The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract line drawing. It consists of various geometric shapes, including diamonds, rectangles, and irregular polygons, some of which are filled with smaller, more intricate patterns. The lines are thin and black, set against a light gray background. The overall effect is that of a technical or architectural sketch, possibly representing a map or a series of interconnected structures. The drawing is spread across the entire page, with some elements appearing more prominent than others.

Are You Listening?  
SOLEDAD SALAMÉ

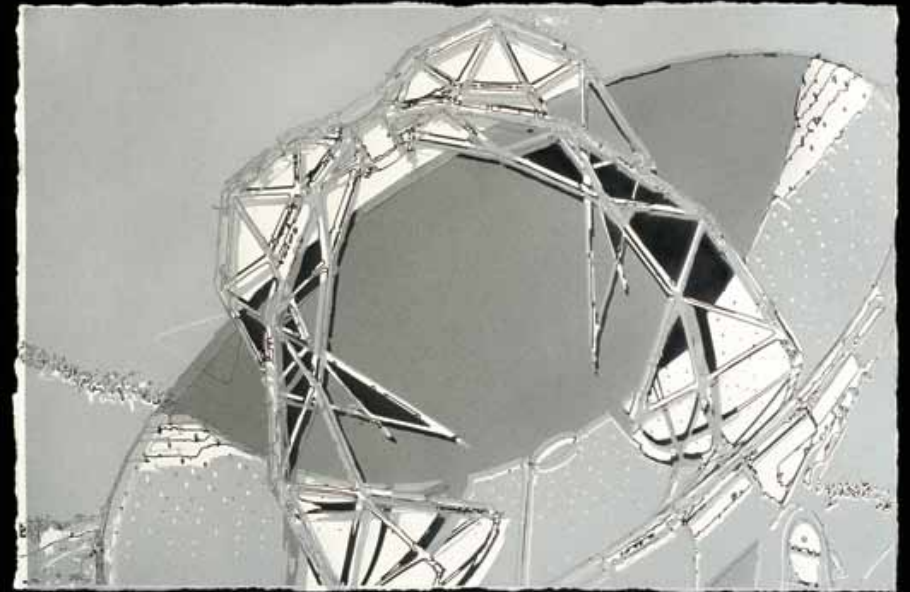
SEPTEMBER 21 – NOVEMBER 6, 2016

## Are You Listening?

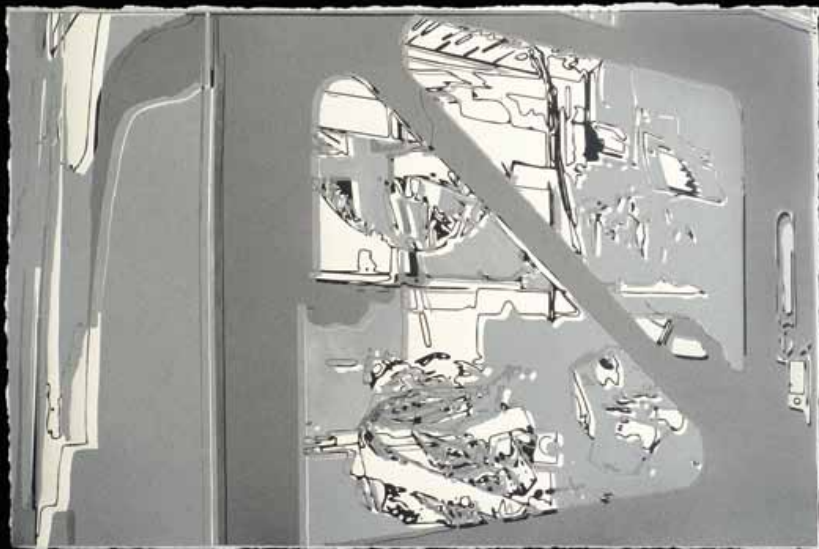
Soledad Salamé has produced provocative works inspired by the environment for more than three decades, highlighting its fragile beauty and magical complexities through a range of pictorial lenses. A master of various and mixed media, she has foregrounded the precarious predicament of specific sites from across the globe along with the increasingly sophisticated technological tools that allow for their documentation and study. Thus, in a signature aesthetic that is at once both figurative and abstract, she preserves precious and disappearing resources, while zeroing in on the threats posed by detrimental human activity that she has traveled the globe to observe, document and study first-hand. She highlights the hidden splendors of landscapes near and far in objects and installations that track changing states of the natural world along with the organic and man-made impending disasters that threaten its survival.

