, *Ready Mix* (detail), 2021, black-and-white video (45 minutes), quadraphonic sound, aluminum and plywood screen, and aluminum seating structure.

Both of my previous films, *China Town* (2009) and *Curtains* (2014), used forms of animation in relation to landscape and its extraction and distribution. In *China Town*, which tracked a small Nevada mine's export of raw copper ore to China, I used photographic animation, sequences of still images joined together. In *Curtains* (2014), a sequel of sorts which explores the outsourcing of Hollywood's raw imagery to post-production studios around the world to be converted from 2-D to 3-D, I animated 3-D photographs to come in and out of stereo convergence. Both works were experiments in discontinuity in relation to commodity flows that have a direct relationship to geography and ownership.

I think the technological development of moving image cameras alongside the popularity of the western as a film genre has contributed to our collective imaginary, and image, of the Western landscape. Those films were predicated on a fantasy of the empty West, available to be settled, that depends on a very selective mode of looking, or not looking, at who and what is already living on that land. I was interested in the material creation of private property, historic and contemporary, and the forces behind those processes as another way of considering what a western could be.

Lucy Raven, *Ready Mix* (detail), 2021, black-and-white video (45 minutes), quadraphonic sound, aluminum and plywood screen, and aluminum seating structure.

I shot *Ready Mix* in Idaho, where a friend of a friend owns a concrete plant. When I was first there, I just asked to take a look around. And I got a visual idea of what I wanted to do with it right away. I'd already been experimenting with different materials like sand, glass beads, gel, using what's called analog modeling to design relationships between liquids and solids in natural and built combinations as they undergo different degrees of pressure: state change. So, when we started filming some of the materials that were moving very quickly during the batching process, like gravel pouring down a chute, I saw that a kind of optical liquidity, in that case a blur, was possible to capture in the image. The camera operators I was working with usually film sports like snowboarding and cycling. So, it was a very different kind of shoot for them in some ways. Maybe messier. But we developed a language onsite for approaching the camera's movements and point of view as well as a choreography between the drone camera and the front loaders it was filming.

There's nothing like starting a chat with someone who says, "What are you working on?" And you say a film about concrete. It's an instant conversation stopper. I think it's something about concrete's heavy dumbness as a form, as a material that needs a form to be of use. There is musique concrète and concrete poetry. Why not concrete cinema, then?

— As told to Erik Morse

The New Yorker
30 April 2021

THE NEW YORKER

ART

Dia Chelsea

Art work © Lucy Raven / Photograph courtesy Dia Art Foundation

Among the great legacies of the Dia Art Foundation, founded in 1974, in New York City, are the earthworks of the American West. The sites Dia stewards include Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty," in Utah's Great Salt Lake, and Walter de Maria's "Lightning Field," in rural New Mexico. Of course, land art was largely a boys' club—because the boys got the backing. Jessica Morgan, the director of Dia since 2015, has been working to change that. Nancy Holt's "Sun Tunnels," which have graced the Great Basin Desert since the mid-seventies, recently joined the collection. And inaugurating the new **Dia Chelsea,** an impeccably renovated twenty-thousand-square-foot space on West Twenty-second Street, is "Ready Mix" (pictured above), a mesmerizing black-and-white film by Lucy Raven, which both builds on and breaks down (even takes down) the genre of land art and its extractive toll on the Western landscape. The setting is a concrete factory in Idaho; if fifty minutes of seeing solid rock become oozing concrete sounds about as exciting as watching paint dry, the film's strange beauty and conceptual provocations are bound to surprise you. ("Ready Mix" is on view through January; reservations, available via diaart.org, are required.)

— *Andrea K. Scott*

The Brooklyn Rail
13 July 2021

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Art | In Conversation

Lucy Raven with David Levi Strauss

"I was interested in taking some of the tropes of the genre, like extreme violence and the image of the open frontier as natural setting, and grinding them through another set of operations."

