



Shotgun Review

The Distance at Capital Gallery

By Shotgun Reviews November 29, 2015

It is no easy feat to evoke the vastness of the Nevada desert in a space as economical as Capital. Yet despite the gallery's size, Letha Wilson and Richard T. Walker's show *The Distance* generates an ambience of incredible breadth. The entirety of the show can be seen through the shopfront window, where passersby are captivated by the evocative display. "I can't even tell you why it's so damn interesting," one man said while considering it from the street, "but it's really doing it." Developed concomitantly but not in collaboration, *The Distance* is about making conversation with specific spaces: the landscape near the salt flats on the border of Nevada and Utah where Walker and Wilson produced their work, and the gallery where they show it. This is not an abstract dialogue, but a material search for a voice that can articulate one another as well as between—the eponymous "distance." This sense of distance haunts the show—the longing to reach out and speak to one another across the gulf of literal and figurative space.

Wilson's pieces line the walls, material indexes of her reciprocal exploration of the landscape. The skies of her *Nevada Wall Sundials* (2015), C-prints of the sun rising (or setting) over the desert bent like corrugated aluminum siding, are pierced by angled steel, occasioning both rift and suture. They seem like heat mirages, images mirrored on sweltering shade structures. But her most compelling work is *Nevada Concrete Folds* (2015), a hypnotic concrete cast of folded paper. Its sharp, looping whorls pull a viewer's gaze into a dizzying articulation of spatial involution. Purple emulsion from a photograph pressed into mold renders a quality of abstracted texture onto its surface, a satellite image of a forgotten site. The piece suggests some ineffable relation between Wilson's hand, the earth she touched, and a viewer's experience, connections that are sensed but not quite tangible.



Richard T. Walker. *The Other Side of Meaning Something Other Than This*, 2015; Casiotone MT-68 keyboard, Radioshack TRC 220 walkie talkie, microphone, Roland bass amplifiers, MDF, neon, rock; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Artist and Capital Gallery.

Dominating the room, Walker's *The Other Side of Meaning Something Other Than This* (2015) was made specifically for Capital Gallery. It is an attempt at conversation, the most definite example of Walker's—and Wilson's—"call and response" with the natural landscape. Sound equipment sits upon and wraps around craggy rocks, and white neon juts out to ricochet across both gallery windows in a jagged mountain outline. The neon reflects from the glass pane and shoots out into the street, defying spatial restrictions and clear photos. From an amplifier emanates a cool, constant tone that quietly fills the gallery. The sound, composed by Walker in the Nevada desert, is impossible to place—it is echoing, ghostly, almost sepulchral. It is the sound of empty cathedrals and open sky. It is the ringing in my ears that I heard in the Mojave Desert in winter many years ago, when the land was so vast and silent as to be oppressive.

Walker and Wilson may never reach across the impossible chasm of distance, but at Capital Gallery they get pretty damn close.

Mailee Hung is a freelance writer currently pursuing a Master's degree in Visual and Critical Studies at California College of the Arts. Her work focuses on prosthetics, biotechnology, posthumanism, and interrogating the boundaries between nature and culture.

Richard T. Walker / The Distance \ Letha Wilson is on view at CAPITAL, in San Francisco, through December 5, 2015.