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The Only Way Out Is Through

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DCKT CONTEMPORARY



ESCHATIA

By Kristina Newhouse

In the artworks of Lia Halloran, the artist has frequently displayed an interest in the interface between space and time. In her *Dark Skate* series, for example, she introduces themes of time and space in a manner both simple and elegant. What is most compelling about these works is how she compresses spatio-temporality, rendering her presence in these self-portraits as ghost-like, reducing herself to a hard, bright line of light which swoops and arcs across the expanse of the frame in long-exposure photographs. In a continuation of this trajectory, the artworks of her new series, *The Only Way Out is Through*, also seek an undoing of the distance between time and space. Seemingly paradoxically however these works simultaneously suggest an expanded sense of “between-ness.”

A notion of “between-ness” as associated with physical, phenomenological, and psychological thresholds has come to be described through the term “liminality.” Originally, “liminality” was derived from the Latin root, *limen*, which refers to the strip of wood or stone at the base of a doorway. In 1909, ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep introduced the concept of liminality as he sought to describe the components of cultural rites of passage. He identified these rituals as marked by three phases: separation of the ritual subject from the social structure; an intervening threshold period when the subject is “neither here nor there;” followed by the reintegration of the subject into society.

Anthropologist Victor Turner expanded upon van Gennep’s concept of liminality, describing it as “time outside time.” To him, liminality exists in the marginal topography between the ordered/disordered, the bounded/boundless, and the living/dead. Episodes of liminality are ambiguous and often transgressive. Magico-religious properties are its frequent attribute and in the ritual context liminality sets into play the dissolution of cultural norms that allows for periodic and temporary reclassifications of reality. Because liminal subjects (or, as Turner called them, “passengers”) are not so much status-less as “indeterminate,” they are “betwixt and between” the customary restrictions imposed by law, ceremony, or convention. In many cultures, rituals that

involve liminality often bring participants in touch with “beliefs in the protective and punitive powers of divine or preterhuman beings.” In this sense, the circumstances of the ritual passengers during the process can be at once liberating and terrifying.

Liminality has been linked to supernaturally charged conditions from “the womb to the tomb,” as well as to conceptions of wilderness, darkness, invisibility, and natural phenomena like lunar and solar eclipses. Liminality is also closely connected to taboo and ritual pollution. In its more menacing aspects, liminality could be ascribed to the Greek goddess Hecate. While responsible for the beneficial cycles of fertility, agricultural growth and harvest, Hecate also ruled the dead souls of the underworld. Associated with the dark arts of witchcraft and magic, she was worshipped at crossroads, where this chthonic goddess was known to wander at night with ghosts and demons.

In a fascinating adaptation of Turner’s work, cultural theorist Dag Øistein Endjsø has added another dimension to liminality, imbuing it with a spatial aspect that supplements its temporal nature. He has argued that in ancient times, the geographical periphery called the *eschatia* reflected a “territorial parallel” with liminal Greek rites of passage. The *eschatia* is described as the landscape extending from the hinterland of the *polis* (the city) to what was considered the uttermost periphery of the world, the chthonic land below the earth, Hades.

In any instance, entrance into a state of liminality is a form of exile, whether imposed by self or by society. As in all rites of passage, the *eschatia* provided a context within which Greek adolescents gained access to adulthood through “initiatorial ordeals.” Not surprisingly, the Greek epic adventures were undertaken in the *eschatia*. Like Turner’s ritual passengers, heroes like Odysseus or Jason were considered by their loved ones to be dead once they departed from the confines of the *polis* (hence, civilization) into the liminal territory.

Within the ancient Greek worldview, the *polis* and Hades served to express the “existential dichotomy” of life and death to such an extent that it was transferred onto an “externalized reality of space,” a geography from which it expanded into a more comprehensive dichotomy of “being” and “non-being. Additionally, Hades represented

“nothingness,” an area “void of both time and space” in opposition to the ordered spacio-temporality of the civilized *polis*.

The *eschatia* being porous, however, there were leakages into it from both the *polis* and Hades. Consequently, this intermediary zone was ambiguous, paradoxical, and presented a “confusion of all customary categories.” Endjsø has suggested that in the *eschatia* non-being “encroached upon, intermingled, and even merged with elements of being.” Because man himself was “de-humanized” outside the civilizing structure of the *polis*, he often became either “a beast or a god,” according to Aristotle. Indeed, many of the epic protagonists were literally transformed by encounters with gods and supernatural beings into demigods or abject creatures. Moreover, this liminal realm was filled with nonsensical landscapes “that could not be put on any maps” and “teemed with zoomorphic hybrids like centaurs, satyrs, sirens, and sphinxes.” Betwixt and between the culturally recognized states of *polis* and Hades, the *eschatia* proposed the ultimate paradox of being and non-being, space and non-space, time and non-time. In this respect, the *eschatia* resembled primordial chaos, an undifferentiated and confused state in which the past, present, and future all “floated together.”