Portrait of Lucy Raven, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

ON VIEW
Dia Chelsea
Lucy Raven
April 16, 2021 – January 2022
New York

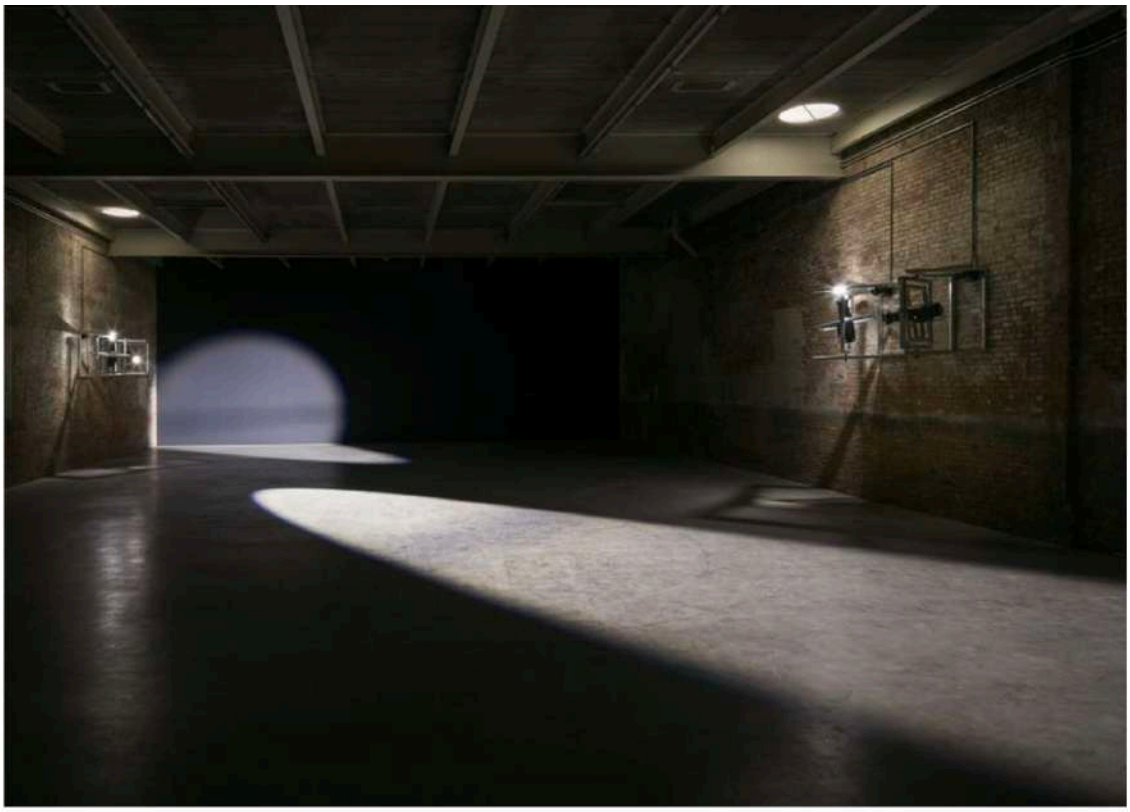
I met Lucy Raven 17 years ago, in 2004, when she was working as an editor at *BOMB Magazine*. She had read my books *Between Dog & Wolf* (1999) and *Between the Eyes* (2003), and approached me about being interviewed for *BOMB*'s new "Theory + Practice" section. When she asked who I'd like to be interviewed by, I said Leon Golub, because he and I had been having an extended conversation, and since Lucy was also very interested in Golub's work, we set that up. The night before the three of us were going to meet to record the conversation, Leon called me and said he didn't think he was going to be able to come to the recording session, because he was on his way into the emergency room at NYU Hospital. "Leon, what's wrong?" I asked. "Everything," he said. "Is there anything I can do for you?" "Yeah," he said, "you can go find me another body." He died a month later. We ended up doing the *BOMB* interview with Hakim Bey asking the questions, and that was published in the Fall 2004 issue.

Lucy and I began our own conversation that continued over the next year, as Lucy entered the Bard MFA program, where I'd been teaching for years. She graduated in 2008, with her film *China Town* as her final project. We collaborated on various projects after that, and continued our conversation through the years. In 2010, I hired Lucy to teach in my MFA program in Art Criticism & Writing at the School of Visual Arts, and then again in 2013 and 2015, on motion capture.

We sat down in the "Zoom room" on June 9th to talk about Lucy's installation at the new Dia Chelsea.

David Levi Strauss (Rail): I've been able to spend some time with your new installation at Dia Chelsea over the last couple of weeks. It consists of two parts, in two magnificent cavernous spaces: *Casters X-2 + X-3,* which are two kinetic light sculptures casting beams that sweep the darkened space; and the 45-minute, black-and-white film *Ready Mix,* shot over two years at a concrete plant in south central Idaho. The film is projected at an anamorphic aspect ratio on a giant curved screen, in front of aluminum bleacher seating, flanked by four massive speakers for quadraphonic sound.

My first impression of the *Casters* piece was as a combination of spotlights and searchlights, bringing Hollywood/consumer spectacle and the carceral/surveillance state into the crosshairs, and that mixture of spectacle and confinement seemed very timely as the pandemic was just wearing down in New York—the pandemic that spotlighted all of the enduring political atrocities in American society. *Casters* was also an extremely pared down way of doing cinema—without an "image." Erika Balsom called an earlier version of *Casters* "an active iconoclastic reduction."



Lucy Raven, *Casters X-2 + X-3*, 2021. Installation view, Dia Chelsea, New York. © Lucy Raven. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York.

But the larger space with the *Ready Mix* film is a full immersion in sight and sound. That immersion is vertiginous and mesmerizing, a slowed-down epic of resource extraction and the seething *matter* of development.

I'll point to two passages in the film that caught me and remain in memory. One is the place where the activated grid of a sorting, sifting screen, with stones being thrown around madly, is accompanied by what I think is live sound combined with composed sound, to heighten the frenetic sense. And at a certain point, the whole space, and the whole building, is activated, from the reflective concrete floor to the vaulted ceilings, and it made me remember why Dia is in that space, and why this piece is there, now.

And another passage is when the black center of a cement mixer, I guess, becomes the pupil of an enormous screen-filling eye, and then shifts to become this great maw of consumption and unlimited growth, the kind of infernal maw that consumes everything.

So, from the concrete to the abstract. You've talked elsewhere about proposing abstraction as a tool for re-perceiving these sites. How are you using abstraction here in these new pieces?

Lucy Raven, *Casters X-2 + X-3*, 2021. Installation view, Dia Chelsea, New York. © Lucy Raven. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Lucy Raven: The first iteration of *Casters* was developed in the aftermath of a body of work that dealt with Hollywood's outsourcing of images and contemporary digital image production in a very real global geography, economy, and quite complex labor situation. I was questioning the role of story, and the relationship between traditional narrative and contemporary image production. I found myself looking for other models of formal and experiential possibilities for moving images and collective viewing.