Inspired by not only environmental but also social crises that are local as well as global, *Are You Listening?* brings together an arresting selection of recent works – prints, mixed-media sculptures and paintings, and a video – that, consistent with Salamé’s trademark approach, offer an understated yet urgent call-to-arms for viewers to pay attention to what is unfolding around them. Her artistic interventions encourage us to slow down and observe long enough to see (and hence hear) how vulnerable environments and reckless human activities collide. These subtle, elegant and lyrical works echo the mystical

Shadows  
(detail cover)  
2016  
screenprint directly applied to wall  
variable size



ALMA / Are you Listening II  
2014  
silkscreen and relief printing on  
600 gram Fabriano paper  
16 x 25.5 IN



ALMA / Space Cabinet  
(top)  
2014  
silkscreen and relief printing on  
600 gram Fabriano paper  
16 x 25.5 IN

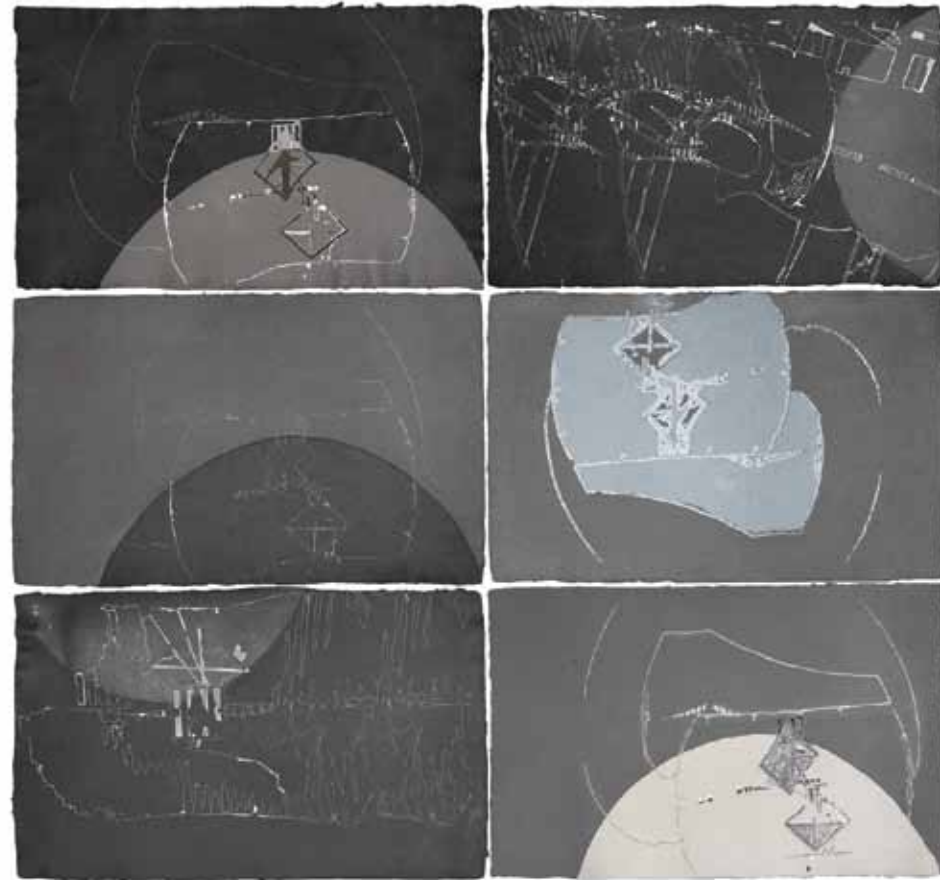
ALMA / Antenna II  
(bottom)  
2014  
silkscreen and relief printing on  
600 gram Fabriano paper  
16 x 25.5 IN

simplicity of geometric shapes and deliberate lines always already present in the aesthetic design of the landscapes she so desperately wants to protect, bearing a dire collective message that implores us to heed the warnings of global warming and other natural disasters exacerbated by human ambition and greed. In what follows, I will examine how Salamé offers “slow” impressions of the organic world through tools dependent on the accelerated nature of technologically driven contemporary society.<sup>1</sup> In line with this paradoxical vision, she conflates, in each of her projects presented here, contrasting elements, forces and phenomena that are impossibly yet necessarily linked: we find solid forms of liquid bodies, celestial visions of terrestrial maps, and artisanally rendered industrial icons through her combinations of natural and artificial subjects, materials and processes.

