

Art in America

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Zarouhie Abdalian

by Antonia Pocock

OAKLAND-BASED ARTIST Zarouhie Abdalian (b. 1982) creates sculptures and sound installations that reveal the physical and historical conditions of a particular site. Since earning her MFA in 2010 from Oakland's California College of the Arts, Abdalian has received commissions for site-specific works at international biennials and at such institutions as the Berkeley Art Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. For "The Space Between" at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, artists were invited to work with areas beyond the galleries, such as stairwells and courtyards—a prompt that aligns with Abdalian's predilection for interstitial spaces. She created a sound piece in a garage near a construction site. The piece incorporates a voice intoning different terms for "labor."

Abdalian's first solo exhibition in New York, at Clifton Benevento, presents a constellation of subtly altered found objects that echo the features of the gallery and of each other. *Openings* (all works 2016), a mortise lock affixed to the wall just past the gallery entrance, draws attention to the noises particular to this space. Wired to an electronic device, the lock clicks periodically, punctuating the clanging of the gallery's radiators and the creaking of its floors. The iron scrollwork of *Close of winter*—a security gate the artist disassembled into four vertical fragments—resembles the ornate ironwork found in the building. *One into Two* comprises two plaster busts representing the Roman god Janus. Typically a double-headed figure, Janus is here shorn apart and repositioned to face himself as in a mirror—one of many instances of doubling in the installation. Hanging

in one of the gallery's windows is a transparent screen printed with a photograph of the rooftops outside. This view includes a tarp-covered roof that is echoed by a taut tarp hanging inside at a diagonal from the gallery ceiling. In turn, the tarp's form mirrors the oblique face carved into the surface of a lava rock in the corner.

Abdalian's selection of materials and forms highlights the distinctive mix of industrial and classical elements in the surrounding architecture. The SoHo gallery is located in a former store building constructed in the 1880s. After a period in the 1960s and 70s, when such buildings served as studios for artists, the structure has returned to its original purpose as a locus of commercial activity—in this case, the sale of artworks.

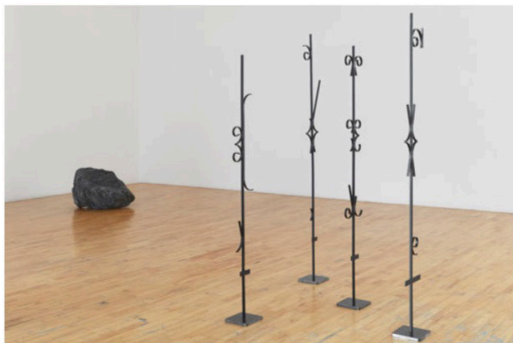
Janus, the god of doorways and passages, establishes the central theme of the installation. All of the pieces represent transitional spaces: a lock from a door, a gate, a window. A tarpaulin implies construction, and a lava rock a change of state. In this way, the work internalizes the function of the gallery as a site where art objects are always passing through.

Abdalian's works have consistently explored liminal zones, from her simulation of broken glass on the windows of her graduate school building to reflect the dilapidated surrounding neighborhood, to her timed light installation in an abandoned storefront for the 2013 Shanghai Biennial. Born and raised in New Orleans, a city in which the effects of time on materials is pronounced, Abdalian is particularly attentive to the ways in which historical processes are embedded in physical transformations of spaces. ○

CURRENTLY ON VIEW: Zarouhie Abdalian's solo exhibition "A Betrayal," at Clifton Benevento, New York, through May 14.

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ART IN AMERICA 33



View of Zarouhie Abdalian's exhibition "A Betrayal," 2016, showing (left) *From what is called Mono County*, 2016, lava rock, and (right) *Close of winter*, 2016, painted steel. Courtesy Clifton Benevento, New York. Photo Elisabeth Bernstein.