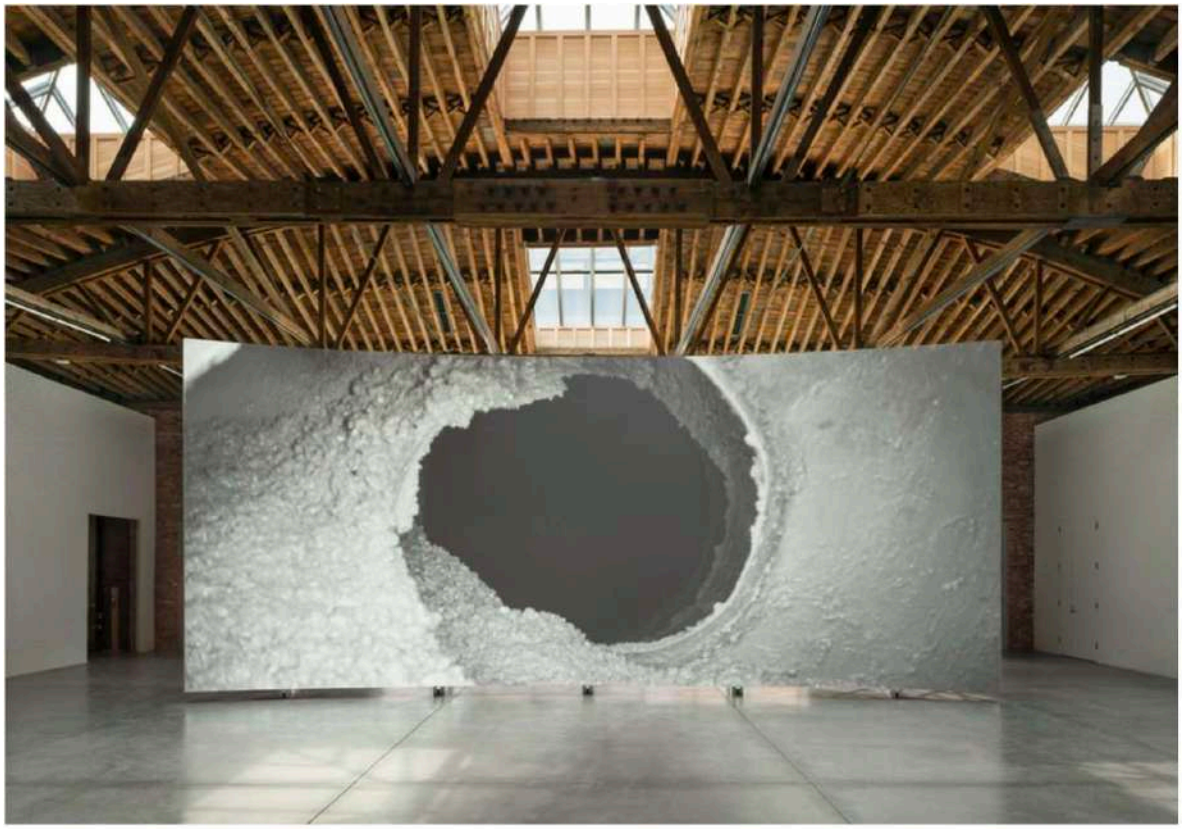
In Moholy-Nagy's writings about the potential of moving images back in the 1920s, he asked why film needs to be *horizontal*, or projected onto a flat surface at all. He wrote about this assumption as the extension of the proscenium in theater and ultimately in literature, a regressive position, when film's inherent medium is light and movement in time. He responded with his own light-space modulators, but I feel like he also laid out ontological ground for cinema that hasn't been extensively developed.

You've written a lot about the power of images and how the transport mechanism matters, and in this iteration of the work, I was interested in thinking about that in relation to *civic space*, and what it would mean to be spending time in a shared space with other people, coming out of the last year and a half.

The *Casters* move using a system invented for a WWII era anti-aircraft device, which allowed an enemy aircraft to be tracked in any direction without getting its power source tangled as it spun.

The Whitney brothers detourned a surplus version of the system to make the first computer graphics, slowing spinning spirals which ended up in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), and then Michael Snow used it to make the device for filming *La Région Centrale* (1971). Those first explorations had a relationship to abstraction, but also an origin in militarized optics and tracking that I wanted to pursue. The two works play out a choreography over two hours, moving through a series of "locked-off" positions in relation to each other. Their pace is slow, relentless.

When I started filming *Ready Mix*, I thought about how the term "concrete cinema" doesn't exist, and what it might mean. I realized I'd proposed one answer to that question with the first version of *Casters*, a work I'd been wanting to iterate.



Lucy Raven, *Ready Mix*, 2021. Installation view, Dia Chelsea, New York. © Lucy Raven. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Rail: A close correlative to concrete cinema might be structuralist film. I've always had a conflicted relation to structuralist materialist film, and I wrote something on Kurt Kren (Malcolm Le Grice called Kren's *Bäume im Herbst/Trees in Autumn* in 1960 the first structuralist film) in the '80s for the Cinematheque in San Francisco that engaged the conflict. It was called "Notes on Kren: Cutting Through Structural Materialism or, 'Sorry. It Had To Be Done.'"

And in that essay, I quoted Le Grice from his *Abstract Film and Beyond* to say, "In effect, structuralism in art can be seen as a consequence of the awareness that concept can, and perhaps must, determine the nature of perception and experience if it is to avoid determination by existing convention or habit."

You wrote to me in July 2020 to say you were filming your "concrete film" in Idaho. And you wrote, "I see it as a kind of Western, a material examination of *state change,* solids to liquid to solid, and also an examination of the literal foundation(s) and (infra)structure the country was built upon, particularly the West in the myth of the frontier as an empty wilderness/horizon." When I read that, it made me think of Joseph Beuys and John Ford, who have probably never been put together before, but...

Raven: I like it.

Rail: Because, when I walked out of your installation at Dia, I ran into the basalt columns and trees of *7000 Eichen* on 22nd Street, and it struck me then to see them with their feet stuck in concrete, because that freezes the whole process, which is the alchemical/spagyrical process and the sculptural principle of the transformation from cold, crystalline form to warm, organic form, and back again, that Beuys intended to activate.

