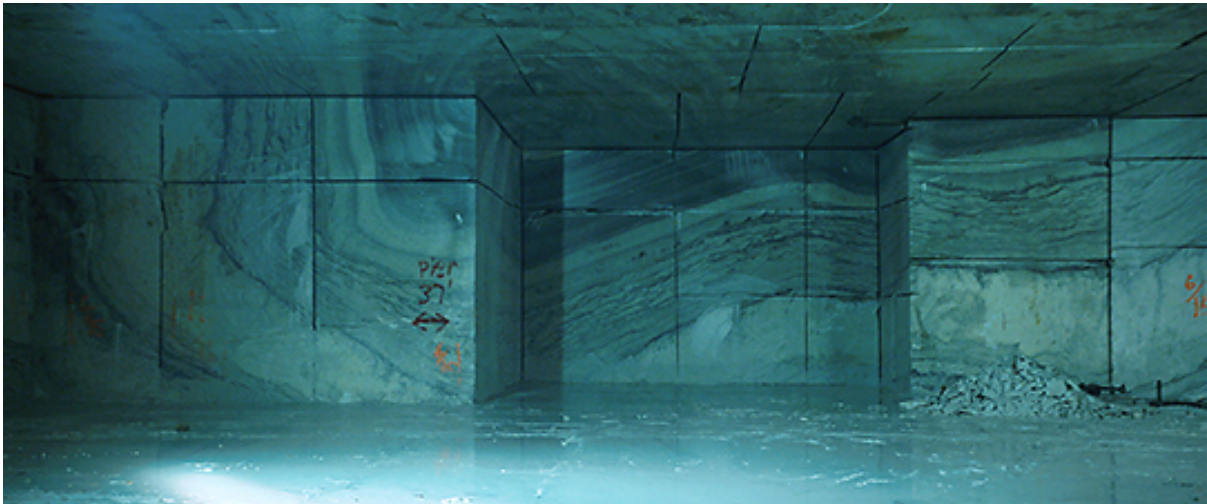Coxhead, Gabriel. 'Amie Siegel: South London Gallery', *Art in America,* Online. April 2017.

Art in America

Amie Siegel: South London Gallery

Amie Siegel: *Quarry*, 2015, video, 33 minutes, 41 seconds; at South London Gallery.

Marble is a metamorphic rock—limestone, originally, that has been compressed and refined by geologic forces and has undergone a change of state. And there's a parallel sort of metamorphosis in Amie Siegel's video *Quarry* (2015), which traces the processing of marble as a commodity—from the material's excavation to its use in interior design—and the cultural meanings that are forged along the way, the changes in its status.

The centerpiece of the New York artist's first London solo show, *Quarry* initially depicts marble as terrain, as mountainside. We see the cavernous, shadowy interior of the world's deepest marble quarry, which is located in Vermont. "Neptune," from Gustav Holst's The Planets suite, serves as the video's soundtrack and accentuates the primeval, otherworldly atmosphere of a realm shown half-flooded and lit only by faint bluish light. Next we see areas of active excavation, where gargantuan blocks of marble are neatly levered free by monstrous diggers, before being sawn into slabs and packaged, stored, and labeled with their destinations, Park Avenue being a notable one.

Such Manhattan locations then become the video's main focus, in the form of a montage portraying what appear to be high-end apartments with polished marble countertops, tables, and bathrooms that the camera pans across, examining in close-up the various patterns and colors. Other signifiers of luxury and power are everywhere on display: designer fittings and furnishings, sleekly recessed lighting fixtures, seemingly expensive works of art (including, at one point, a Brice Marden–esque painting), sheer glass windows giving high-rise views of New York's skyline. The camera's scrutiny is relentless, vaguely creepy, at once forensic and fetishistic. Its tracking gives the sense of a constant search for something—for signs of life or habitation, perhaps (the title, *Quarry*, becomes a sort of pun). The video is quite literally unsettling, as its parade of surfaces keeps your eye from settling on anything, casting it adrift in a maze of exquisite facades.

For that is what the spaces essentially are: mere facades. Some of them are "show" apartments: stage set–type constructions produced to give buyers a sense of the potential homes-to-be probably before the proper buildings have even been completed. Others appear by way of computer-generated mockups. The marble seen throughout the ersatz spaces is simply set dressing or a digital rendering and, as such, seems to embody some grotesque triumph of culture over nature: that such a monolithic material, such a quintessence of weighty physicality, should somehow be adopted in the cause of the virtual, illusory, and artificial.

Ideas about simulation and authenticity were also explored in the installation *Dynasty* (2017), which was shown in a small upstairs gallery. Here, what looked like two thin book-matched slabs of marble hanging on the wall were in fact digital scans. Nearby, a rather nondescript chunk of marble placed on a plinth turned out to be an actual fragment from the lobby of New York's Trump Tower, bought from eBay after the United States presidential election as a kind of historical relic. In the other small gallery, visitors encountered the video *Fetish* (2016), which documents the annual cleaning of Freud's study at the Freud Museum in north London: his personal collection of antiquities being meticulously dusted; the ornate carpet that usually covers his famous couch being peeled back for vacuuming, revealing the shabby yellowed padding beneath, stained as if with the sweat of anxious analysands. The video functioned as a sort of codicil to *Quarry*, turning to the dirt and grime of another kind of excavation—that in which people attempt to unearth the effects of lived experience through psychoanalysis.