Using Endjsø’s system, we can say that *eschatia* is still with us when we experience and narrate our encounters with nature (no matter how impossible it might now seem to travel beyond the boundaries of the known world). In the “wilderness” many of our assumptions and expectations are liminally suspended. Time speeds up or slows down. Distances expand or contract. We find ourselves capable of things we did not know we had in us. The ways in which we describe the places and things we encounter outside our cities can include the dark, disorienting, and fearsome features of liminality but also can be lighter, even liberating, as we “lose ourselves” in an unfamiliar environment.

Far beyond the bounds of civilization, both caves and the Polar Regions could be considered enduring forms of *eschatia*. Some of the earliest known artworks, dating back as long ago as 35,000 BP, have been discovered in the deep, chthonic recesses of caves in southern France and northern Spain and Italy. It is often speculated that within these caverns, Cro-Magnon shamans practiced some form of sympathetic magic in which they underwent

spiritual transformation in order to intercede directly with supernatural forces.

The history of the Polar Regions is filled with the tribulations of adventurers who endeavored to explore them and their stories certainly inspire wonder and horror. In early maps, the Polar Regions were referred to as *terra incognita*, the unknown land, and the seas that surrounded them were filled with depictions of chimerical sea monsters. But it is in Mary Shelley's classic tale, *Frankenstein* (1817) that the liminal nature of the Polar Regions is best revealed. By the end of novel, Frankenstein's hybrid and unnatural progeny has exiled himself to the desolate arctic north, beyond the confines of civilization, escaping the humanity that rejected and reviled him. The last sighting of the creature is as he disappears on an ice raft, "lost in the dark and the distance."

As seems fitting with the schema of caves and Polar ice-sheets as *eschatia*, both natural phenomena have been summoned to play a metaphoric role in psychological descriptions of human consciousness. In 1889, Gustav Fechner devised an analogy of the human mind as being like an iceberg. Just as the majority of a vast iceberg is situated below the waterline, so too the majority of our thoughts are "subliminal", or below the threshold of consciousness. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung would both adopt this analogy but would refine it. In their models, the tip of the iceberg represents conscious thoughts and perceptions, while a roughly proportionate "pre-consciousness" exists just below the waterline and represents memories and stored knowledge that can, under the right conditions, be summoned to consciousness. The overwhelming mass of the iceberg, however, remains deeply submerged and represents our unconscious, the zone that contains urges, anxieties, and fear as well as irrational wishes and socially unacceptable desires.

In works such as *The Things We Never Said* (2010), Lia Halloran has personified the icebergs represented in her paintings, giving as titles the names of individuals from her life. She proposes that these paintings be read as revealing the complexities of interpersonal intimacy and separation. In light of the "mind as an iceberg" analogy, it can certainly be treacherous to circumnavigate subliminal desires and expectations, the *terra incognita* of loved ones, particularly when they cannot plumb the depths of these unconscious thoughts themselves.

Also at play in these paintings are ideas about transparency and crystallization. In earlier models of the mind, our thoughts were described as going through a process of “crystallization,” wherein they take on definite, permanent form. Those thoughts deemed “pure” have often been called crystalline, in other words transparent and therefore, philosophically speaking, more truthful. In going back to van Gennep’s idea of liminality, it could be that through these works Halloran proposes to her loved ones that they together enter into an interpersonal threshold in order to enact rites of transformation and growth.

In another body of paintings from *The Only Way Out is Through*, Halloran responds to images of the recently discovered Cueva de los Cristales (Cave of Crystals) in Naica, Mexico. In this astonishing natural marvel, the cave’s interior is crowded with monumental selenite crystals formed from the mineral gypsum over countless millennia. The cave is both beautiful and visually disorienting, manifesting a scale of time that exceeds human comprehension. It inspires awe of the sublime variety, tinged with both wonder and terror. In Halloran’s paintings, this sensation remains intact, as she presents spaces that defy viewers’ expectations about the formulaic objective distance from subject matter in the art viewing experience. There is no horizon line to orient viewers within this peculiar interior landscape. It is as if viewers have been plunged, confused and undifferentiated, into the midst of the paintings’ content. Halloran, in this respect, very much situates her audience within the paradoxical time/non-time and space/non-space of the *eschatia*.