And then John Ford, you know, I think I mentioned to you that the first movie I ever saw, in the little ramshackle theater in Chapman, Kansas when I was 9 or 10, was Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. And now I see it every few years, and to me it's sort of the perfect Western, a revisionist Western infused with John Ford's weird politics. And it was shot in Thousand Oaks!

Raven: I think moving to New York from the West, from Arizona, I was confronted with people's view of that place when they would find out I was from there. It felt like a kind of brand, often associated with a very conservative politics that the state was known for (though that seems to slowly be changing) but also a romanticized notion of the desert, and its remoteness from "The City." I think even as a young person in Tucson, though, I felt aware that my family had moved there, and not that long before. I was *from* there, but I also felt it as a distance from my Eastern European Jewish ancestry, and from New York, where we'd go visit my grandmother, which I found totally thrilling. I understood their movement to the Southwest in the context of a fresh start and a restorative climate for my parents and grandparents' generation. Perhaps the myth of the frontier perpetuated in Westerns like *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* I'd in my own way internalized in trying to figure out how we ended up there. For me, the setting for films and TV I watched, for action, was in a city. The desert landscape wasn't reproduced in media very much, other than in Westerns, or in cartoons like Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, which I loved, or Krazy Kat. I thought about cartoons, and the sound that goes with them (or in the case of Krazy, the onomatopoeia George Herriman wrote into the drawings), for this film quite a lot. But growing up, I found Westerns boring. There were no women in them, for one...

Rail: Well, there are women, but they're mostly all entertaining men in the cantina, or—

Raven: Yeah, or in the whorehouse.

Old Tucson, which is a theme park that I'd go to a couple times a year as a kid when family would visit, was actually where a lot of Westerns were filmed. So you'd head to the outskirts of town to a set that used the same landscape you'd

pass on the drive there as a stage for live gunfight shows and film shoots, then head back through it, home to the TV. The Westerns I would watch, which were older Westerns, had the same backdrop, but none of them carried the feeling that I associated with living in that area, which is a kind of vagueness, somehow, to the landscape, and to perspective, where in the harsh sunlight, everything is a bit too bright. There's not really a focus, no city center, rather a constantly developing sprawl that gets over-articulated because it is spread out and single story, positioned just right to frame a continuous pan through the backseat car window. It didn't jive with the pristine, empty horizon of the Western with a single cowboy riding through it.

I was interested in taking some of the tropes of the genre, like extreme violence and the image of the open frontier as natural setting, and grinding them through another set of operations.

The idea of state change was something that I was interested in from the very beginning, but came more into focus as I began to shoot and edit. It became clear to me that the film would be a loop; a rechurning of this same material that is both marked and unbothered by repetition.

Rail: The production of cement is an alchemical process. You know, I'm sitting here now, only a few miles away from Rosendale, New York, where a kind of natural hydraulic cement was discovered in the 1820s and the concrete that came from here built a big part of New York City, including the Brooklyn Bridge and the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Then portland cement came in the 20th century and wiped out that whole industry here. The canal system and all the rest of the infrastructure around here just collapsed when that went away. We live in the ruins of it.

When I talk with people about the piece at Dia, you know, people talk about concrete and cement production being one of the biggest contributors to climate change, because the production process releases so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. If concrete were a country, it would be number three, after China and the US, in CO_2 pollution. And that's significant because it is the most prevalent artificial material in the world. The only thing we consume more of is *water*. Concrete is everywhere, especially in China. Since 2003, China has poured more concrete every three years than the US did in the entire 20th century. And today, China uses almost half of the world's concrete. So, all roads lead back to China, again.

Raven: Again. Exactly, I know.

Still from *China Town*, 2009, color photographic animation with sound, 51:30min. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: I watched your making of the *China Town* film 12 years ago very closely. It tracks the mining of copper ore in Nevada to China, where it is sent to be smelted and refined and turned into copper wire and other things. It's basically a handmade film of photographic animation, built up from 7000 individual images. So, *China Town* was built up from still images, and *Ready Mix* is really all about the movement and flow, even the blur. In another interview, you talked about "that purgatorial zone between still and moving images." Still images lodge in the brain with more longevity than moving images, but moving images have more immediate effects. How do you think about the movement from *China Town* to *Ready Mix* in those terms?

Raven: They're very different sculpturally and compositionally. And you're right that they function differently. I'm still thinking about that thing you said about stills lodging in the brain. I've had my students at Cooper reading your new book *Photography and Belief*.

