Marnie Weber, *Gathering Daisies on a Misty Day*, 2019, mixed media, 12½ × 9½".

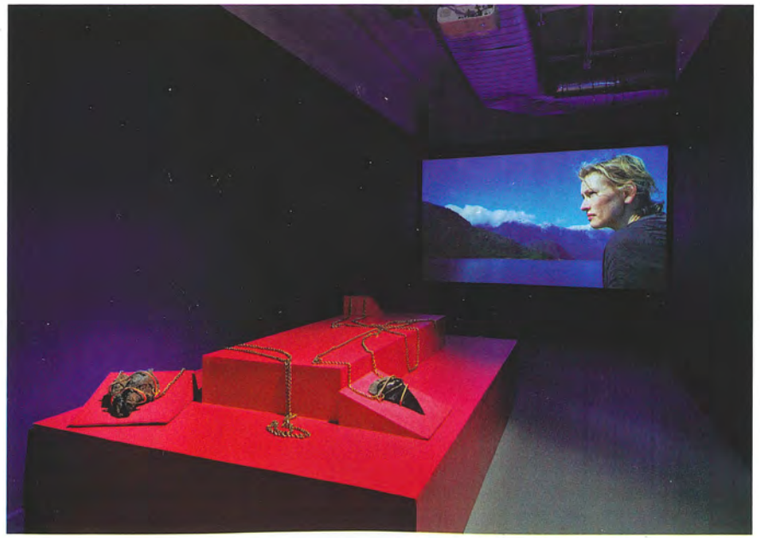
Caitlin Berrigan

ART IN GENERAL

What does a rock want? In "Imaginary Explosions," Caitlin Berrigan's first solo exhibition in New York, the artist alluded to "mineral desires," which made me wonder if stones are sentient things, always yearning beneath our feet. Her show offered up a chilly tale about a band of environmental saviors trying to commune with a geological consciousness in order to "become mineral"—to borrow a Deleuzian turn of phrase—a narrative that was strangely beautiful and poignant.

Two videos formed the crux of Berrigan's presentation. Both were filled with esoteric scientific and theoretical terms that zoom by in rapid voice-overs that only sometimes correspond to their footage of natural landscapes, topographical renderings of geological formations in black-and-white, animated rocks, and throbbing orbs of light. Images of various electronic instruments, such as satellite dishes in a desert, which rotate like huge mechanical sunflowers, also appear. The artist's premise for the show: A group of transfeminist scientists goes on a mission to help the earth fulfill its wish—to cause all of its volcanoes to erupt simultaneously and thus induce a "radical planetary transformation."

The narrative plays out like a speculative spy thriller, a guerrilla-style episode of *Star Trek*, or a nature-meets-noir documentary inflected by a vaguely postinternet aesthetic. *Imaginary Explosions, Episode 1*, 2018, centers on the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull blast in Iceland. Clips of Spanish, German, British, and French newscasts show dramatically billowing smoke; anchors bemoan the grounding of hundreds of planes in the disaster's wake. We hear girlish laughter—Berrigan and two of her collaborators (the actors in both videos are all real-life transdisciplinary artists-scientists-philosophers) seem pleased with our planet's outburst. "Maybe Europe will be cut off from the rest of the world for years," one of them says. *Helix pomatia* (big fat hermaphroditic snails humans like to eat) pervade the video; two tenderly linger in an embrace. In the corner of the gallery where this work played, a backlit, mountain-shaped sculpture titled *Bilateral Seismic Communication Instrument*, 2019, invited viewers to lean on it. The sculpture emitted vibrations and sounds composed by the artist Yun Ingrid Lee, inspired by Eyjafjallajökull's seismic activity; Lee's soundtrack has the power to rewire our neural pathways, claims Berrigan.



View of "Caitlin Berrigan," 2019. Background: *Imaginary Explosions, Episode 2*, 2019. Foreground: *Big Dumb Rocks*, 2019.

In another room, viewers sat on an elevated platform adorned with bits of volcanic discharge (*Big Dumb Rocks*, 2019) to watch *Imaginary Explosions, Episode 2*, 2019, a video inspired by Chaitén, a volcano in southern Chile whose tremendous 2008 flare-up forced the town that surrounds it to evacuate. In Berrigan's story, the scientist-artists are trying to recover the "communication devices" that they use to talk with their inorganic counterparts from the caves under Chaitén, before the contraptions were lost to the rising seas. In the caverns, populated by spiders that spin communal webs, the team discovers an interspecies petroglyph of an arachnoid human vulva.

The snail is famously a symbol recycled from Mayan religion by the present-day Zapatistas, who transformed it into an icon of their revolutionary multiverse. And the spider is a key figure for Donna Haraway in her 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, an enterprising treatise on forging a life-preserving path out of the Anthropocene. Berrigan draws from these and other sources in her own cosmology here. Her story is one of how else we might be, and of the violence that feels necessary for us to get there; yet Berrigan's cracked, exhilarating fable left me feeling wistful. Looking at the Eyjafjallajökull imagery led my thoughts to Okjökull, the once-enormous glacier that recently died in Iceland. If indeed the earth wanted to cleanse itself, I don't think the human virus would play any part in its rehabilitation.

One special type of stone does not appear in Berrigan's fiction. Some seem to think it lives and breathes. Found only in one remote part of Romania, the trovants don't wear away with time like other rocks, but rather, miraculously, *grow*. How I wish to see these trovants and ask them what they want, or need, before the end.

—*Ania Szremski*

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