But before analyzing specific works, it seems critical to consider the roots of Chilean-born Salamé’s practice, which I believe hovers between two distinct legacies. On the one hand, her delicate and seductive lines and shapes carry on the formal legacy of mid-century, geometric abstraction found in the art and architecture of South American artists who themselves recast formal lessons attributed to the Bauhaus and other avant-garde traditions of European modernism.<sup>2</sup> No less significant, however, are the practices of land artists of the 1960s and 70s, most often connected to the American Southwest, whose works about the environment (as well as their resulting spectatorial experiences) were necessarily mediated by and linked to technology.<sup>3</sup> Salamé expands on the inroads made by both of these spheres of influence. Her signature geometric abstraction likewise moves beyond color, line, shape, scale and materials as subjects of pure contemplation and instead constitutes a new language designed to communicate deeper messages – in this case, tracking the soft contours of the mountains, bodies of water and precious flora that cover the earth – that enables her to celebrate as well the physical qualities of the mechanical bodies of the tools and instruments

(cameras, satellites, telescopes and laser cutters) she self-reflexively engages both to capture and to re-present their guises.

To begin, let us consider her 2015-16 series of prints *Shadows I to VI*. This suite of six large-scale screenprints contain abstracted images of shadows produced by an old antenna discovered in a junkyard in the Dominican Republic where she was amongst the first group of artists granted a residence by the Davidoff Art Initiative in 2015. The dilapidated rods and the shadows they cast appeared uncannily similar to parts and effects of the impressive telescopes that Salamé had previously observed during a recent visit to the ALMA (Atacama Large Millimeter / submillimeter Array) group of radio telescopes located 5000 meters above sea level on the Chajnantor Plateau of the Atacama desert that stretches north to south in the Chilean desert, nestled between the Pacific and the Andes Mountains. The grey and silvery hues of these images allude to not only the scientific machinery but also palettes familiar from x-rays, radar and other scientific imagery. Moreover, the light lines and shapes displayed against a darker background evoke blueprints and architectural plans as well as maps produced by aerial views. In other words, Salamé turns the parts of found and imagined instruments (and her viewer's gaze) away from the far reaches of the universe whose stars they should strive to document as she plots out another, more simplified one. Within this more finite space of her prints, she juxtaposes the corporeal presence of rich, handmade paper with its role as a physical support for printed fragments of telescope-like parts; moreover, she reminds the viewer of the ways in which images – captured photographically and translated into other media – instigate explorations of worlds far beyond the one shown on the paper or recorded elsewhere in waves that themselves translate information about distances, lifespans and more in the barely imaginable worlds far beyond the planet Earth or even our galaxy.



*Shadows I to VI*  
2015-16  
silkscreen on hand-made paper  
40 × 24.5 IN each



The Ninth Planet  
2016  
wood, epoxy resin,  
silkscreen and enamel  
14 x 23 x 1 in each  
Collection of Sue Payne, TX