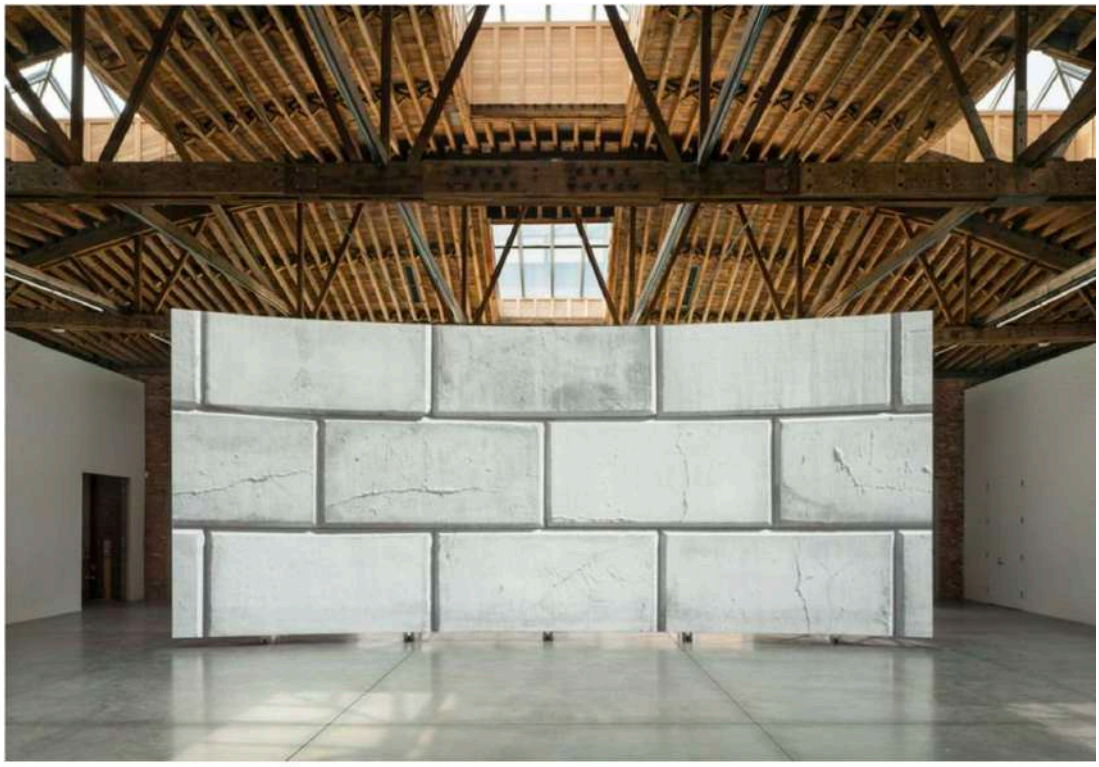
There is one scene in *China Town* that I think especially informed a lot of the work that came after. It's the scene where a woman is walking up a chute away from the camera while raw ore is coming down it. Using that method of photographic animation, everything in each scene moves at the same rate of change, because the only interval you have is the time between still frames. And because they're photographs, each object within the photo is fixed in position, so her walk advances at the exact same rate as the movement of material. Even if you don't know how quickly stuff moves on a conveyor belt of that scale, you intuitively know that those two kinds of movement don't happen in sync, because one is organic and biological and the other is mechanical. That effect is true of the whole film, but editing that scene unlocked it for me.

I was interested in the idea of a figure's movement yoked to a mechanical time signature, both within the image, but also within that kind of edit. In a way, it's the opposite of stop-action animation where you take things that are inanimate and you make them look like they're moving. It was this kind of rhythmic restructuring that led me to explore different questions about motion capture, motion control, and movement.

Rail: I always talk with my students about slowing the mechanism down enough so you can see its moving parts, and this has become a central working practice with you, both concretely and abstractly.

Raven: I've generally worked outside of the standard capture rate, and playback rate for moving images, and instead built something that can operate outside of the corporatized speed of production and reception that's inherent to all of our technologies, to the point of seeming naturalized. One strategy to avoid reiterating the ideologies out of which those tools are designed to function is to use animation and hand build a sequence, shaping the rhythm as you go.

In *Ready Mix*, when I was experimenting with different ways to film the material flows and scale transitions, I started with a very high frame rate. The kind of state change I was interested in was a material shift from a granular array to a viscous liquid to a homogeneous solid that goes through, as you mentioned, an alchemical cycle, and I found that could also happen optically in the film when I slowed the frame rate down to the standard 24 frames per second. The movement of material was too fast to be captured in focus at that speed—there was too much information for the signal to carry, and the result is an artifact: a blur.



Lucy Raven, *Ready Mix*, 2021. Installation view, Dia Chelsea, New York. © Lucy Raven. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Rail: This might be a good time to talk about the sound. Because the soundtrack of *Ready Mix* is also somewhat different than what I've heard you do before. The sound is enveloping, but never overpowering. The mixture of captured sound and composed sound is intricate. Are there times when the sound—this may just be in my imagination or an aural hallucination, but—are there times when the sound of film going through the gate of a projector is actually audible? Like the sound of an SLR mirror slapping up when you take a digital picture with your phone?

Raven: No, but that's great. The musician I worked with, Deantoni Parks, and I are actually making a vinyl record right now, derived from sound in the film. We're using the conceit of the film soundtrack as a guide, working primarily with the composed sound, which in the film, as you noted, was mixed with production sound from the shoot in a way that's difficult to separate. He's also doing a couple of remixes—EDM!

Deantoni Parks is a percussionist and composer I met through Jason Moran, when we were both part of a series Jason curated at the Park Avenue Armory a number of years ago. I initially connected with his *Technoself* project, where he's drumming with one hand and playing a MIDI with the other, sampling very granular bits of music, half- and quarter-notes. I'd been more finely cutting the time signature of animations I was working on, using a 60-frame-per-second timeline, and felt an affinity to how we were each thinking about breaking up and reassembling image and sound. I'd recently been asked by Dia to do one of their "Artists on Artists" talks—my first engagement with them—and I'd selected Walter De Maria. I knew that De Maria had been a drummer for this proto-Velvet Underground band called the Primitives, but wanted to dig deeper into that, because when I'd heard it years before, it totally reformed my thinking about his work, and how it relates to interval.

I was compelled by the relation of violence and abstraction in De Maria's work, and drumming seemed like one way in. I asked Deantoni to collaborate with me, and we made a work, a live performance, called *Bullet Points for a Hard Western*. I'd thought from the start that I would ask him to work on *Ready Mix* with me. Then when I started filming, I found the actual production sound was incredible, so rich, and very percussive. And so for a moment I thought maybe I'd just use natural sound. But while shooting at the gravel plant on a subsequent trip, I heard all of these different resonances, and occasional sweeps of bass that seemed to overtake the plant, then disappear. I asked the plant manager what was going on and he told me that each of these machines runs at different frequencies, so you're hearing where they overlap and collide. I knew then that I wanted to explore that idea further and to take the sound out of the realm of complete naturalism.

