

# Alice Channer: Megaflores

22 April – 26 June 2021

Alice Channer's forms and materials are found in the social and sensual worlds of industrial and organic processes. She immerses herself in natural and industrial materials and production processes to find forms that she develops as sculpture. Her method is both experimental and precise, collaborating with people, machines, and materials to make sculpture that is emotionally charged *and* industrially perfected.

*Megaflores* is Alice Channer's second exhibition at the gallery and it takes, as its starting point a bramble stem, also making an appearance in Rosanna Mclaughlin's short story, specially commissioned to partner the work:

## *Ripple and Void*

Simone stumbled out of Bromley-by-Bow underground station in a panic, desperate to be alone. Half running, half walking, and not paying any attention to where she was going, she eventually came to a halt on a dead-end road about twenty minutes south of home. Behind her was an apartment block still under construction, a yellow-brick building with identikit metal balconies and windows covered in protective plastic. On the other side of the road, behind a ten-foot metal fence, was a yard filled with scrap cars. There was nobody around, thank god, and being careful not to lose her balance she eased herself down onto the curb. From her seated position she took deep breaths, in an attempt to calm her frayed nerves, and watched the sunlight bounce off the exhaust pipe of a mangled motorbike.

Just like that, it started up again. The motorbike was no longer a cohesive entity, but the confluence of myriad materials and processes...chrome, steel, glass, petroleum, acrylonitrile butadiene styrene...its complex provenance ripping across her field of perception like a tornado. Simone squeezed her eyes tight shut and covered her face with her hands, as if stitching her eyelids together would help to hold the world in place. But it was too late. While her body remained on the pavement, her thoughts were transported to a factory in Sydenham, where people stood over electrified tanks of liquid encrusted with turquoise metallic residue. And there it was: the motorbike's exhaust pipe, one of many being pulled from a tank by a jig, the steel piping coated in a gleaming layer of nickel-chrome.

When the vision ended Simone opened her left eye a crack to assess the damage. The tarmac by her trainers had begun to ripple – a new development. After each event the symptoms intensified, eroding her capacity to perceive ephemera as solid and stable. Get a grip, she chided herself, and in the hope of figuring out what the hell was going on she tried to retrace the day's events.

Where had she been? It was Sunday. She'd woken late with a mild hangover. The effects of too many glasses of wine at a friend's book launch, nothing out of the ordinary. Around half-past twelve she'd left to meet her cousin Addie for lunch at an Italian restaurant near Tottenham Court Road. The restaurant had been Addie's choice, a tourist trap with pretensions of grandeur but charming all the same, the lunch a belated birthday present. Simone had lost track of time, and as a consequence had to forego a much-needed shower. Despite the fact that she was dressed in a decrepit pair of jeans and a cap to cover her dirty hair, the waiter called her 'madame' and insisted on pulling out her chair. They had sat outside beneath an awning, on a little round table covered with a green and white gingham tablecloth,

and Simone told Addie about the slow progress she was making on the novel she was already six months late submitting. Before bringing out the main course, the waiter had even brushed the breadcrumbs off the table with a special comb.

That was it!, Simone thought, relieved at last to have landed on an explanation. It must have been the clams. She had ordered the daily special, spaghetti alle vongole. You had to be careful with molluscs. They were a breeding ground for bacteria. The funny thing was she didn't feel sick. No headache, no upset stomach, no fever. Not at all like the last time she'd had food poisoning, when she spent the best part of 24 hours shuffling between the toilet bowl and the bath matt, clutching a bottle of Diet Coke as if it were her last and dearest possession.

Over lunch, Addie described the research she was doing at the Institute for Gastroenterological Research. Simone's mind wandered to the peach-colour wine they were drinking, and the way the droplets of water cascaded down the outside of the glass, catching the spring sunshine, making sure to add the occasional 'mhmm' to indicate that she was following. What was it Addie had been talking about? She had grown increasingly animated while explaining that our conception of the human as a solid entity, demarcated from the rest of the world by the epidermis, was flawed. More out of politeness than interest, Simone had asked why. 'A void runs continuously from the mouth to the anus,' her cousin told her, 'and because of this, at least in medical terms anyway, that void is considered an exterior part of the body. When you think about it, this means that the very thing we tend to imagine as our innermost self is actually part of the outside world. In fact,' Addie said, 'when you really think about it, humans aren't solid at all. We're matter wrapped around a hollow, a hollow that the world passes through.' 'Like a fleshy donut?', Simone asked. 'Right', Addie answered. 'Or the stems of certain plants.'