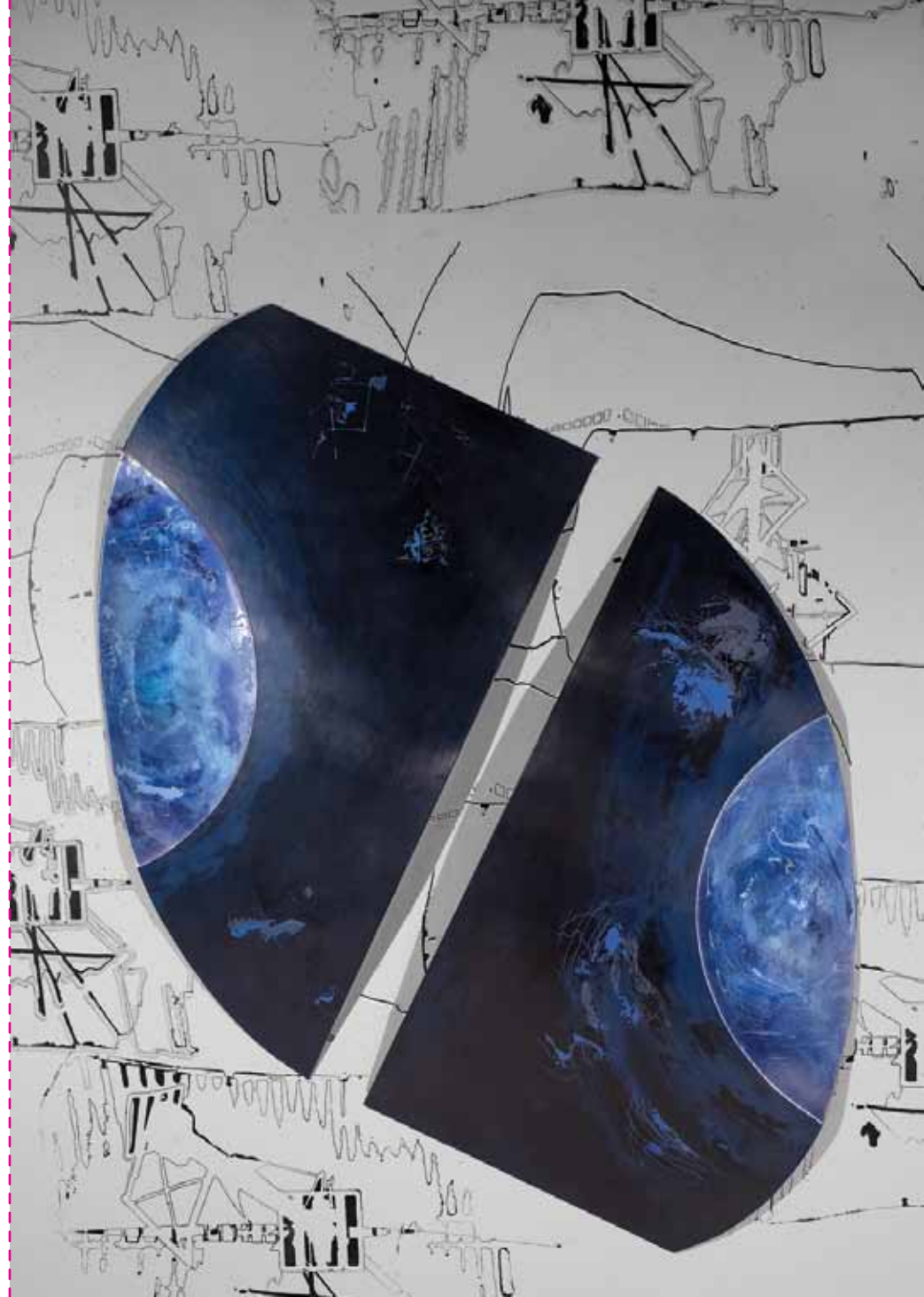
Salamé's related video work *Are You Listening?* (2015) achieves this in a more concrete way. By juxtaposing unpopulated shots of the ALMA telescopes and images of the Atacama desert with the rhythmic movements of agricultural workers and local dancers in the Dominican Republic, Salamé pushes the viewer to contain and perhaps redirect her desire to expand beyond to look within. Suturing together these powerful contrasts – the pristine, mathematically precise movements of high-tech equipment vs. the methodical, sweaty gestures of human bodies – are sounds that oscillate between imagined electronic echoes of waves sent into outer space and the percussive and vocal sounds of local Caribbean music. While the workers are enveloped by the leaves and stalks of the plants that sustain them, the nearly naked, shiny bodies of the fast-paced dancers are clothed in projections of Salamé's graphic shapes and words that themselves dance across their flesh and pulsating white fabric. While their bodies are reminiscent of the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica's trademark *Parangolés*, which "aspired to articulate *forms of being* in the world as opposed to *representations* of things" whereby people would physically wrap themselves in cloths that they would then activate through movement, the film's overall tendency to alternate between mechanical movements produced by machines and human beings likewise looks as far back as the early twentieth century to works like Fernand Léger's short film *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), itself a frenetic exploration preoccupied with where machines would take us.<sup>4</sup>