We thought a lot about perspective and scale in the sound, as well as in the image. Something that I was interested in was how to use sound musically without asserting too much of an emotional affect, or feeling romantic, which is really quite challenging, particularly with the scale of the film. So there was a lot of back and forth and Deantoni was able to do these subtle, incredible things.

Rail: *Ready Mix* focuses on machine work. And it's mostly unpopulated, but the human workers who do appear in only a few cases, like the two men helping to guide the concrete blocks into place in the wall, are pretty hapless and ineffectual. And their position is obviously precarious in relation to these massive machines, and to the whole process. They're out of place.

Raven: It may make sense here to go back to this question of abstraction, which can be a mode that allows you to project yourself into a different space than the one you're in, either through identification or through another kind of projection—including how the humans who appear in the film are perceived. This range of imaginative association that abstraction can instigate is something I'm really interested in.

I wanted to engage a register wherein the violence of development would come through a kind of ambivalence to the human, to a human time scale, or the scale of the human body, or the laboring body. A structural/infrastructural violence that nonetheless is not without human intention. Quite the opposite.

What does a Western without a human at the center of it look like? Where landscape is not a readymade, but something that's formed and terra-formed and populated?

Lucy Raven, *Ready Mix*, 2021. Installation view, Dia Chelsea, New York. © Lucy Raven. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Rail: Ready-mixed, not ready-made. It seems to me that the distinction between concrete objects and abstraction has broken down in the realm of the virtual, and this collapse has certainly affected our relation to the real, and shaken the whole question of cause and effect.

Raven: There's a physical dumbness to concrete that has to do with its opacity and its weight. I think about Guston's paintings of walls, also of eyes...

Its form is necessarily *formed*—it has no structural integrity until it hardens and is shaped by some form extrinsic to it as material. So cause and effect press together and have to dry.

Can you say more about how you're thinking about that collapse?

Rail: Well, the concrete has devolved into what you describe here—it sets up within given forms, in negative space, like Rachel Whiteread recognized. When I was 18, I worked on a construction crew building bridges for the highways in western Kansas, and most of what we did was build forms for concrete—forms that were later dismantled, leaving this malleable material that has a shape and substance, and some resilience, and is now ubiquitous, but it has no real form of its own. And this reactive stuff has come to replace active forms in the environment.

Raven: In the realm of the virtual, that distinction is harder to see, and to fathom. So it's easy to take the material we *do* see and navigate through it as active, rather than formed.

Rail: How are the drone camera movements in *Ready Mix* so sharp and always in register?

Raven: Well, I was working with two great camera operators, Spencer Cordovano and Yancy Caldwell. Yancy was on drone. He's usually filming snowboarders and mountain bikers, so he's quite good at tracking, and has incredible control. But he's used to a quite different kind of camera movement, so this was very challenging.

There is a sometimes-sublimated militaristic optics to drone technology that I felt I had to contend with one way or another. At the same time, I wanted the camera to have an indelibly linked relationship to the material it was filming. So a choreography developed, and a language to describe it, between the camera and the material or vehicle it was following. The way you operate those vehicles is with a joystick, which is also the way a drone is operated. So the tether between camera and machine/material is triangulated by a disembodied hand that may control both.

Rail: And the control is really in the fingers. Literally, "manoeuvres."

What in your mind is your connection to the historical artists represented by Dia, especially the Land artists of the '70s, because it's something that people think about as Dia goes into this new realm. Some of the connections are obvious to me. But how are you thinking about that now?

Raven: The relationship we have now to land and landscape and images is so different—the supersaturation of time spent looking at screens and technical images, the digital universe that continues to unfold against an abstracted, if omnipresent relationship to very slowly evolving conditions, like climate change or nuclear radiation and fallout, and the impending nuclear waste reality. Lucy Lippard has written about much of Land art's preoccupation with site over place, and that resonates with me, thinking about and visiting that work today. At the same time, the kind of care and support Dia has offered artists and their work over very long periods of time, then and now—these commissions developed over two years—is a part of their original model that today feels radical in its commitment.

When I went to De Maria's *The Lightning Field* a couple of years ago, I felt the violence I've always projected onto his work affirmed. Is this Cartesian grid that's laid out on the landscape a critique, or is it a reiteration of that same kind of logic, of colonialist, surveying development? Maybe it functions as both. I do know I'm coming to the work, and to the idea of monument in relation to place, with a different set of concerns than I think a lot of those artists had at that time.

I think that there are tools in abstraction that feel relevant right now. That there can be room for a kind of individuated projection to happen over time in a collective space. To be in that space right now with others, to me feels grounding.

Contributor

David Levi Strauss

David Levi Strauss is an American poet, essayist, art and cultural critic, and educator. He is a consulting editor at the *Rail*.