In hindsight, Simone had the first inkling that something had changed when the food arrived. Looking at the steaming tangle of clams, spaghetti and chopped parsley, she could have sworn she saw the surfaces of the calcium-carbonate shells undulating like flags in the wind. When she blinked the movement stopped, and she thought nothing more of it, putting it down to the combination of the wine and the sun and the remnants of an over-indulgent evening. Nor did she linger on the disquieting sensation, upon swallowing, that as the food passed through her it was articulating an empty core.

Addie and Simone had even stayed for coffee and tiramisu. By the time Simone was standing on the platform at Tottenham Court Road station she had forgotten all about the ripple and the void, and was leaning in to the warm fuzz that accompanies a full belly and tired mind. Everything had been fine right up until she changed lines at Mile End. When the District line train arrived she squeezed her way into the carriage, and placed her hand on the rail above her head to steady herself. Yet instead of feeling the support of the rail, her mind was flooded with material biographies: steel heated and rolled at a plant in West Bengal, shipped to Southampton and powder-coated at a factory in Birmingham. Even then she had just about managed to hold it together. But when an empty bottle of Lucozade rolled down the carriage and into her foot, and she was transported to a furnace in the Forest of Dean, into which translucent pellets of polyethylene terephthalate were being shovelled, she really began to panic.

Two hours had passed since Simone had lowered herself onto the pavement on the dead-end street. It was early evening now, and the sky had turned candy-floss shades of pink and blue. Her feelings of agitation had begun to ebb away along with the heat of the day, and for the first time in a while she realised she was capable of opening her eyes and standing. Looking down at the patch of concrete on which she had been sat, Simone observed a thin skin, made from the intermingling of cotton fibres, exhaust fumes, and traces of formaldehyde from the synthetic indigo used to dye denim. The ground around her was still undulating – as

was the air – but like a sailor who had found her sea legs the motion had ceased to be a cause of distress. She turned around, and noticed a giant bramble that was pushing through a gap in the pavement and making its way up the yellow-brick wall. It was hollow, she thought, just like me. Simone looked down at her hands, and noticed that her skin had started to ripple too. Her fingerprints were no longer a unique marker of identity, the signature of a oneness, but an endlessly revolving set of doors. She raised the index finger of her left hand and extended it towards a thorn. Rather than pricking her skin, it passed right through.

*The imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass.*

Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace, 1947

**Rosanna Mclaughlin** is a writer and editor based in Glasgow. She is the author of the book *Double-Tracking* (Carcenet Press, 2019), and editor of *The White Review*.

**Alice Channer** (b. 1977 in Oxford) lives and works in London. She has exhibited widely during the last 15 years. Current and recent public exhibitions include: Marta Herford, Germany; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK (2021); Tate Britain, London, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne, both UK (2019); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK; La Panacée MoCo, Montpellier, France (2018); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, USA; Kunsthaus Hamburg, Germany (2017); Museum Kurhaus Kleve, Germany; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester UK (2016); Aishti Foundation, Beirut; Public Art Fund, New York (2015); Fridericianum, Kassel: Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, both Germany (2014); The 55th Venice Biennale, Italy; The Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire UK (2013) and South London Gallery, UK (2012).

Alice Channer's work will be part of this year's Liverpool Biennial 'The Stomach and the Port' (curated by Manuela Moscoso); a newly commissioned sculpture will feature as part of Artangel's summer exhibition at Orford Ness; an outdoor sculpture can be seen as part of Sculpture In The City, London, and her first permanent public sculpture commissioned for the Engineering Department of The University of the West of England will be unveiled this year. In 2022, a new outdoor sculpture will feature as part of High Desert Test Sites 2022, USA (curated by Iwona Blazwick).