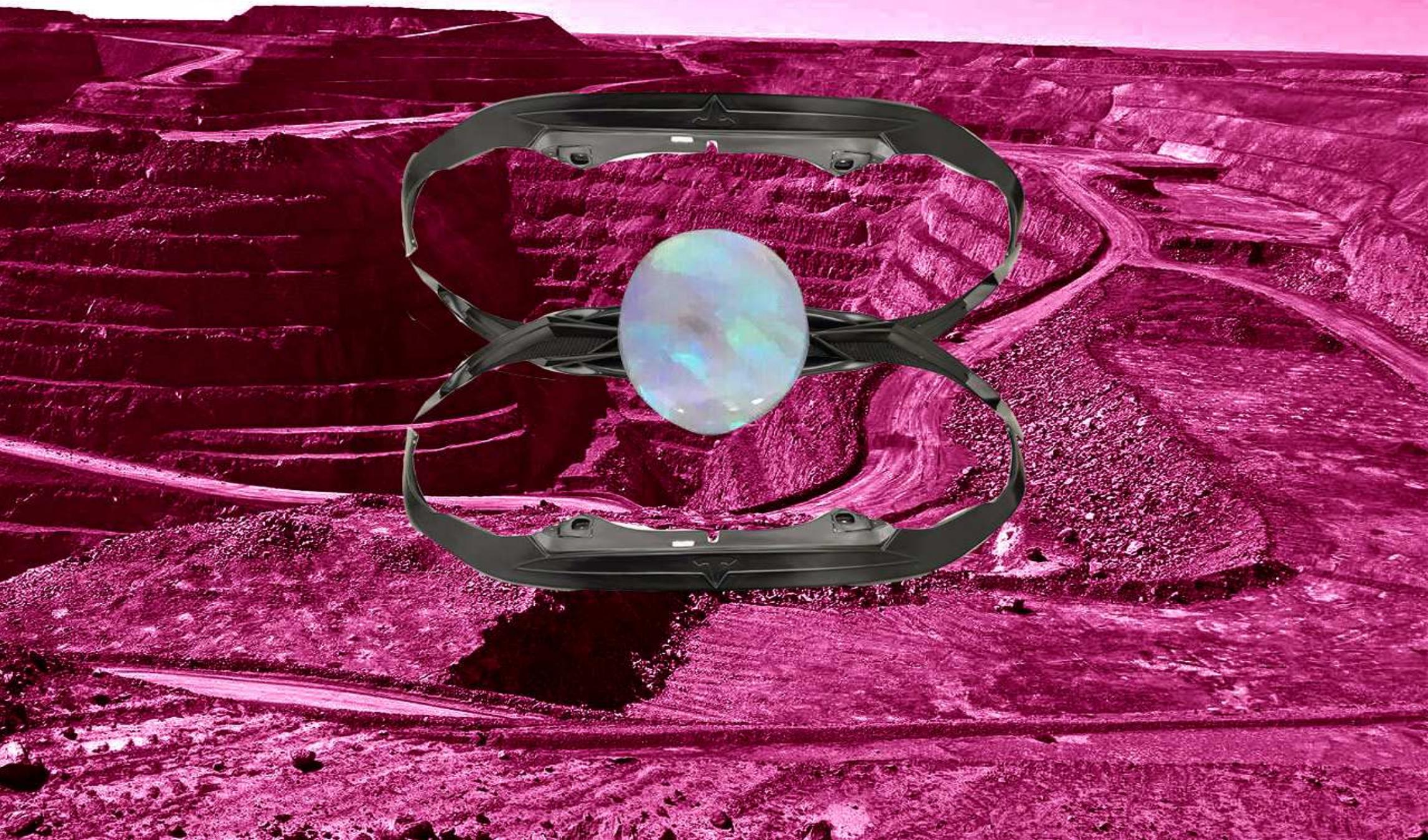


ANDESITE



In Miriam Austin's work the cast is a mark of distance, whether that is distance in time or in space. Counterintuitively, it is the cast's haptic and seductive surfaces that instantiate this distance; counterintuitive because these qualities are so often thought of in terms proximity and intimacy. Texture causes delay. We are held up, tangled up, by these surfaces, by these objects whose symbolic function is to gesture across distance. In being engaged by, often transfixed by, what is affective we are also confronting the reach of our vision. Nonetheless, we are here, or they are there.

Near the confluence of the Hautapu and Rangitikei, a rough track has been cut along the estuary from a point that is both one of arrival and departure.

On the shore is a constellation of objects, bleached by the waves. Perhaps the inclination is to think of these objects as a history deposited on the shores of the present. But this suggests a rather linear and naturalistic view of the past and, in a moment where new visions of both past and future are needed, we might suggest that this array of objects has instead been dragged up from their containing depths. Dragging is, as it happens, what we want to suggest defines much of this work.

Pursed lipped, no bit, no bearing teeth, no answer to where it all came from.

Drag is at the heart of many of the objects in this exhibition: the saddle, bit and gauntlet; the fitness bars. These objects are indices of restraint, old technologies of control and conditioning. Drag is also a term used in sand casting to describe the lower component of the cast. And we might think of Annie Kelly behind blinkered pony, conveyed from scullery to outback, dragging everything but her heels. A life in service. Dragging him, the architect, who in turn dragged with him the plans of their new house, so bedraggled, both, that by the time of their arrival they end up making do with a tent. She asks herself how to lay out their remaining provisions on the dirt outside, as if it too were a shore. To have come to a halt, to unbridle, to settle.

At the shoreline, lies a dark body. Its stern and prow are replicas of the front of a Tesla vehicle. This apparition is the force that has trawled the objects up from underneath the waves. It is a totem of a new era of consumption, exploration and extraction, taking a toothless bite into myriad futures. Without combustion, these vehicles seem breathless and quiet: a technology for a post-carbon world. Cast in Jesmonite, they exert their invisible pull over the draped translucent forms within its orbit: it is incongruous and omnivorous, drawing time and land into its mineral core.

A muffled clunk and it's gone. The tear of the road under the tyres, gone.

It could be said that silicon is the protagonist of the story embedded in Austin's work. It was there as sand on the shore to witness the arrival, the colonization of Aotearoa New Zealand; it was also there on the Irish shore that was left behind. We find silicon in the promise of the new land and it is silicon's journey that we follow into the future, in the form of an electric-everything new reality, perhaps equally as remote. Below carbon and above lead, silicon finds its way from beach to batteries, but it also mineralises in our bodies and becomes deposited there. Cast with an 'e' as silicone, its derivative, it replicates the touch of skin and bridges organic and inorganic realms.

I knew that all about me was mined.

This function as a bridge is crucial to silicon's usefulness as a material for the manufacture of circuit boards and microchips. But, as a semi-conductor, it doesn't simply enable movement or flow: it also offers resistance to it. The semi-conductor measures and controls. The glide, the whirr, the seemingly effortless horizon that stretches out before us is in fact powered and steered as much by technologies of friction and resistance as by fluidity. It drags and it catches.

If silicon moves us from past to future, from the subterranean to the terrestrial, then perhaps there is a parallel with the way in which the cast functions within Austin's work. Like our gaze on the textured surfaces of the objects, the past gets caught up in the present, equally under the skin perhaps; we become semi-conductors. If the works in the exhibition pose the problem of how to reclaim the past, and the odyssey that the objects rested on the shore recall, then perhaps it is with new histories, by dragging them, casting them, into the present.

Text written by Thomas Morgan Evans and Cadence Kinsey

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