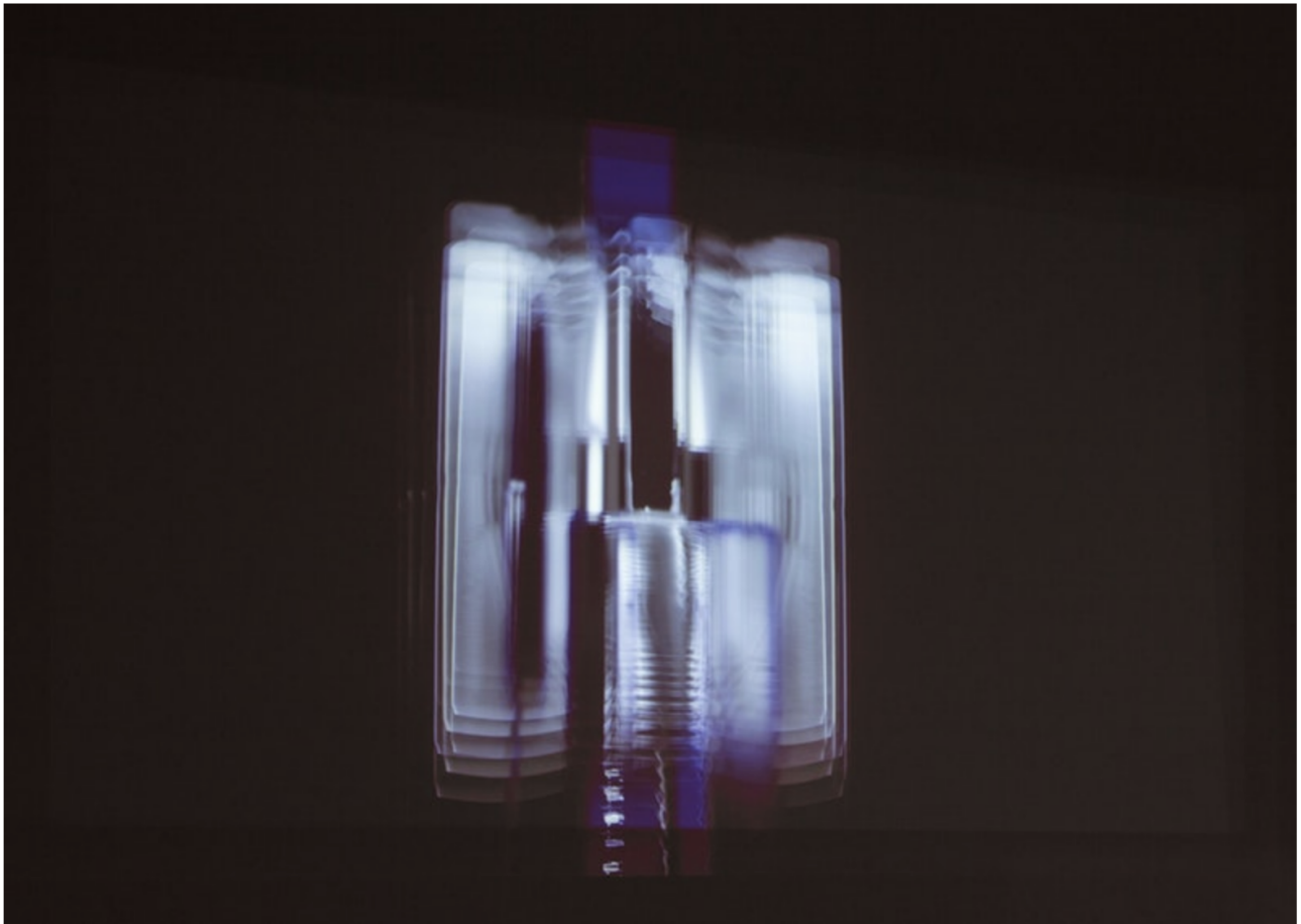


**ArtSeen**

# Trisha Donnelly

By **Katherine Siboni**

Installation view: *Trisha Donnelly*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2019. © Trisha Donnelly, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Cast near the entrance of Matthew Marks, unshielded from natural light, one of three digital projections by Trisha Donnelly repeats on a short loop. A tall, narrow rectangle frames an image—and contains its movement—visually rhyming with the upright and perpendicular marble monoliths Donnelly has installed throughout the gallery space. In the 19-second loop, dimmed by competing light sources, an inscrutable object with a tangibly metallic, emulsive surface repeatedly traces a downward trajectory within its narrow enclosure. Momentarily, midfall, it quivers under its own weight, then collapses to the bottom edge of the projection, before resuming course with an efficiency so abrupt and unsettling it suggests a full erasure of each

