

Title

Alice Channer

Author(s)

Rachel Withers

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About the author(s)

is a writer and educator. She has been researching and writing on contemporary art since the mid-1980s, with an emphasis on installation, photography, live art and film and video.

Cover image: **Fig. 17** Chrome-plating aluminium ammonite casts for *Starship (Super Heavy)* and *Dry Cask (Silk Cut)*, by Alice Channer. 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Thierry Bal).

Alice Channer

by Rachel Withers • 22.02.2024

The work of Alice Channer (b.1977) **FIG.1** enacts a constant and strange displacement. Her sculptures, which are both experimental and precise, often display the marks and residue of their production. They overturn traditional affects and values, eradicating distinctions between the natural and man-made, original and synthetic. Her recent two-part solo exhibition *Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* **FIG.2 FIG.3 FIG.4**, curated by Stefanie Gschwend, spanned both the Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell in Switzerland and included new works alongside sculptures, drawings and installations from the last decade.¹ The works incorporate a wide range of materials, including shells, fabric, plastic, aluminium, concrete and feathers, which have been subjected to various industrial and manufacturing processes, making them simultaneously alien and familiar. In this interview, which took place in Channer's studio, the artist talks to Rachel Withers about prosaic materials, chemical pools, de-anthropocentrism, gravity and sculptural violence.

Rachel Withers (RW): I found *Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* gripping, for reasons I'll try to articulate as we go. To begin, though, can you outline what you hoped for from the show?



Fig. 1 Alice Channer with her work *Lethality and Vulnerability* in 2021. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Thierry Bal).

Alice Channer (AC): This was the most extensive project I've ever

developed, and my hope was to see my work clearly, for what it was. I rarely finish work in the studio; my exhibitions usually consist of new pieces that I see properly for the first time in the gallery, and I always prepare myself for feelings of both extreme elation and extreme doubt. In Appenzell, the oldest exhibited work – a drawing of a pair of snake-print trousers titled *Deep Skin* (2011) – was made about twelve years ago. As this was my first survey exhibition, I hoped to see an overview of my work with some clarity, but I'm not sure this came about. Maybe it's not really possible for an artist. All of the works still felt very 'present'. They're autobiographical to me in a way that they wouldn't be to anyone else. The experience of making them is very intense, and all are strongly connected to process, which is something I can readily see within each work. But anticipating and articulating the effects of their sculptural form – which is what they are about as well – is much trickier. I was hoping for a clearer sense of what it feels like to be in the room with them as 'alien things'.

RW: To me, the show revealed a remarkable sense of consistency across your practice.