In many autochthonous cultures, the natives believe that they were literally formed and emerged from the land where they live. According to Jungian psychologists, numerous creation myths begin with an image of cave, representing an original state of perfection, wholeness, and beatific containment. In this womb-like primordial place, gods and humans are undifferentiated. There is darkness and self-destruction as well as fecundity and creative potential. Psychologically, the primordial state is “prenatal”, an intrauterine totality in which individual ego is not yet incarnate, but has psychic awareness. When induced to return to this pre-ego, unconscious space, liminal passengers are put in disturbing proximity to non-being and the oblivion of nothingness.

In the current era of ecological anxiety, ancient cultural understanding of immense cave crystals and gigantic

icebergs as boundless natural phenomena—infinite and hence eternal—have given way to notions of the finite and bounded. Icebergs melt and with greater size and frequency every day. Caves can “die” when humans interact with them excessively, compelling scientists to wear the sterile masks, gloves, and booties that are more commonly found in hospital intensive care wards. Once insurmountable and even ineffable, the disappearance of natural phenomena like these at our hands seems inevitable. One wonders where we will find the imaginary, liminal territory of the *eschatia* then.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1979). Reprint of the edition published by Aldine Pub. Co., Chicago, in series: The Lewis Henry Morgan lectures, 1966. 95.
2. Ibid, 105.
3. Victor Turner, “Images of Anti-Temporality: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, v 75 n 2 (April 1982), 251.
4. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 95.
5. Dag Øistein Endjsø, “To Lock Up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space,” *Numen* v 47 n 4 (2000), 359.
6. Ibid, 369.
7. Ibid, 368.
8. Ibid, 362.
9. Ibid, 375.
10. Ibid, 373.
11. Ibid, 372.
12. Ibid, 359.
13. Ibid, 376.
14. Ibid, 373.
15. Ibid, 378.
16. Jean Clottes, *Cave Art* (Phaidon Press Limited: London and New York, 2008), 23-24.
17. Donald Kalsched and Alan Jones, *Myth and Psyche: The Evolution of Consciousness*, referenced on the website C.G. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology, March 11, 2010 (http://www.cgjungny.org/d/d_mythpsyche.html)
18. Kathryn Wood Madden, “Images of the Abyss,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, v 42 n 2 (Summer 2003), 127.
19. Ibid.



The Only Way Out is Through, 2009
oil on canvas wrapped wood panel
72 x 96 inches