preceding loop. The image is velocity and viscosity without an object, a moving picture defined by its operations rather than its content, and further abstracted by its rapidity.

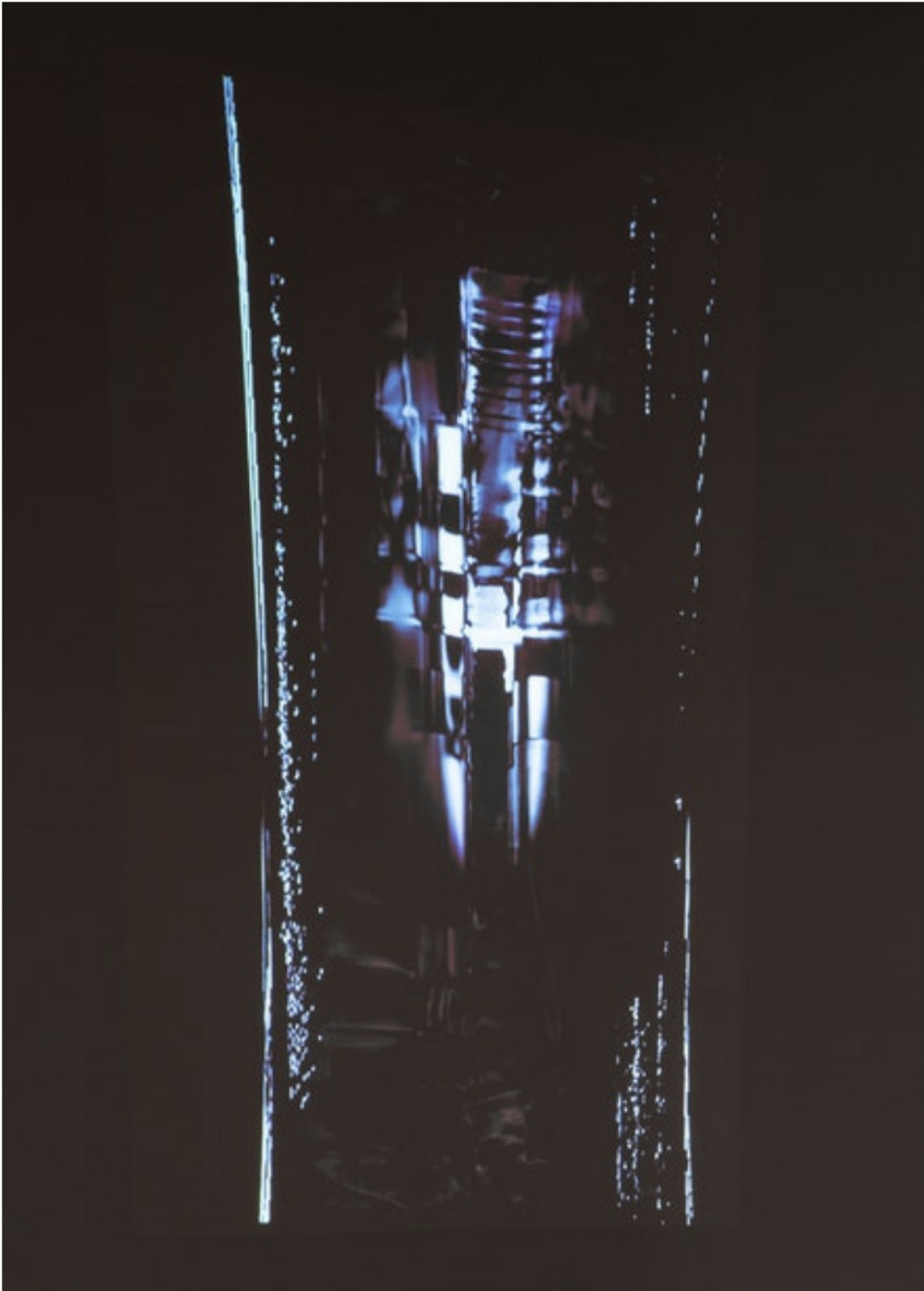
This mute, enigmatic materiality is common in the works on view at Matthew Marks's 22nd street spaces, as it is in much of Donnelly's storied, yet frequently ineffable, practice. Donnelly's exhibitions pierce history—most famously when the artist impersonated a Napoleonic messenger for her 2002 solo debut at Casey Kaplan—or slow events so as to change their nature, as in *Redwood and the Raven* (2004), where dance is rendered as a still form. In the present show, Donnelly's work demonstrates the perceptual effects of looking without identification—a method of temporal manipulation that falls outside of chronology and history, instead showing language and observation to be time-bound. Sensory dislocation is inflicted by all three of Donnelly's projections on view: a central projection on the gallery's rear wall shows a drifting undulation, vaguely solid, the phantasmagoric result of an off-register overlap of three stacked projectors. One still projection, presented before two erect marble slabs, is blurred as if to index motion: a two-dimensional plane appearing to bifurcate into three-dimensional space. Donnelly's marble and basalt objects similarly occupy a state of suspension between raw form and carved sculpture. Chiseled, to various extents, with mechanical precision and regularity, the sculptural grooves appear either ritualistic or functional. Yet Donnelly's rock tableaux also seem to embody an inherent or essential state—a shamanistic analog to Michelangelo's claim of having freed his figures from marble blocks.