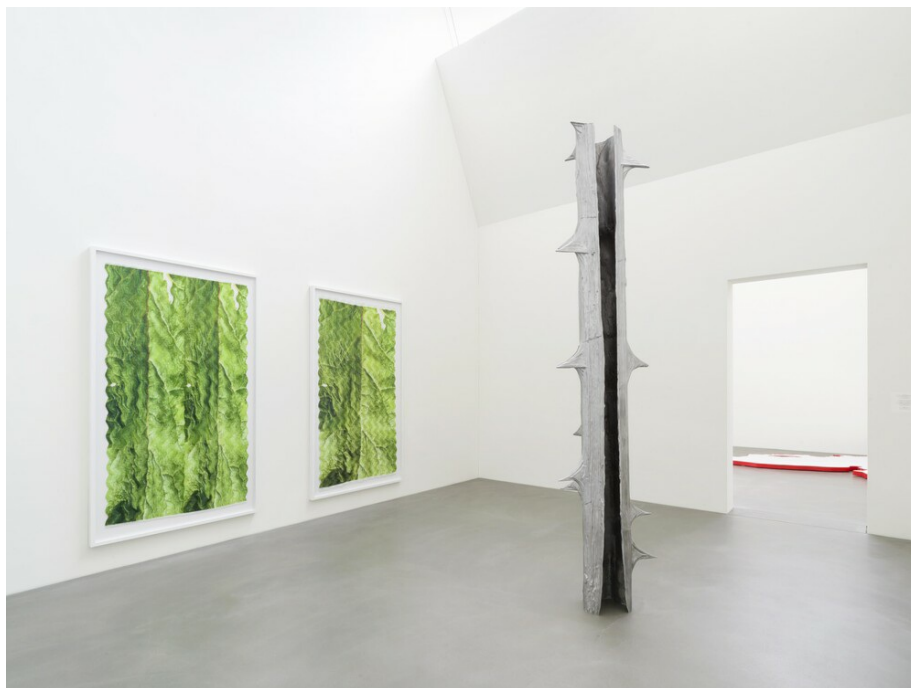


Fig. 2 Installation view of Alice Channer: *Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* at Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell, 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: That's interesting – it's not a quality I expected you to foreground. Some of my peers have refined a really consistent style, but my work remains experimental and I think it always will be. With each new body of work, I'm negotiating a lot of things for the first time.

RW: Maybe that sense of consistency comes down partly to the personal considerations that I brought to the show. With each

work, I was struck by what seemed to be strange, counterintuitive decision-making processes. At times, I felt almost as though I wasn't the primary viewer: as if a strange intelligence had brought these objects into being for the appreciation of other, similarly alien, intelligences. The materials, processes, images and details in your works seem properly de-anthropocentric. For me, at least, 2023 was a year of confronting and thinking about subject positions in art and intelligence in general – AI in particular – in ways I've never done before. To give an example, let's discuss your recent bronze work *Bloom* (2024), which is in front of us now. It's a sequence of cast objects that all feature this residual edge – I think it's called flashing?



Fig. 3 Installation view of *Alice Channer: Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* at Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell, 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: Yes, there are three pieces arranged on a scale from 'minimum' to 'maximum' flash. In this work I've experimented with a verdigris patination that slightly resembles the way mould grows and spreads on stale bread.



Fig. 4 Installation view of *Alice Channer: Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* at Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell, 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

RW: In any standard approach to sculpting or other types of manufacture, the flashing would be considered as residue and the cast object would be the important element, but here that's overturned; the flashing is no less significant. Your work constantly sets up estrangements like this. For instance, in *Ultra Slims* **FIG.5** you make use of sawn-off elasticated waistbands from pairs of leggings. It's a strikingly non-intuitive choice of focus, a thoroughly strange displacement. It's this that made me hypothesise some kind of alien, non-human, 'perfect viewer' for the Appenzell show. I'm not saying this is 'art for AI', which would be a very banal suggestion. Rather, I'm trying to characterise the strange, compelling affect that your works trigger, and maybe establish terms to discuss their material, even ontological, implications.



Fig. 5 *Ultra Slims*, by Alice Channer. 2013. Lost-wax cast, chromed and powder-coated aluminium and oak dowels, 51.5 by 40 by 36 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Cary Whittier).

AC: Yes, I see where you're heading. Let's return to the idea of the de-anthropocentric later. For now I want to note that my most powerful encounters with sculpture – the ones that have written themselves into my body – are the ones that have felt like meeting an alien entity, compelling me to reconfigure myself in order to work out what I'm encountering. And yet none of the materials or processes I use are particularly unusual or remarkable. My work is actually quite analogue; I make some use of digital processes, such as digital carving, for example in *Megaflora* **FIG.6** **FIG.7**, *Ammonite* (2019) and *Burial* **FIG.8**, but in a really basic way. My materials tend to be very prosaic: paper, shells, fabric and metals. For the Appenzell show, I incorporated some new materials, including ostrich feathers **FIG.9**, but these came from a specific context – they're part of an industrial system used to clean car bodies. In *Birth Pool* **FIG.10** **FIG.11** visitors are invited to walk and sit on high-density polypropylene (HDPE) pellets, which are used to make glasses frames and shoe soles. So, many of the materials are familiar and relate to everyday objects.

RW: After walking through *Birth Pool* in the Appenzell installation, I had the strange experience of picking bits of plastic from between my toes. It's like – and yet utterly not like – clearing away sand after a walk on the beach.