In All Disorder, A Secret Order, 2010
oil on wood panel
72 x 84 inches





This Will Be Repeated As Before, 2009
oil on wood panel
60 x 48 inches



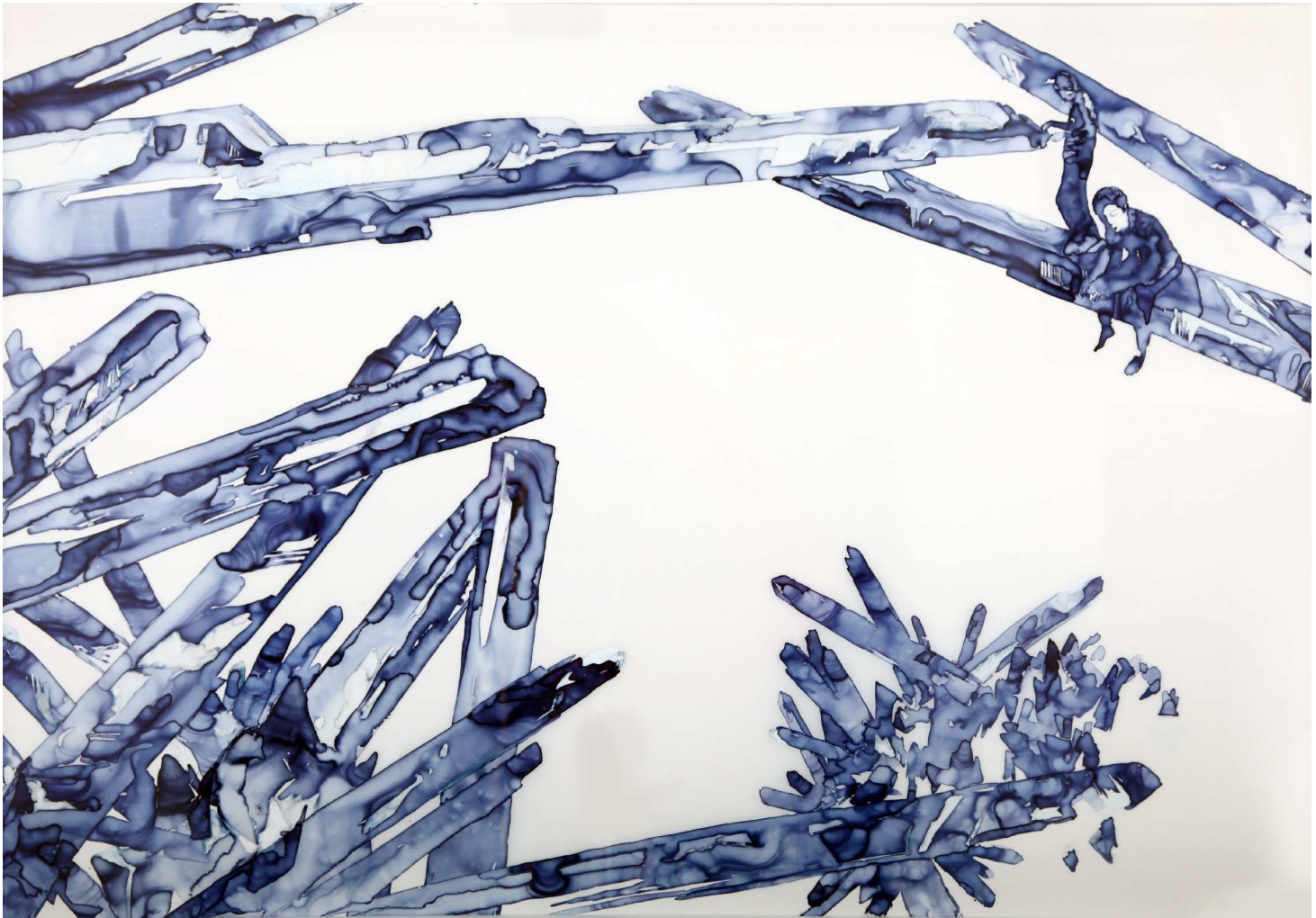
All Truths Are Private Truths, 2010
oil on wood panel
48 x 60 inches

Everything That's Made is Made to Decay, 2009
oil on canvas wrapped wood panel
36 x 48 inches



