



of the camera, Cha's contemporary analog suggests how frictionless that process has become.

—Megan Heuer

## LETHA WILSON

### Higher Pictures

One of a number of contemporary artists who are blurring the lines between photography and other mediums, Letha Wilson makes artworks that are as much sculptures as photographs. Amalgamations of photographic images and spray paint, lumber and concrete, these hybrid objects, medium sized and mostly wall hung, occupy territory also being explored by sculptors such as Rachel Harrison and Virginia Overton. An exhibition of new pieces (all from 2012) showcased Wilson's adventuresome way with materials.

As in the past, Wilson's own color landscape photos formed the basis for each work. Wilson has described herself as an amateur photographer, and on their own, the pictures are indeed nothing special: vistas of mountains and deserts, indistinguishable from vacation photographs taken at any time over the last century, appear alongside inscrutable close-ups of rocks, shrubs and trees. These nondescript outdoor shots are then subjected to various physical processes, including being pleated, cut, bisected by two-by-fours or partially obscured by flows of cement.

Through such interventions, Wilson creates abstract approximations of each landscape's most immediate visual and sensory effects. In *Badlands White*, crumpled photographs of Colorado's badlands alternate with chunks of concrete that have been transfer-printed with images of the same rough country; the work's ridges and gullies mimic the region's inhospitable terrain. In the circular *Storm Cloud Circle Fold (Colorado)*, a photograph (actually three conjoined photographs) of a spectacular thunderhead has been pleated to make a fan, its outward radiating lines conjuring the dizzying expanses of the American West's big skies. More delicate are two views of barren salt flats, each partly obscured by a dried, semitransparent spill of salty-looking white Portland cement. The only floor piece is a narrow photograph, over 8 feet tall, of the Grand Tetons, pinned along its length between two halves of a tall, cast cement column. As in real life, one must tilt one's head to see the image of a mountain peak that pokes out of the very top. Most abstract is *The Wave Concrete Tondo*, a disc of hardened cement, made by pouring concrete over a pleated photograph of a pink and red sandstone cliff. The photograph has transfer-printed onto the cement, resulting in horizontal bands of color that run against the grain of the sculpture's vertical folds, just as they do in the live rock.

Analogues for the physical reality of being in the landscape, Wilson's altered photographs invest the pictured scenery—certainly not the real thing, but no longer just a souvenir of past experience—with dimensionality and life.

—Anne Doran

Letha Wilson:  
*Badlands White*,  
2012, C-prints and  
concrete, 28¼ by  
24¼ by 2 inches; at  
Higher Pictures.

the word "fox." This is the only word uttered, and it comes as a shock even though it lacks any meaningful message. These disruptions to the standard format of the work do not serve to distinguish their subjects, but instead help to establish the work's status quo of non-incident.

That nothing much happens seems to be the point. Cha has referred to her performers here as "empty vessels," and in appearance, they are both anonymous and familiar. They are all relatively young, healthy and attractive, although their skin color and gender vary. They were all filmed in Baltimore, where Cha cast the piece with Coward's help in order to find "a diverse spectrum of anonymous faces," according to the gallery. Instead of the professionals that Cha has worked with in the past, here she chose non-actors who were filmed while in the midst of what she calls "an out-of-body experience," although she has not elaborated on how this state was achieved. More significantly, whatever each figure experienced while being filmed remains completely opaque to the viewer.

In a printed e-mail exchange between the artist and her gallerist that serves as the show's press release, Cha points to a psychic dimension emerging from the contemporary entanglement of bodies and machines. She describes contemporary technological society as "a schizophrenic state of psychotic simultaneity." The phrase is suggestive, and aligns Cha's concerns with those of other young artists like Ryan Trecartin and Frances Stark. But the unspeaking portraits also have an obvious and compelling connection to Andy Warhol's "Screen Tests," which established the genre of the filmic portrait in the mid-1960s. Where the "Screen Tests" recorded the very process of becoming an image, and Warhol's subjects sometimes seem to come undone in front