Fig. 6 Installation view of *Alice Channer: Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* at Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell, 2023, showing *Megaflores*, by Alice Channer. 2021. Sand-cast aluminium, 330 by 72 by 47 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: Yes! With that work, I feared local headlines along the lines of ‘British artist pollutes Swiss countryside’, because of the binary judgments that could be attributed to using plastic pellets. However, every time I’ve shown it – and *Burial*, which uses the same material – people seem able to experience the pellets in a very somatic way, which overrides the inclination to judge it as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Someone even wrote in a local paper that the work gives you a foot massage!² So, it was afforded a kind of therapeutic quality, in a way that negated the conventional attributions of value that this substance often attracts, which, in turn, might aid a more complex understanding of our relationship to this and similar materials.



Fig. 7 Detail of *Megaflora*, by Alice Channer. 2021. Sand-cast aluminium. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

RW: In an interview included in the exhibition monograph, you point out that Swiss grass – all of that brilliant emerald ‘green concrete’ – is itself the consequence of an industrial-chemical process: the intensive spraying of nitrogen-rich fertiliser.³



Fig. 8 *Burial*, by Alice Channer. 2016. Sand-cast aluminium bronze, cast concrete, sand-cast Corten steel and pelletised and recycled HDPE, dimensions variable. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: Yes, and it pollutes the water table in the cantons below, I've been told. The green grass isn't just vital to the dairy industry, it's arguably also a significant part of tourism and the very construction of Swiss national identity.

RW: You describe your materials and processes as prosaic or basic, but I don't think they necessarily strike viewers that way. I'd argue that they sharpen our awareness of the way that, in everyday life, we're surrounded by manufactured substances that many of us barely understand – what they are, how they behave, how they're processed. Your works constantly remind me of this, even at the level of choices of colour: take the green shade that features in the work *Linear Bivalves (Quintuple Green)* **FIG.12** **FIG.13**, for instance. It's chilly, attractive and profoundly synthetic – a familiar part of the world of consumable products and packaging. Although I have no idea how the colour is constituted, your use of it and other materials has the effect of reorganising my everyday perceptions. Just now, outside your studio, I walked past an electric car emitting the type of soothing, spectral, carefully engineered fake 'engine noise' that has been designed into electric vehicles for safety purposes. It felt like the perfect preface to this discussion.

AC: There's a great quote in Katrina Palmer's *End Matter* (2015): 'individuals, in the midst of a vanishing physical environment, might adjust to this loss by heightening their sensual experiences'.⁴ We tend to think of electric cars as a kind of disappearance of the physical world, whereas what I'm trying to do in my work is re-materialise it. The materiality is still there to be grasped. For example, the car you just encountered is essentially a carapace,

sitting on top of an array of batteries. *Linear Bivalves* also includes carapaces: mussel shells covered in a layer of aluminium and then a translucent green varnish. It's a finishing process that allows for the cheap mass-production of objects in plastic rather than metal. It's an outrageous thing to apply to something made by an animal, and yet the shells fit the industrial process very well because, like all animals, the mussel repeats itself willingly. It was far easier for me to buy, clean and cook hundreds of bulk-purchased mussels from Billingsgate Market than to cast them.

That said, it was important that the work was made from real bodies, which were then processed by a machine. The shells are attached to the aluminium bars of jigs designed to fit into a coating machine, so the piece takes its final form from the demands of this apparatus. Coating substances make the shells more resistant to environmental conditions and more pleasant to touch and look at: this is a whole, invisible area of capitalist production. In the United Kingdom alone there are hundreds of chroming, metal coating and anodising factories, as well as places that exclusively make the jigs and components that hold things as they go in coating tanks, kilns and chambers. They're like extensions of bodies. Formally, they look like 'nature' – say, a debased tree or branch with stems – but they're also violent forms, because of their repetitiveness.



Fig. 9 *Body Shop*, by Alice Channer. 2023. Ostrich feather car body cleaning discs and stainless steel chain, dimensions variable. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

The jigs in *Crustacean Satellites* **FIG.14** have spring fixings that would usually secure car headlamps. They came from a small company in the Midlands that I frequently work with, which slightly tweaked the jigs to make them hold hundreds of crab shells instead. Maybe the strangeness of the jigs stems from the fact that they're not made to be seen, they're made to be held, and as extensions of bodies, to hold.

RW: In engineering, the most complicated tasks are often not in making the object, but rather in designing the apparatuses that facilitate the making of the object. This is another displacement, a redirection of our attention away from finished products and towards the objects that enable their construction.