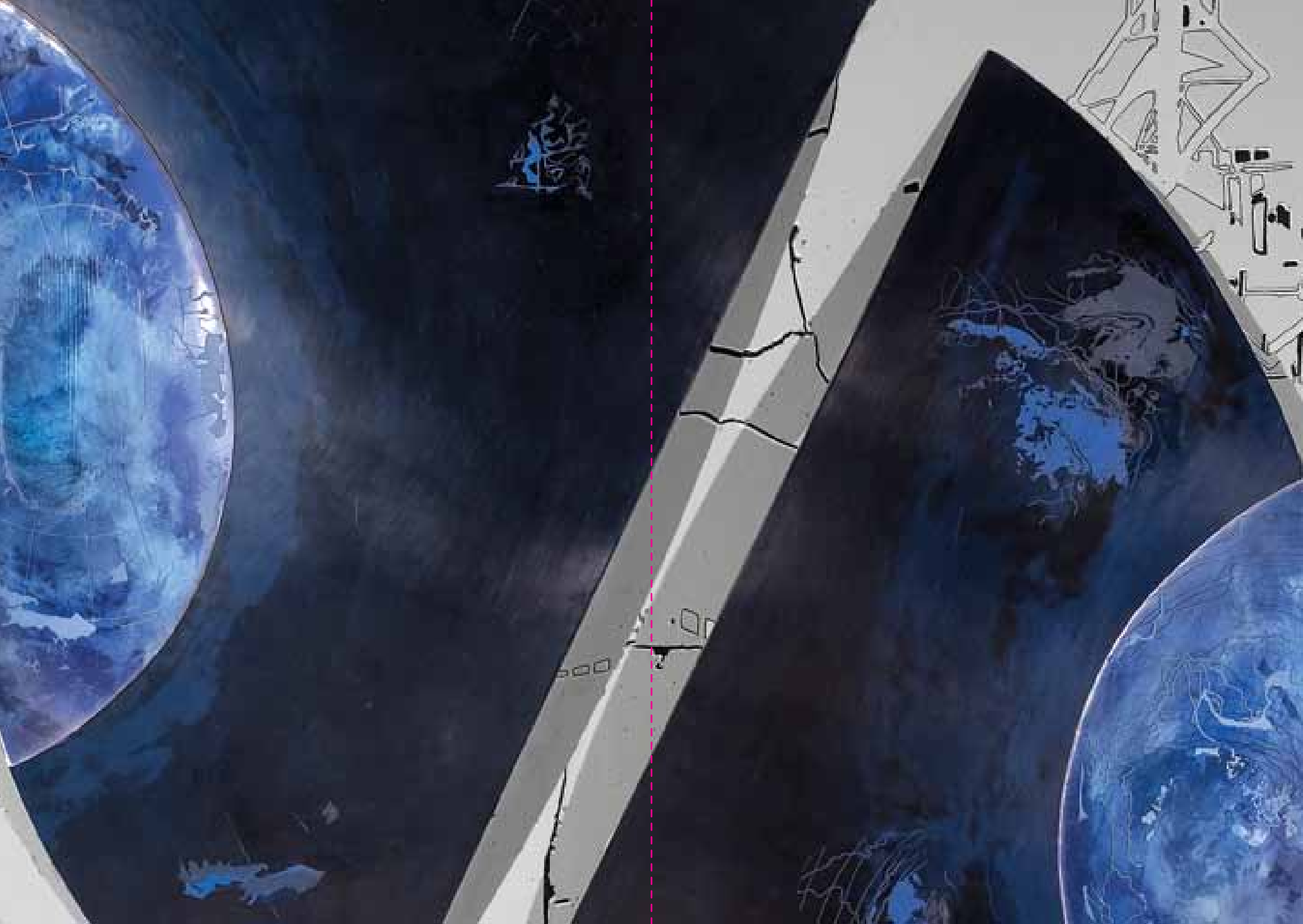
*The Great Silence* (2014) by Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla is a multi-channel, projected video work that provides a compelling comparison with Salamé's work. Whereas Salamé seeks to make the ALMA radiowaves into audible sounds, Allora and Calzadilla, working with Arecibo, the world's largest telescope in Esperanza, Puerto Rico, imagine what the endangered parrots living in close proximity with that telescope think and feel about human behavior and activity. In subtitles written by Ted Chang, the beautiful, preoccupied birds ask, "The humans use Arecibo

to look for extraterrestrial intelligence. Their desire to make a connection is so strong that they've created an ear capable of hearing across the universe. But I and my fellow parrots are right here. Why aren't they interested in listening to our voices? We're a non-human species capable of communicating with them. Aren't we exactly what humans are looking for?" In each case, the artists fantasize about the operations of these sophisticated scientific instruments. Salamé's reverberating beats underscore the weight of what such machines can and manage to do, while Allora and Calzadilla, in a spirit that reflects much of the motivation behind Salamé's practice, express the apprehension, disappointment and despair of the parrots.