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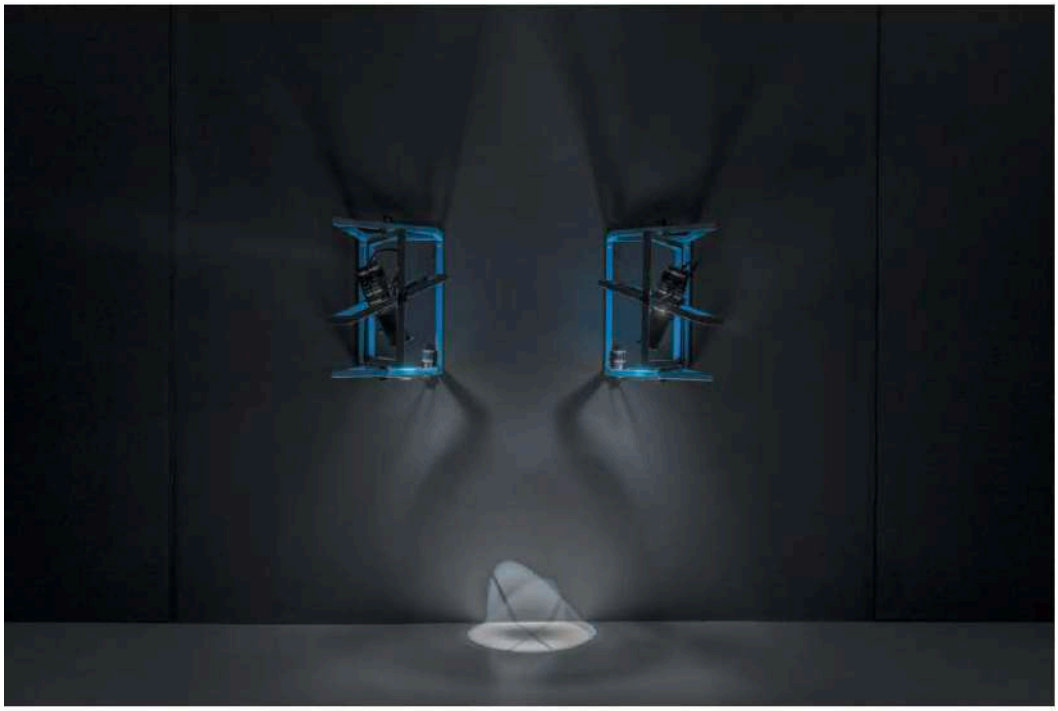
THE ART NEWSPAPER

Confronting Land Art and the Western frontier: Lucy Raven on how the two US cultural legacies influenced her new works at Dia Chelsea

New York-based artist's exhibitions opens at Dia Art Foundation's new and improved space in New York



Raven's installation Casters (2016); she has developed a new iteration of the work for the reopening of Dia Chelsea
Photo: Damian Griffiths;. courtesy of the artist

Lucy Raven's protean, multidisciplinary practice defies simple definition. Over the past two decades, the Arizona-born, New York-based artist has drilled into the American bedrock and filmic history through experiments in light and moving image. Two new commissions for Dia Chelsea's grand reopening—after a two-year, $20m expansion—boldly question the Land Art legacy Dia exists to enhance. *Casters* is a version of the slowly revolving spotlight installation Raven first showed at London's Serpentine Gallery in 2016. *Ready Mix*, meanwhile, is an immersive projection of mesmeric black-and-white footage showing aggregate and cement being churned into ready-mix concrete. From extractive industries to industrial networks, Raven consistently focuses on the through-lines of a global economy etching itself into the landscape.

Raven on the set of her new film for Dia Chelsea, Ready Mix
Photo: Charles Eshelman/FilmMagic

The Art Newspaper: You shot *Ready Mix* in a concrete processing plant in Idaho. In the accompanying materials, the film is described as contending with the myth of the frontier perpetuated by traditional Westerns. What does the film stem from?

Lucy Raven: I'm from [Tuscon] Arizona. As a kid, my dad would bring us to New York, where he is from. I really didn't understand why he'd ever moved to the desert: I just wanted to come back here. Later, when I actually moved here, I began to see how the [American] east looks at the west. This project, and maybe quite a lot of work I've made, is an exploration of the fantasy of the west. I don't really like Westerns. I find them quite boring; there are never any interesting female characters; it's just dusty. This was more about how the west has been developed—the infrastructure necessary to quite literally pave over this so-called empty wilderness, which of course was populated.

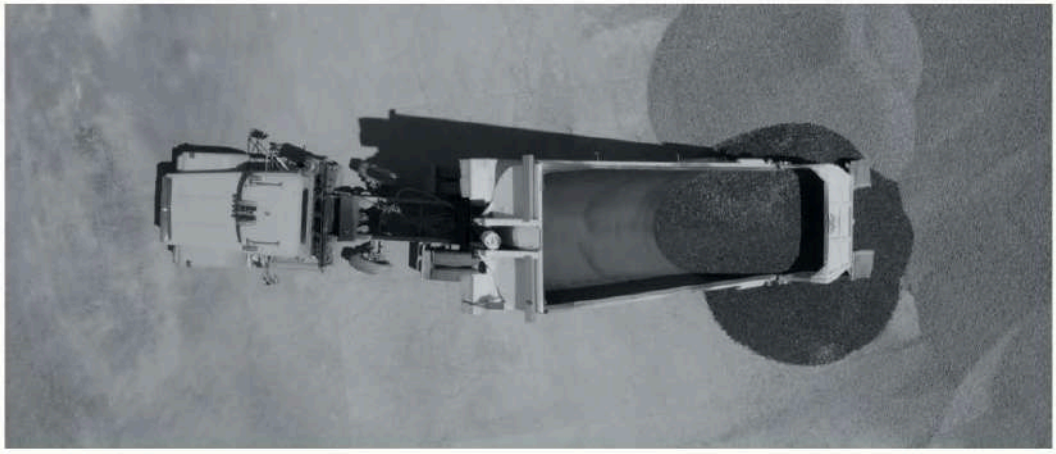
It all started through a residency I did in the Philippines several years ago. I flew into Clark air base, [which had been] the biggest American military base outside the US. While there, I thought about how the late 19th-century American colonisation of the Philippines—not something I ever learned about in school—is not an aberration but rather part and parcel of the American doctrine of manifest destiny, and the so-called settling of the west. When California was, essentially, full, and the frontier declared closed, the purchase of the Philippines along with Puerto Rico and Guam happened, in 1898. All these forms of state architecture and concrete infrastructure in Manila came along at that moment too. So when I got back to the States, I decided to get kind of literal, and do a site visit at a concrete plant.

Why Idaho?

My partner and I have a cabin there. And in movie terms, Idaho is a kind of stand-in for the west in general. I also realised that if I made a concrete film in New York, it would be like a mob film so I knew I had to make a Western, out west.