Fig. 10 *Birthing Pool*, by Alice Channer. 2019. Accordion-pleated hi-tech lamé, accordion-pleated polyester satin, accordion-pleated 'women ladies animal leopard snake PU PVC wet look shiny leggings fashion pant new', accordion-pleated 'sexy ladies high waist wet look skinny leather leggings pants trousers black', curved and welded mirror-polished sheet stainless steel and pelletised and recycled polypropylene, dimensions variable. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Tim Bowditch).

AC: Yes, I want to tell the truth, not make objects that are divorced from the processes that produce them. It's my job as an artist, and that's often an uncomfortable and thankless task, but it's also anarchic and fun, ecstatic and beautiful. The release of energy from it is often huge. I also feel it in the audience's responses. There's a relief: 'Ah, I see this'. But another fascination that these jigs exert is that they aren't made as a means of expression, but rather to annihilate expression. These production processes are often used for weapons or defence manufacturing; for example, jigs designed to hold a variety of mortar shells. Right now, a lot of light industry is retooling to make weapons. I've always seen this, but it's happening more and more.

RW: Sitting side-by-side with this is the fact that the mussel shells in *Linear Bivalves* were also processed in a very 'homely' fashion: essentially, cooked in a domestic kitchen.



Fig. 11 Detail of *Birthing Pool*, by Alice Channer. 2019. Accordion pleated hi-tech lamé, accordion pleated polyester satin, accordion pleated 'women ladies animal leopard snake PU PVC wet look shiny leggings fashion pant new', accordion pleated 'sexy ladies high waist wet look skinny leather leggings pants trousers black', curved and welded mirror-polished sheet stainless steel and pelletised and recycled polypropylene. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Tim Bowditch).

AC: Making anything always involves unexpected kinds of labour. I don't have a lot of constants in my practice because each work interrogates its own production. I have to be open to new things every time – turning my kitchen into a mussel shell production site, for instance.



Fig. 12 *Linear Bivalves (Quintuple Green)*, by Alice Channer. 2018. Vacuum-metallised and lacquered mussel shells on custom jigs, 484 by 260.3 by 7 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman

März).

RW: In *Mechanoreceptor, Icicles (red, red) (triple spring, triple strip)* **FIG.15** rows of disembodied, scarily elongated metal fingers have been dipped in a red coating **FIG.16** – a plasticky-rubbery acrylic that is very familiar and almost worryingly attractive. In its set form it's perfectly smooth and resilient, but it also loudly announces its previous liquid state. Its tactility almost screams at you.



Fig. 13 Detail of *Linear Bivalves (Quintuple Green)*, by Alice Channer. 2018. Vacuum-metallised and lacquered mussel shells on custom jigs. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: It's the substance used to coat the handles of tools, such as wire-cutters. You talked earlier about how little we know about the everyday substances around us, but everyone will have handled a tool like this. The coating is glossy and bright, appealing to both

the eye and the hand.

RW: It's obvious that you're extremely disciplined as to which ideas, works or materials 'make the cut', and which get discarded.