Salamé's ethereal sculptural diptych titled *North and South Pole* (2016) offers another instance of how her work embodies what we might call an aesthetic of anxiety. Suspended from the gallery wall, these two blue floating bodies have strange surfaces that are at once gently curved and flat, as though hovering in between two- and three-dimensionality, neither painting nor sculpture. Their piercing blue color, not dissimilar from the regal shades of lapis lazuli applied to early modern portraits of the Virgin Mary and other subjects worthy of great expense, has been perfectly applied with almost mechanical precision across the entire surface and especially in each panel's resin-covered section. Here Salamé's expert skill comes to the fore as she activates the surface that, although static and solid, seems to contain liquid and frozen matter within and on these softly sloping, lacquered planes onto which she has inscribed fleeting fragments of geographical bodies and borders. This sort of binary complexity underscores her recognition of the fact that pursuing one's desire for knowledge inherently demands facing that the world is

*North and South Pole*  
(right and detail next)  
2015-16  
wood, epoxy resin,  
silkscreen and enamel  
21 x 34.5 x 2 in each







Are You Listening? Islands I and II  
(top)  
2015-16  
wood, epoxy resin, silkscreen,  
silver copper wire  
21 x 34.5 x 2 IN each

Atacama Desert  
(next)  
2016  
printing, laser cutting, embossing,  
embroidery on 600 gram Fabriano paper  
30 x 40 IN

infinitely unknowable. Indeed, staging such formal tensions in works like these offers a pictorial analog for the beauty that is under ever-growing threat of global warming and other calamities connected to climate change. Derived from the poles' respective topographical identities, the delicate *graffiti* printed onto the surface are ambiguous signs, legible as a form of scientific writing or even astronomical mapping, moving the viewer to traverse the earth's surface and the celestial world above it. Matte and shiny, flat and plastic, liquid and solid: these contrasting qualities dynamize a work that is at once about joy and fear. Each of the wooden surfaces of the two pendants in a related diptych, *Are You Listening? Islands I and II* (2015-16), remains only partially covered with a single, golden-colored plane set beneath precisely applied resin and worked with delicate silver-copper wire stitched to outline imaginary islands. Unlike the mostly uniform surface of *North and South Pole*, the distinct material passages of this piece suggest the scarcity of a selection of diverse natural resources: the metallic "thread" signifies mineral ores, the resin applied to the surface refers to water (itself a kind of gold), and the wood indexes our ever-shrinking forestation.

The multiple, laser-cut layers that denote the patterns of desert planes in *Atacama Desert* (2016) constitute a complex, layered work *in* (as opposed to *on*) paper. Embroidered and embossed, the work translates horizontal registers captured in two-dimensional photographs of the landscape back into a three-dimensional work that, again, defies medium specificity. An expert printmaker, here Salamé becomes an archaeologist of paper who digs into the import and beauty of a unique landscape as she renders a kind of plastic meteorological study. In this way, she pushes the boundaries of her medium, adding intensity to printing by literally cutting into the work's physical body. Not quite violent, she generates a residual object replete with angular excisions that is as fragile as the desert itself whose corresponding image hangs in delicate balance within a frame. The soft tan hues of the paper as well as the refined sewing that





embellishes its surface underscore the ephemerality of the most arid non-polar site in the world. By extension then, the work warns that all nature is inevitably in flux and unstable, at risk to both its own uncontrolled mechanisms and the potentially damaging operations of human activity and industry. Yet the fact that the work's layers result from multiple mechanical processes – from photography to laser cutting to embossing – foregrounds rather than conceals the dialectical and dangerous relationship between man, machine and nature that lies at the heart of Salamé's endeavors.

