

Lucy Raven

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Another Dull Day

27 – 04 _____ 14 – 08 – 2022



Still from *Demolition of a Wall* (Album 2), Lucy Raven, 2022, color video, quadrasonic sound, 15 min. 31 sec., courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

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The artist **Lucy Raven** makes us look elsewhere in order to understand our current landscape. She encourages us to look below, behind or beyond. The solo exhibition *Another Dull Day* observes the properties of extreme pressure and material state changes in the context of the Western United States of America. In the vastness of the desert, Raven scrutinizes what is usually overlooked: gravel pits, nuclear testing sites, ballistics ranges—contemporary settler industries hidden in plain sight. The exhibition features two large film installations: *Demolition of a Wall (Album 2)*, 2022, premiering at WIELS, and *Ready Mix*, 2021, recently commissioned by Dia Art Foundation in New York. These are shown alongside a new body of photographic work titled *Socorro!*, 2022.

Raven's comprehensive practice includes moving image installations, animations,

sculpture and film. Her work points to the processes of human and mechanical labour that fuel the late-capitalist economy, often using the apparatus of image production as a point of entry. Presented in precisely conceived environments, her film installations possess a materialist aesthetic reminiscent of the conceptual art and experimental film of the 60s and 70s. They draw attention to how images and commodities are produced, and how our perception of both is influenced by the way they are depicted.

Demolition of a Wall (Album 2) was shot at an explosives range in Socorro, New Mexico. Socorro—meaning ‘aid’ or ‘help’—was given its name in the 16th century by Spanish colonizers as a token of gratitude: as the Spaniards emerged from a very barren stretch of desert, native Piro Indians offered them food and water. More recently, the area has been physically imprinted with the history of atomic bomb testing and hypersonic weapons research.

Demolition of a Wall (Album 2), presented on a freestanding LED wall, is a suite of short films observing the extreme pressure surging forth after the detonation of an explosive charge. Raven purposefully omits the actual blasts and instead makes us look at what occurs in the immediate aftermath: shock waves traversing the landscape. One could easily mistake these as visual effects. They are in fact an optical aberration caused by changes in the refraction of light, due to matter moving faster than the speed of sound. Raven uses high speed cameras and digital processing techniques to generate slowed-down image sequences of different shockwaves that are not usually discernible by the naked eye. Their inverted black and white properties bring to mind James Whistler's nocturne paintings (1870-1877) or Andy Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series (1962), but also hint at surveillance technology used by defense-related industries. The work is driven by shock and the cumulation of pressure, not only physically but as a wider gesture toward the development of the Western United States and its destructive fallout.

This is echoed in *Socorro!*, a series of analogue shadowgrams shown on the fourth floor. They document the shockwaves of exploded raw materials on large format photosensitive paper and negative film. To achieve this, Raven built a room-sized black box that acted as a camera inside the ballistic sciences lab of the New Mexico Tech University. In it she fashioned a lighting mechanism that triggers a stroboscopic flash timed to the exact moment of detonation, precisely capturing the exploded materials as they travel at mach speed (a unit indicating the speed of sound, named after the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach (1838-1916)). The resulting images bear a faint resemblance to the first visualisation of the shockwaves of a bullet, recorded in 1887 by Mach. But rather than pointing to the trajectory of a single bullet, Raven unleashes an array of different materials, each generating a series of interacting shocks and turbulent wakes. Her rendition is far more elusive and nebulous; the images appear to be haunted, imbued with the complicated histories of the region. In some instances,

this violence is suggested by the force of the blast piercing the paper of the shadowgrams. But these markings also serve to reveal the physicality of the image as object, grounding it back into a solid form.

There's a kind of vagueness to the physical experience of being in the desert, as opposed to how it's often pictured. It's not always clear where the foreground ends and the background begins, and the iconic image of a lone figure in the open landscape, something typical like a cowboy riding into the sunset, is evasive. Posing alternatives to linear, fixed-point perspective, a vanishing point on the horizon, is something I thought a lot about when making these works.

—Lucy Raven

The film *Ready Mix* observes a different materiality: that of cement, gravel and water being combined into concrete at a plant in Bellevue, Idaho. Concrete is the

most ubiquitous building material on the planet, but its environmental impact is lethal: straining water supplies, emitting CO₂, and extracting limited natural resources at a breakneck pace. WIELS, itself a stronghold of fortified concrete built by the architect Adrien Blomme in 1930—during the heyday of modernism—offers a resonant framework for *Ready Mix*.

The film speaks to the material creation of private property and industrial infrastructure, both historic and contemporary, by way of investigating the processes that produce its main component—concrete. At times, the physical accumulation of mineral aggregates overloads the limitations of the camera, blurring and flattening the image as a result. At others, closely choreographed drones following the movements of excavators and conveyor belts bring to mind surveillance footage. The drummer and music producer Deantoni Parks was approached by Raven to design an immersive soundtrack for

Ready Mix—he also scored *Demolition of a Wall (Album 2)*. His sonic treatment is both highly composed and improvisational in nature, emphasizing the disrupted flow of time and space that distinguish the film.

Shown on a custom-made curved screen in CinemaScope format (2.35:1) the film draws on the preferred aspect ratio of Western genre films, but also on its military uses as a virtual reality environment for anti-aircraft combat during the second World War. In fact, early motion picture technologies came of age in tandem with the industrial and military exploitation of the western United States during the first half of the 20th century, and Raven is interested in their complex entanglement. Through her lens, the mythical “Wild West” and its persistent ideology of individualism, frontierism and unlimited expansion is reimagined into a critical, multipolar rendering of the landscape. In doing so, the artist turns our attention away from the horizon and toward a forcefield of geographic, material and historical tensions.

Underpinning Raven's works is the perpetual cycle of development, redevelopment and violence, enacted both on the people and animals inhabiting the land and on the land itself, one dull day after another.

Curator: Helena Kritis

THANKS FOR YOUR VISIT!

The exhibition is made in collaboration with Dia Art Foundation and is supported by Lisson Gallery (London, New York, Shanghai) and Vidi Square.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Lucy Raven (b. 1977, Tucson, USA) lives and works in New York. Another Dull Day is Raven's first major solo exhibition in Belgium. With Vic Brooks and Evan Calder Williams, she is a founding member of 13BC, a moving-image research and production collective. Raven teaches at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York. She is represented by Lisson Gallery (London, New York, Shanghai).

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