On the margins of this restrained presentation, Donnelly casually invites liminal spaces and the elements themselves into a supposedly hermetic gallery experience. A cord near the rear of the gallery travels like breadcrumbs from a projector to a raw opening in the drywall, revealing a narrow corridor along a cinderblock wall and an overhead trapdoor inviting natural light

(and, during my visit, light rain). Other ruptures in the presentation style of a typical commercial gallery —exposed drywall, painters tape, temporary architecture halfway through demolition—distend the perceptual attenuation provoked by Donnelly’s work, further suggesting mysterious intent and a broader allegorical content.

Donnelly’s synesthetic practice has tasked her viewers with expanding and contracting one kind of sensory information such that it is received in the form of another, a process she directly guides in language that is at once procedural and metaphysical. In *Vortex* (2003), Donnelly famously instructs her viewer to transform sound into sculpture: “Take the highest male voice. Listen and track it throughout the recording. The sound can compress like a photograph. While listening, flatten it into an object. It’s a comb-like structure.” Donnelly’s silent exhibition at Matthew Marks formally echoes these imagistic similes. Her introductory

projection takes the form of a relentless cycle of compression, while her stone objects grow increasingly narrow and pronged when carved: “a comb-like structure.” Donnelly plunges the viewer into a mute space in which verbal identification fails, amplifying visual properties so that they become viscerally tactile. The concept of transubstantiation illuminates Donnelly’s work, not only for its interpretation of matter as shifting, but also for its origin in myth and its dependence on suspension of disbelief. It is synesthesia inflected by religious ecstasy.



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The ghostly three-video work installed at the center of the gallery recalls, in its constant quiver, a common synesthetic method: the production of sound by vibration. The image's curving surface resembles the undulating arrangements of a pipe organ, elements of the shape pushing up and down, opening and closing. Donnelly's *Vibration Station*, a 2002 silver print not included in this exhibition, shows a majestic pipe organ inverted. In 2005, Donnelly described to Hans Ulrich Obrist an unrealized installation by the same name, "I still wish I could make the Vibration Station, the organ that goes into the ground ... You would walk through the vibrations of a box organ concerto." In the work on view here, vibrations take place absent literal sound or movement. Silent emanations radiate from visual stimuli, and art does what it is intended to: it summons the intangible.

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## **Contributor**

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