

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

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### Art review: Amie Siegel's "Medium Cool" mines society's obsession with luxury



"Diamond Wire Saw – Olympian White" is among the marble dust paintings in Amie Siegel's show "Medium Cool" at the Blaffer Art Museum. Photo: Molly Glentzer / Houston Chronicle

"Amie Siegel: Medium Cool," through October 12 at Blaffer Art Museum, 4188 Elgin (University of Houston); 713-743-9521, [blafferartmuseum.org](http://blafferartmuseum.org)

The paintings in New York artist Amie Siegel's show at the Blaffer are marvels of illusion. They look like they could have been copied from starkly lit photographs of icebergs or geysers during some dramatic moment of rupture. If those white crystals had been rendered by hand, you might wonder how the artist achieved such a mixture of realistic imagery and textural depth with material that washes down the canvas like slurry.

The truth about these works turns out to be more startling: Siegel's linen canvases hold a recording of sorts, gathered through the chance accumulations of marble dust as it flew from the cutter's blades at a Danby, Vermont quarry. Discarded marble is both the subject and the substance of these masterpieces of machinery.

In an adjacent gallery, the first part of Siegel's 34 minute HD video "Quarry," which is screening for the first time in the U.S., takes viewers into the cavernous underground quarry where that machinery lives, with its flooded grottoes and cutting rooms. Her slow pan technique, achieved with a gliding dolly, absorbs scenery from such a steady, constant perspective you have the odd sensation that you are both embedded there and detached.

Stick with it, and the camera resurfaces within the New York skyline, showing the fruits of the quarry's hard labor in the glossy, hard surfaces of minimalist interiors in insanely sophisticated high rise apartment models. (For what it is

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worth, many Houstonians also know this marble: the vertically striated walls of the Menil Drawing Institute's bathroom walls and the boulders placed artfully in its courtyards came from the same Danby quarry.)

Siegel slyly edits super-slick digital animations into the footage of built environments, and it's pretty impossible to tell the real from the imaginary. The final scenes of an unfinished shell of a building emphasize the vacant spirit of a society obsessed with luxury.

The show's title "Medium Cool," keenly references the material feel of marble, Siegel's nearly forensic eye and the 1960's philosopher Marshall McLuhan's ideas about "cool media" forms of communication whose larger significance isn't obvious. Filling all of the museum's galleries, it includes the installation "Dynasty," built around a small marble fragment from Trump Tower (meh) that Siegel bought on eBay during the 2016 presidential election; and "Fetish," a mesmerizing, 10-minute film of the meticulous, white-gloved dusting and deep-cleaning of small antiques and the patient's couch in London's Freud Museum.

Former Blaffer director Tony Kamps, who curated the show, suggests in a brochure that the works convey "a psychological and economic narrative of contemporary, late-stage capitalism — a time of social stratification, conspicuous consumption and the displacement of labor through mechanization."

Each piece is quietly subversive, and the overall temperature is just right.

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/entertainment/arts-theater/article/Art-review-Amie-Siegel-s-Medium-Cool-13934830.php>