Perhaps a codicil to her earlier exhibition titled *Where Do You Live? 3000 Miles of Maryland Coast* (Contemporary Museum Baltimore, 2009), the works in this show offer a second, more emphatic plea for the viewer to stop, listen and pay attention to the ubiquitous warnings about destruction all around us. And so while her artistic practice has drawn her to sites of crisis, such as the Gulf Coast in Louisiana, and sites of scientific splendor, such as the Atacama Desert in South America, Salamé has also fervently thrown herself into understanding the complex explanations of and predictions for the catastrophes threatened by unchecked environmental abuses resulting in already visible glacial movement in the North and South Poles. But global warming, fracking and oil spills are not the only concerns that she addresses, in her work and in her life. The recent uprisings and unrest that have unfolded in Baltimore, the place she has considered home for nearly four decades, have also grabbed her attention, since, as she has astutely observed, there too, we must listen if we are to prevent ongoing damage and effect meaningful change.

#### NOTES

1. Here I am indebted to the notion of “slowness” in contemporary art explored by Lutz Koepnick in *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014). Koepnick argues convincingly for the efficacy of contemporary art that manages to either represent or orchestrate slowness – as a subject or an activity – amidst the frenetic and fast-paced world in which we live. His analysis of the use of aerial views in contemporary works by Olafur Eliasson and Hiroyuki Masuyama, chapter 3: “Glacial Visions, Geological Time,” 79-115, is especially relevant.

2. See Mónica Amor, *Theories of the Non-Object: Geometric Abstraction in the Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). Breaking out of frames and moving off of pedestals, graphic as well as sculptural “non-objects” by artists such as Gego and Hélio Oiticica, broke down barriers between the object and viewer in new and exciting ways, applying abstraction to new social and political contexts.

3. See *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974* (Munich: Prestel, 2012), esp. Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon's introduction, “Ends of the Earth and Back,” 17-31, which emphasizes, amongst other points, that for many of these artists, technology and media played a key role in what we call “land art.” In other words, photography, film, and early video *made possible* not only the creation of the works *about nature* but also their display and dissemination, as shown in the key “Earthworks” exhibition (first at the commercial Virginia Dwan Gallery and then in an academic art museum at Cornell University) which “included photographs, drawings, blueprints, sculptures, written proposals, a film, a photo light-box, and a large monochromatic painting.” (30). In the case of this latter sphere of influence, we can think of artists such as Robert Smithson, Joan Jonas and even Judy Chicago, whose early works about and in landscapes depended on technology, both for their creation and eventual display.