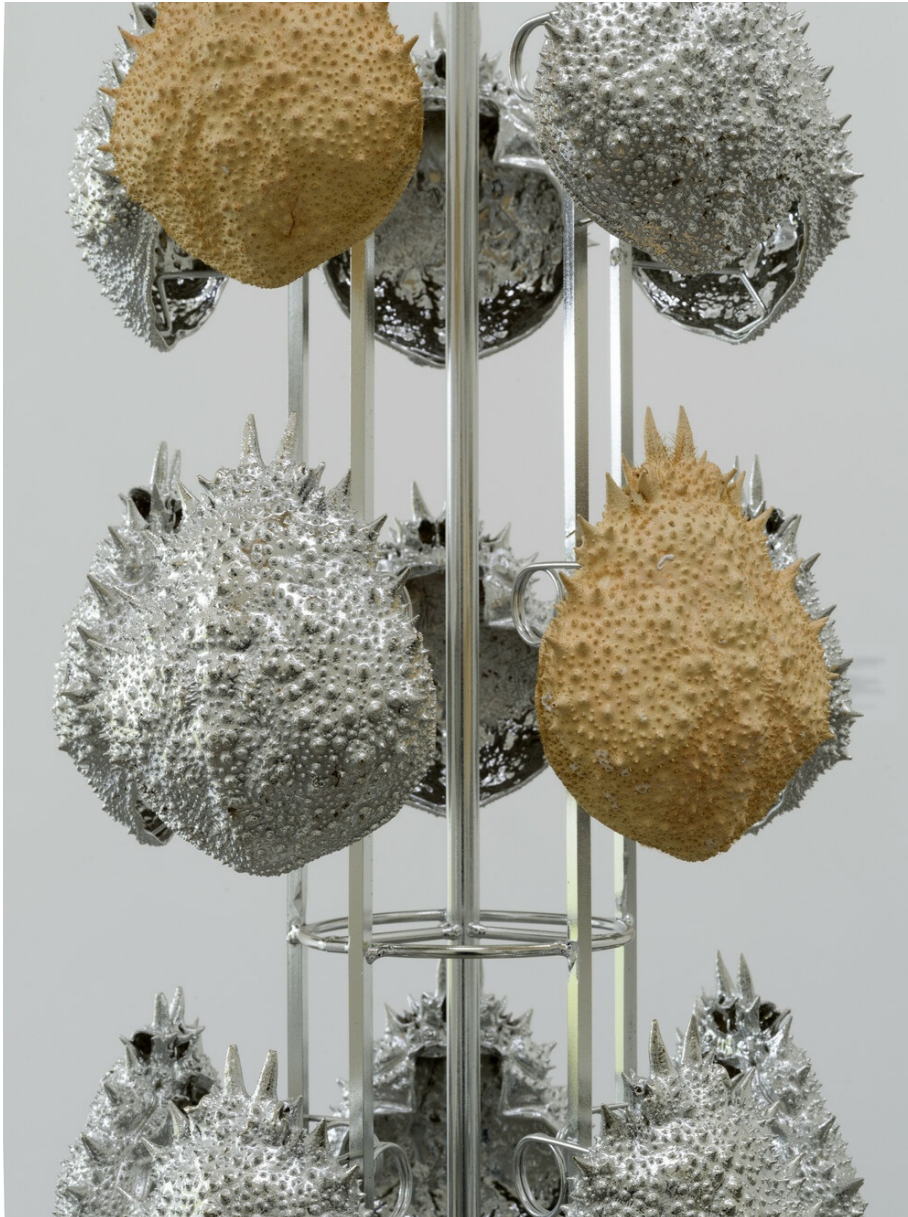


Fig. 14 Detail of *Crustacean Satellites*, by Alice Channer. 2018. Vacuum-metallised spider crab and brown crab shells on stainless steel jigs, PVC-coated steel cables and fixings. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: There's a lot of trial and error. I'm interested in precision: if I can make a work that's really precise, then it's the most generous. Precision may seem like a narrowing-down, but when I achieve it, the work seems much more open. It takes a long time to get to the point where it feels right.



Fig. 15 Detail of *Mechanoreceptor, Icicles (red, red) (triple spring, triple strip)*, by Alice Channer. 2018. Cast and PVC-dipped aluminium, titanium, electropolished stainless steel, stainless steel, PVC-coated steel cables and fixings. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Lewis Ronald).

RW: As you're working, are there effects or qualities that you immediately know aren't right?



Fig. 16 Liquid PVC dipping for *Mechanoreceptor, Icicles (red, red) (triple spring, triple strip)*, by Alice Channer. 2018. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Thierry Bal).

AC: I look for a combination of pleasure and violence in the forms I develop, or rather in the emotions they carry. However, I don't have pre-existing criteria for making work. The criteria emerge in stages as the works are born. There are also lots of practical issues to resolve, things as basic as whether or not an object can stand on its own. Apparatuses used in industrial processes are made to be supported on a production line, not shown in a gallery.



Fig. 17 Chrome-plating aluminium ammonite casts for *Starship (Super Heavy)* and *Dry Cask (Silk Cut)*, by Alice Channer. 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Thierry Bal).

