

ALTMAN SIEGEL

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ARTFORUM

Fisher, Cora, “Critics’ Picks: Zarouhie Abdalian,” *Artforum* (November 2017)

Zarouhie Abdalian

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1150 25th Street

November 3–December 16

Zarouhie Abdalian’s exhibition “To History” pays tribute to the early industrial laborer, the proletarian figure whom Émile Zola’s novel *Germinal* (1885) described en masse as an “avenging army” that would soon “overturn the earth.” Abdalian’s offerings here—husks of toilsome manual work—bring a material surrogacy for the miner and the migrant.

A fleet of nicked steel hand tools, all titled *brunt* (all works 2017), stands positioned on white pedestals. Abdalian’s Hydrocal relief casts, “from chalk mine hollow,” offer a delicate counterpoint, with chisel marks, an occasional dramatic gouge, and speckles of color lifted from a defunct mine, now covered in graffiti, in Tishomingo County, Mississippi. For the immersive sound piece *threnody for the millions killed by silicosis*, made with Joseph Rosenzweig, the artist learned the technique of knapping, a controlled manual chipping of stone for the purpose of making tools. The clank of lithic instruments resounds across acoustic simulations of a dungeon, cathedral, mine, and factory. Finally, there is “to history,” a series of five burgundy-on-white drawings on cotton, which are rubbings taken from a massive wrecking ball. Scars of impact become sanguine frottage.

Abdalian’s investigation into the haptic and sonic character of industrial labor produces an archaeological aesthetic. It seems more precise, however, to think of her tracings as quasidocumentary interventions that draw attention to extractive practices taking place all over the world, parallel to the rise of automation. In this sense, the show’s dedicatory title speaks in equal measure to the present.



View of “Zarouhie Abdalian: To History,” 2017.