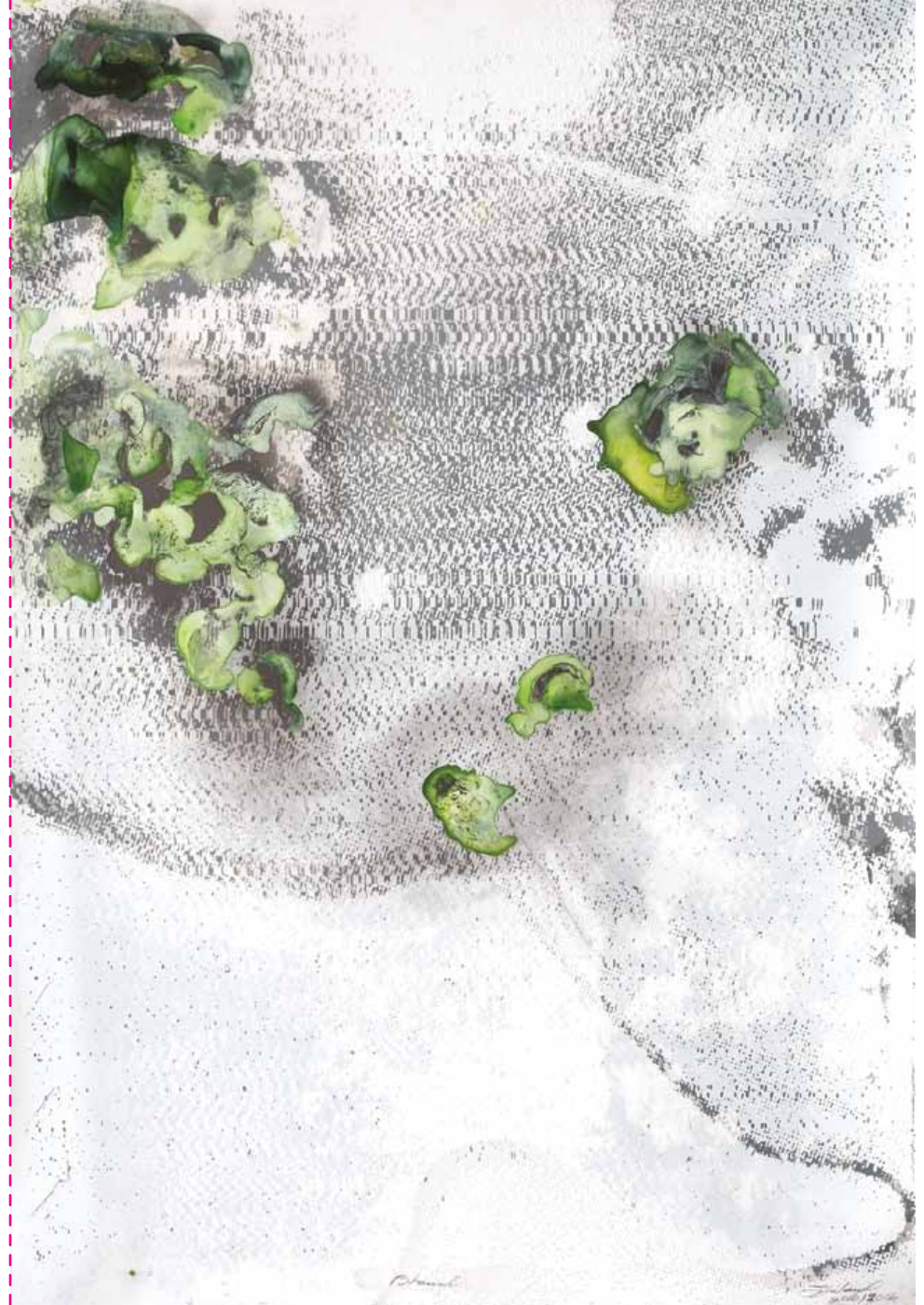
NOTES CONTINUED

4. See Amor, 137-171, esp. 138.

Jennie Hirsh is Director of the MA Program in Critical Studies as well as a Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History, Theory and Criticism at the Maryland Institute College of Art. She is currently completing *Reflections of the Self: Giorgio de Chirico and the Classical Tradition*, which focuses on the artist's pictorial and literary self-representation. Her first book, *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth* appeared with Ashgate in 2011, and she has published exhibition catalogue essays on artists including Giorgio Morandi and Regina Silveira, as well as art and film criticism focused on Yinka Shonibare, Jean-Luc Godard, Roberto Rossellini and de Chirico. Her writing has appeared in *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art* and *Art in America*, for whom she served as corresponding editor for Philadelphia for several years. Hirsh has held fellowships from institutions including the u.s. Fulbright commission to Italy and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, and, prior to joining the faculty at MICA, she was a postdoctoral fellow at both Princeton and Columbia Universities.

Island II  
(right)  
2010-16  
silkscreen on mylar,  
hand painted guache  
and graphite  
30 x 21 IN

Island I  
(next)  
2010-16  
silkscreen on mylar,  
hand painted guache  
and graphite  
30 x 21 IN





## Soledad Salamé

Chilean-born (Santiago, 1954), Baltimore-based artist Soledad Salamé creates evocative works that reflect passion for the earth's natural resources, concern about human effects on the environment, and interest in the ever-growing utility and influence of technology, all in an array of diverse materials. After earning a BA at Santiago College in Chile (1972), she completed her MA at the CEGRA, Centro de Enseñanza Grafica, Conac in Caracas, Venezuela (1979). Salamé moved to Washington, DC in 1983 before establishing in 2009 a vibrant print studio in Baltimore where she conducts mini-residencies and develops specific projects.

An interdisciplinary artist, Salamé creates paintings, drawings, print editions, sculpture, works that combine sound and video, and installations that originate from extensive field research and collaborations with experts in architecture, astronomy, entomology, and technology. She is widely represented in private and public museums and collections across the globe with noteworthy exhibitions at the Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD; Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago, Chile; Katonah Museum of Art, Westchester, NY; The Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC; El Museo del Barrio, NY; Milwaukee Museum of Art, WI; Denver Museum of Art, CO; Phoenix Museum of Art, AZ; Miami Art Museum, FL; the National Museum of Women in The Arts, Washington, DC; and the Museum of Goa, India.

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