There Is Only Underneath, 2009
oil on canvas wrapped wood panel
36 x 48 inches





Sarah, Holly And The Crystal Cave, 2010
ink on duralene
24 x 36 inches



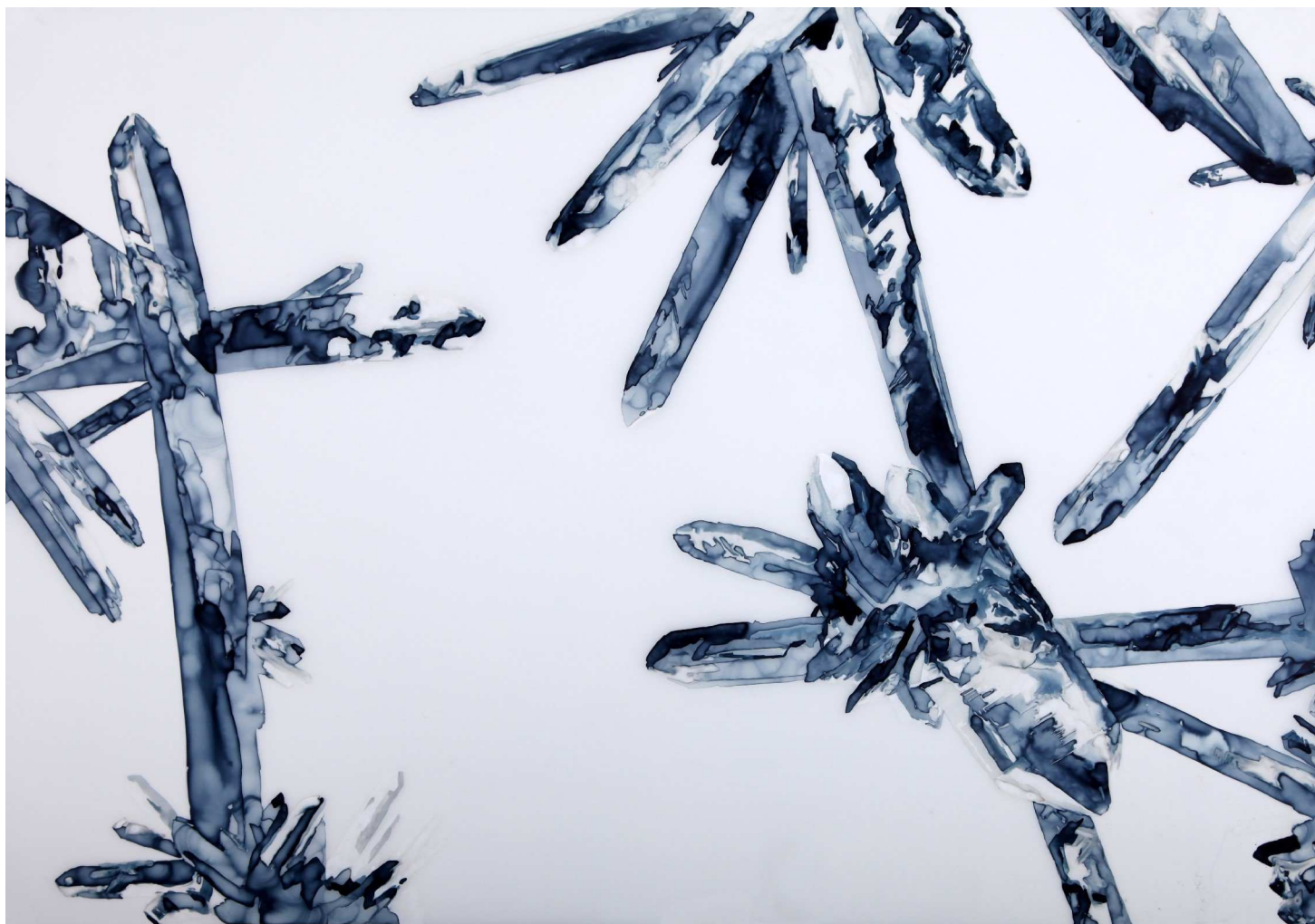
The Crystal Cave, 2010
ink on duralene
24 x 36 inches



Susana, Theresa And The Crystal Cave, 2009

ink on duralene

24 x 36 inches



Crystalline Forms, 2009
ink on duralene
24 x 36 inches



Crystalline Forms, (Part 1, 2, 3, 4), 2010
ink on duralene
14 x 11 inches



Red Crystalline Form, 2009
ink on duralene
24 x 36 inches





You And Me,, 2008
oil on wood panel
24 x 36 inches





You're The Best Thing That Ever Happened To Me, 2009

oil on wood panel

60 x 47 inches

You're The Worst Thing That Ever Happened To Me, 2009

oil on wood panel

48 x 60 inches

The Things We Never Said, 2008

oil on wood panel

36 x 48 inches



No One Has To Know, 2009

oil on wood panel

72 x 60 inches



BORN 1977 Chicago, IL
Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

EDUCATION

2001 MFA, Yale University, New Haven, CT
1999 BFA, University of California, Los Angeles, CA
1998 Studio Art Centers International, Florence, Italy

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2010 *The Only Way Out Is Through*, DCKT Contemporary, New York
2008 *Dark Skate Miami*, Fredric Snitzer Gallery project space, Miami, FL
Dark Skate, DCKT Contemporary, New York, NY
Dark Skate, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
101 California Street, San Francisco, CA
2007 *Dark Skate*, DCKT Contemporary, Pulse London, London, UK
2006 *The World is Bound with Secret Knots*, DCKT Contemporary, New York, NY
2005 *And the Darkness Implies the Vastness*, Sandroni Rey, Los Angeles, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