RW: How about if something starts to feel anthropomorphic, or have a kind of nostalgia, pathos or sweetness about it? These are

registers that I'd be very surprised to discover in your work.



Fig. 18 Chrome-plating aluminium ammonite casts for *Starship (Super Heavy)* and *Dry Cask (Silk Cut)*, by Alice Channer. 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Thierry Bal).

AC: Over the last few years I've made use of hundreds of ammonite fossils, usually cast in aluminium. It's an obviously 'content heavy' form and for me, 'content' or 'subject-matter' is right down at the bottom as a consideration. As I engage with processes and materials, it doesn't come into view until much later. For the ammonites, I've had to remove the centres using a drill press, which is quite a large hole to drill into a solid cast. The reason is that the unmodified form is just not right, it verges on kitsch. With the middle removed, it loses its conventional value. It's had violence done to it.

RW: The marks of the industrial-style making process – the mould mark, the perfectly round drill hole – are as important as any feature of the original ammonite. It's another example of that estrangement I keep referring to: the destabilisation of predictable affects and values.

AC: Yes, without those marks the ammonite cast stands as evidence of 'deep time'. My interest is in this as a sculpture made by an animal and a geological process, then transformed via industrial processes.



Fig. 19 Chrome-plating aluminium ammonite casts for *Starship (Super Heavy)* and *Dry Cask (Silk Cut)*, by Alice Channer. 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Thierry Bal).

RW: In my conceit, this unfathomable intelligence that I'm positing has no idea whatsoever of the profundities (or clichés) of 'deep time', or the idea that it categorically contrasts with the present, or with high-speed mechanical manufacturing. It simply doesn't understand that.

AC: The idea of deep time itself is a fairly contemporary concept or concern: a subject in fashionable books that is usually dealt with in a nostalgic, escapist way, which at this moment is utterly inexcusable. My work is a form of realism. It's about what's already here, but is difficult to see, or, what we'd rather not see. For that reason, the work isn't affirmative. People can find that difficult, I think. I'm supposed to be in reverence of this object, not spending days in the studio removing its centre with a pillar drill that I bought specifically for the purpose. The violence I've inflicted on the fossil is being enacted over and over again, on the materials that are being extracted to facilitate all the beautiful and terrible industrial processes that surround us.



Fig. 20 Installation view of *Alice Channer: Heavy Metals / Silk Cut* at Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell, 2023, showing *Starship (Super Heavy)*, by Alice Channer. 2022. Machined limestone, lost-wax cast and mirror-polished aluminium; chromed, vapour-blasted, machined and sand-cast aluminium; accordion-pleated crepe satin silk; laser-cut and mirror-polished stainless steel, dimensions variable. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

RW: In the monograph that accompanied your exhibition in Appenzell, there's a stunning sequence of photographs documenting the industrial coating process **FIG.17 FIG.18**. The colours in these photos are sumptuous: copper, steel, rust, charcoal, cobalt, verdigris. They feel both gorgeous and dangerous.

AC: I wanted the book not to be just a monograph but to tell the story of the production processes. As you browse it you see the ammonite moving in and out of various chroming tanks, being 'skinned'. The green tank is the copper tank, the orange one the chroming tank and the blue one **FIG.19** contains nickel. The location is a small family business that I work with frequently. The photographer Thierry Bal makes incredible images in any situation, and when he took those images the factory was in full operation. Even during the pandemic, it never seemed to stop: its processes are as continuous and primordial as the seasons are supposed to be, and I think of the forms it contains as natural.



Fig. 21 Detail of *Starship (Super Heavy)*, by Alice Channer. 2022. Machined limestone, lost-wax cast and mirror-polished aluminium; chromed, vapour-blasted, machined and sand-cast aluminium; accordion-pleated crepe satin silk; laser-cut and mirror-polished stainless steel. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

RW: That reminds me of a note I made while reading the printed material at the Appenzell exhibition. The text refers to a juxtaposition of the natural and the man-made in your sculptures but, reading it, I thought instead that your works simply destroy the distinction. The spectrum from natural to man-made, from the original to the synthetic, is swept away: that's another, vital aspect of the dislocation, the estrangement in your works. To do the essay I've mentioned justice, it too goes on to deconstruct that binary. Here, I think we're looping back to the subject of de-anthropocentrism.