The camera's perspective and decisions are intriguingly tangible in the footage. Did you conceive of the camera as a character?

You know, we have *musique concrète*, concrete photography, concrete poetry. Going into this project, I wondered, what might the term "concrete cinema" mean? Instead of naturalising the eye of the camera, I thought about it choreographically. The drone shots, for example, are not shot the way a drone operator normally would: it's almost misuse. Similarly, in order to shoot these flows and pourings of raw materials, you would usually use a higher frame rate, because it is all moving so fast. But I was really interested in that blur, the in and out of focus.



Aerial shots in Ready Mix were "not shot the way a drone operator normally would: it's almost misuse", Raven says

Certain scenes in *Ready Mix* bring to mind the surprising abstract paintings of, say, Michael Heizer. Were you consciously making a connection between Abstract Expressionism, and what the Land artists made in the desert?

There ended up being so many sections that I now think of as, like, the Frankenthaler scene, the Pollock scene, the Heizer spill. While filming, though, I wasn't thinking about that. It isn't something you usually think of when you think about Land Art.

Of course, the big three—James Turrell's *Roden Crater*, Michael Heizer's *City* and Charles Ross's *Star Axis*—are all nearing completion. Your work feels like an important counterpoint to these big, very male, very white projects, be that when you speak about the myth of the west or when you speak about Westerns having no strong female characters, given the women who have played central roles in, say, *City*, yet remain overshadowed.

I think about this a lot, having visited many of those sites, and seen the caretaking that goes into maintaining them. *Ready Mix* has a monumentality to it, in the way it will be projected, and also within the image itself. But it is not an imposition on to the landscape, which those works are. My question is, whose perspective is being projected there? I've always thought of works by, for example, Walter de Maria, as having a kind of violence to them. But it wasn't until I visited [his 1977 work] The Lightning Field last year that I began to understand why. First, I hadn't ever really internalised that all those poles are spikes. But also, the violence is in the very grid he's laying out—it's a Cartesian projection on to the landscape, and a neutrality that's hard to parse. Is the work about the violence, or is it enacting it? I think that question is provocative.

Abstract Expressionism, and Land Art, of course, dealt in universality. But you're making abstract images with raw materials that have been mined as resources, and are sold as commodities. You have referenced Robert Smithson's idea of the exhaustion of the landscape. With *Ready Mix* are you delving into the kind of specifics those movements did not address—that is, whose land is being depleted? Who has been robbed of resources?

This notion of private property became quite central in *Ready Mix*. On one side, you have the development of public infrastructural projects. And on the other, you have what's called the Dawes Act of 1887: the development of private property and the disenfranchisement of the indigenous peoples who lived there to begin with. Concrete is tied to the creation of private property, which immediately leads you to the protection of private property, which circles back to the police and the militarisation of protecting private property, and to the beginnings of film-making too—because those histories are so deeply intertwined. All of which is what *Casters* came out of.

This new iteration of *Casters* involves two pairs of moving spotlights on customised armatures similar to roto-casters—devices used to mould objects in the round. What was the impetus for this work?

Casters evolved from a previous 3D film entitled *Curtains*, [as well as] *Tales of Love and Fear*, which involved these two counter-rotating projectors. I was thinking about Robert Smithson, but also Michael Snow's 1971 film, *La Région Centrale*. Snow, a Canadian structural film-maker, had this idea to make a kind of total or absolute record of the landscape. He used an articulated robotic arm to shoot the view from the top of a mountain in Quebec. When you watch it, you're watching the horizon spinning, slowly. I wanted to see if you could have a record of a place that was absolute at the site of reception, rather than production. I was interested in liberating the medium from the frame. In its first iteration, *Casters* felt like the beginning of a way of thinking about light and motion that I knew I'd been looking for.

The light becomes a presence in the room and a way to describe that physical space too. Is there a bodily aspect to the piece, for you?

Another starting point was a visit I'd made to the rock-cut temple of Ajanta in India. The temple is filled with all these paintings, which you can only observe by

flashlight. You end up with this haptic connection between what your hand is holding—a light—and what your eye can see. There is something about touch, and physicality, in *Casters*. And then there's the carceral aspect: searchlights, much like the amplified slip rings used in Snow's piece and in the *Casters* machines (to allow for 360º rotation without the wires getting tangled), evolved out of military equipment.

The lights' tracing is relentless, ominous, inescapable. How did you determine the patterns they would follow?

I knew what I wanted these things to do. And my friend Robert de Saint Phalle made it happen. I was thinking about the spiral animations John Whitney made for Alfred Hitchcock's [1958 film] *Vertigo*, which are thought of as the first computer animations. We made rudimentary visualisations to figure out patterns and pacing. But here too, it is a kind of choreography, and as such needs to be staged and programmed in the space itself. It is tricky to get something to move super slowly and really smoothly.

And those mechanisms determine what it sounds like in the space too?

Exactly. Like, how loud is too loud? The other way I've been trying to think about the movement has been through drawing. Particularly during the pandemic. They started out as technical drawings and then became their own thing—a non-linguistic way for me to think through ideas about light and speed in space.

Biography

Born: 1977, Tucson, Arizona.

Lives: New York

Education: 2008 MFA, Bard Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson; 2000 BFA studio art, BA art history, University of Arizona, Tucson; 1999 Escola Massana, Centre D'Art i Disseny, Barcelona

Key shows: 2019 Bauhaus Museum, Dessau; **2018** Los Angeles County Museum of Art; **2016** Serpentine Galleries, London; **2014** Portikus, Frankfurt; **2012** Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; **2012** Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

Not currently represented

- Lucy Raven, Dia Chelsea, New York, 16 April- January 2022
- Read Linda Yablonsky's review of the exhibition here