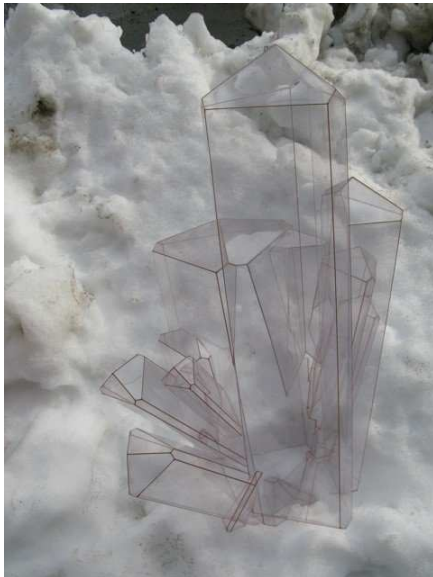
2010 *Haunted: Contemporary Photography / Video / Performance*, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain
Skateboarding Side Effects, Terrace Gallery at Artisphere, Arlington, VA
The Rise of RAD: Contemporary Art and the Influence of the Urethane Revolution, Torrance Art Museum, Torrance, CA
2009 *Superficiality and Superexcrecence*, curated by Christopher Bedford, Jennifer Wulffson, and Kristina Newhouse, with catalogue essay by John Welchman, publication by Fellows of Contemporary Art Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art & Design, LA, CA
2008 *Ultrasonic International III: Elementary, My Dear Watson*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
Sandroni Rey, Los Angeles, CA
2006-08 *Space is the Place*, curated by Alex Baker and Toby Kamps for Independent Curators International, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield, MI; Bedford Gallery, Walnut Creek, CA; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH; The Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY
2006 *Art Girls*, Anna Helwing Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Flatfiles @Haskins Laboratories, Yale University, New Haven, CT
2005 *Not too Loose, Not too Tight*, DCKT Contemporary, New York, NY
2004 *Enchantment*, untitled (space) gallery, New Haven, CT
SHAZAM!, Contemporary Artists and the Influence of Comics, MICA Baltimore Institute, Baltimore, MD
Works on Paper, Sandroni Rey, Los Angeles, CA
New Location, Sandroni Rey Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

COLLECTIONS

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Progressive Art Collection, Cleveland, OH
The Speyer Family Collection, New York, NY

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- Myers, Holly, "Superficiality and Superexcreance" *Los Angeles Times*, July 8.
- 2008 New American Paintings, December/January, The Open Studios Press
- Banai, Nuit, "Art: Reviews: Lia Halloran, 'Dark Skate'", *Time Out New York*, September 4-10.
- "Goings on About Town, Art ; Galleries Downtown Lia Halloran", *The New Yorker*, September 1.
- Baker, R.C., "Best in Show", *The Village Voice*, August 27.
- "Photographer Lia Halloran Captures Skaters Hitting Warp Speed", *nymag.com*, August 22.
- Genocchio, Benjamin, "Space Adventures, Real and Imagined", *The New York Times*, August 10.
- Hershenson, Roberta, "View of Space From One Who WAS There", *The New York Times*, August 9.
- Rosenberg, Karen, "Art in Review", *The New York Times*, August 8.
- Ouellette, Jennifer, "Rockets Red Glare", *Twisted Physics*, August 6.
- Tully, Judd, "Summer Art Shopping in New York", *ARTINFO*, July 28.
- Finel Honigman, Ana, "Skater in the Dark", *Style.com*, July 24.
- Ashman, Angela, "Sweet Shot", *The Village Voice*, July 16-22.
- McQuaid, Cate, "Lia Halloran: Dark Skate", *The Boston Globe*, June 12.
- Cook, Greg, "Fringe Festival", *The Boston Phoenix*, June 10.
- Griffith, Kristie, "LA People 2008 - Lia Halloran: Sk8er grl", *LA Weekly*, March 14.
- Pearce, Sara, "Easy to Get Lost in Space", *The Enquirer*, March 28.
- Kilduff, Angela, "Review: Space is the place", *CityBeat*, March 10.
- Jones, Richard O., "'Space is the Place' exhibit out of this world", *The Oxford Press*, February 8.
- Moon, Grace, "Skater Artist Lia Halloran", *Velvetpark Magazine*, January 11.
- 2007 Foust, Jeff, "Review: Space is the Place", *The Space Review*, December 3.
- Wasserman, Burton, "InSight: Space is the Place", *Art matters: The Philadelphia Region's Magazine of the Arts*, November 2.
- Strimpel, Zoe, "Off to London, Art in Hand", *The New York Sun*, October 11.
- "The World is Bound with Secret Knots", *NY Arts*, January / February.
- Speers Mears, Emily, "Space Race", *V Magazine*.
- Ascarelli, Brett, "Art Blasts Off", *Diablo Arts Magazine*.
- 2005 Goodbody, Bridget L., "Reviews: Lia Halloran/Sandroni Rey", *ARTnews*, December.
- Pagel, David, "Price's resplendent sculptures pack a punch", *Los Angeles Times*, February 11.



For this exhibition Lia Halloran and Sarah Strauss of Bigprototype have collaborated to build an edition of suspended and lit sculptural crystal chandeliers. The two have enjoyed over a decade of discussions about science, surfing, parallel dimensions, and infinity.

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