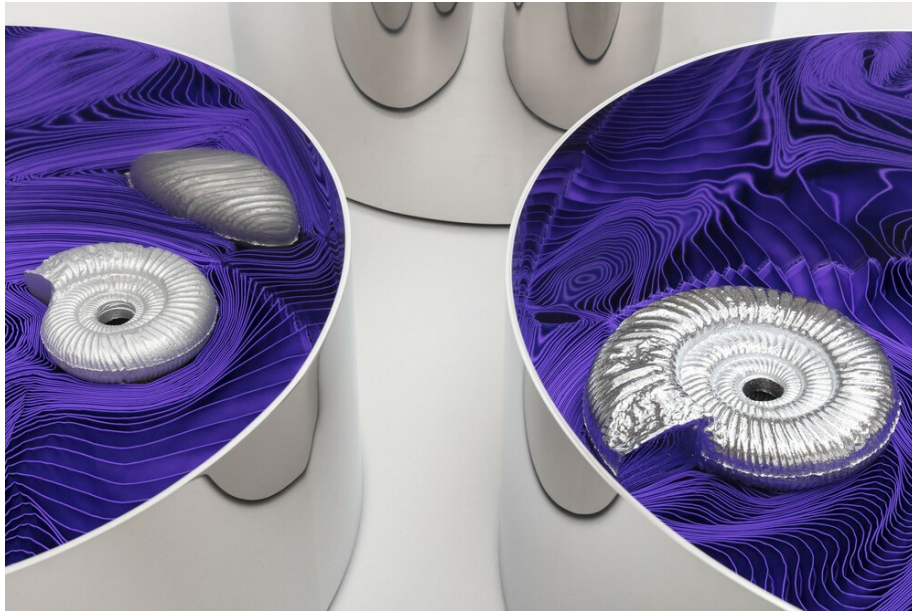


Fig. 22 Detail of *Dry Cask (Silk Cut)*, by Alice Channer. 2023. Mirror-polished, laser-cut, rolled and welded sheet stainless steel; accordion-pleated crepe satin silk; sand-cast, machined, vapour-blasted and chromed aluminium. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Lucy Dawkins).

AC: For me, de-anthropocentric sculpture constitutes a form of expression, however unlikely or contradictory that sounds – especially coming from an artist who uses materials, processes and forms that were mostly built to be as inexpressive as possible. Here I’m talking about things like industrial surfaces, or structures made by non-human animals with their own alien forms of expression, or even things made to eliminate expression; in many ways, industrial materials and processes are death-making. For me, the great big transgression in this approach creates a productive tension, which my work at its best fully exploits.

RW: Can you explain to me the Elon Musk references in some of your works?



Fig. 23 *The Colonization of Mars*, by Alice Channer. 2023. Mirror-polished, welded and laser-cut stainless steel, accordion-pleated hi-tech lamé and polished hematite, 51.5 by 101 by 21.5 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; photograph Roman März).

AC: I made a work in 2016 that I titled *Elon Musk*, when he was primarily known as an eccentric billionaire connected with technology. I often give works a title that doesn't fit, and so naming this very intuitively made work after somebody who symbolised technological rationalism seemed provocative. Now, though, he's so strongly aligned himself with the hard right that I presently don't want to show that work.

RW: Can you revoke the title?

AC: I'm going to put him into art storage – really cold, dark storage!

RW: That sounds like a work!

AC: My discipline and thinking is the antidote to his libertarianism. In the first work that the visitor encountered in Appenzell, *Starship (Super Heavy)* **FIG.20** **FIG.21**, I wanted to invoke the opposite of Musk's SpaceX rocket. The piece uses huge discs of Portland limestone and mirror-polished stainless steel, the substance that the rocket is made from, which is inlaid into cavities in the stone. I'm partly interested in the glamour of the Musk Starship, but my 'starship' is very different: it's horizontal and includes different kinds of time and more complex ways of thinking. I'm not interested in terraforming or colonising other planets. I don't want to go to Mars so I can strip it of its materials. I want to think about it as an alien place that might suggest another way of being. I want to stay here on my home planet and make Earth a better place.

