

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Ruth Hardinger

Long Island University

Ruth Hardinger's recent show, "The Basement Rocks," arose out of her concern about how fuel extraction disturbs the earth's foundational strata. Functioning like the best science fiction, Hardinger's activist work projects well-founded fears

into the near future, her totem-like sculptures acting as harbingers for anthro-induced ecological ruin.

"The Basement Rocks" displayed an impulse toward immersive installation, although the sculptures themselves felt like individual studio experiments. Gray floors, ashen concrete sculptures, and the ovoid shape of the all-glass gallery all



RIGHT: ROBERT LOWELL

evoked a kind of post-industrial Zen garden. A sound collage by Andy Chase swooshed like an echocardiogram in the background, playing recordings of seismic activity and drilling at a fracking site. Hardinger's materials are foundational: poured concrete and cardboard (used for molds). The former carries associations with building, permanence, and stability. Cardboard, however, is the epitome of disposable packaging and what we turn to during times of transition. Combining these materials invites chance to collaborate in terms of how the cardboard will sag, stick, bulge, imprint, and sometimes semi-permanently adhere as liquid concrete is poured into it, hardening into a rocky solid.

The most prominent works were the two "Split Envoy" sculptures. *Split Envoy #29* (2015), the largest, measures 64 inches high. Twin humanoid-shaped totems, placed side-by-side at slight angles as if in conversation, display alternately smooth and textured surfaces, some imprinted and others encrusted with corrugated cardboard remnants. From one side, one of the pair looks like it was clawed into creation. While these figures recall funerary elements such as tombstones and coffins, there is also something alchemically alive about them. They mark space as a monument would, but they also seem animate—like eco-Golems—protective messengers that communicate the dire consequences of ecological imbalance.

There were also moments in the show when artifacts from our culture seemed to have been carried into a post-technological era. *Split Envoy #28* (2013–14) looks a little like a Picasso guitar embalmed in mineral form and then spliced into two perfect halves. Other works, such as *Agent #2* and *#3*, aggregate architectural elements, including slabs and pillars, into what appear to be fragments of grottos. The

former is arranged on top of weathered pieces of natural slate as if reclaimed by another civilization.

The humble pieces in the "Extracted from the Artesian Basins" series (2015) sat on the floor. The small, ossified slabs freeze the shifting and flowing qualities of liquids—a suitable metaphor for the unseen activity in our geologic basement. Generally speaking, what is beneath the surface often guides our actions and circumstances. In many ways, Hardinger's totem-like sculptures harken back to pre-cyber rituals in which the alchemy that goes into the making of an object imbues it with the power to act as an agent of change. With her focus and ambition, Hardinger heightens our awareness of how destruction wrought underground can impact us all.

—Sarah Goffstein

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