RW: For anyone else with a large amount of money, and some common sense, that would seem like a better way of spending it.

AC: During the pandemic I was fascinated by the billionaires departing for space. I watched Jeff Bezos graciously thank his workers and customers for enabling him to travel into outer space!⁵ *Starship (Super Heavy)* also connects to ideas about gravity and anti-gravity – for example, through their sheer weight. The pieces are so heavy that they had to be moved into place with a gantry. People often think that the giant discs are made from poured concrete aggregated with fossils, but they feature limestone as it was quarried from the earth: the same stone that was used to build Buckingham Palace, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and so on, albeit using a much ‘purer’ form. When I visited the Portland mine I walked past a seam of stone that was dense with fossils and I was enthralled by the way it shows its own production process: it’s literally made of bodies. All I had to do was slice open the surface and show that as a sculpture, interrupted by some other forms and materials.

RW: The exhibition also featured various pieces made by inserting concertinaed folds of silk into steel forms **FIG.22** **FIG.23**. These also exert a related fascination that results from sculptural strategies of exposure and concealment. You can see the top edges of the folds, and they glisten in a way that invites you to imagine the hidden areas. The material that you can’t see is as tantalisingly important as the stuff on the surface. Going back to my imaginary intelligence conceit, viewing these works, this strange consciousness doesn’t discriminate at the level of visible and invisible. It doesn’t mind about material being unseen; in fact, it likes that.

AC: I think I’m only presenting surface. All of my work is surface – a complex one. It’s compacted or condensed material.

RW: The brushing aside of the visible–invisible distinction: it’s part of a sculptural language with profoundly shifted aesthetic values.

AC: But don’t you find this a truth? I find a lot of the world around me, especially the industrially produced world, invisible – in the sense of it being incomprehensible. It seems only natural that my work would reproduce that.

RW: Yes, this is part of your work’s consistency, its coherence.

AC: On the studio wall at the moment are photographs relating to a *Guardian* investigation of Sellafield.⁶ I had no idea that Sellafield contains the largest amount of untreated nuclear waste in the world, but the part that interested me the most was the vast, completely inaccessible pools it contains, each built to hold that nuclear waste. Today, a lot of them are in a state of extreme disrepair. I’ve made a series of works that are pool-like, taking the

outlines from satellite images – for instance, from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, a massive event that, like the Sellafield pools, is incomprehensible in its vastness. I find myself continually skirting around these images; they're fascinating, but they're sculptures already. I can't make anything as remarkable as this, nor would I want to, but for me these pools aren't unlike the chemical pools that the ammonite fossil is being lowered into and out of. They're both alien and mundane, beautiful and terrible, and I don't know what to do with this knowledge. I don't make sculpture about it, but rather around it, of it and with it. As an artist, what I can describe is the space between me and those pools, a space full of comprehension and incomprehension. In the end, that's what I'm trying to do.

Footnotes

- 1 S. Gschwend, ed.: exh. cat. *Alice Channer: Heavy Metals / Silk Cut*, Appenzell (Kunstmuseum and Kunsthalle Appenzell) 2023.
- 2 M. Bächtold: 'Kunst kann nicht mit natur konkurrieren', *Appenzeller Volksfreund* (1st July 2023).
- 3 See 'Bodies and machines: Alice Channer in conversation with Stefanie Gschwend', in Gschwend, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.268-277.
- 4 K. Palmer: *End Matter*, London 2015, p.7.
- 5 See Reuters: "'You guys paid for all this': Jeff Bezos thanks Amazon staff, customers", YouTube (20th July 2021), available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvVVm375daA, accessed 19th February 2024.
- 6 See A. Isaac and A. Lawson: 'Sellafield: "bottomless pit of hell, money and despair" at Europe's most toxic nuclear site', *The Guardian* (4th December 2023), available at www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/04/sellafield-money-europe-toxic-nuclear-site-cumbria-safety, accessed 19th February 2024; and "'A picture of hell": inside the UK's nuclear reactors – in pictures', *The Guardian* (21st February 2024), available at www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2024/feb/21/a-picture-of-hell-inside-the-uks-nuclear-reactors-in-pictures, accessed 22nd February 2024.

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