

(UN)POWER

Ana González Barragán

MFA University of Colorado 2025

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
the Graduate School of the University of
Colorado at Boulder in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Master of Fine
Arts Department of Art and Art History, 2025

Thesis Advisor: Richard Saxton

Committee Members: Yumi Janairo Roth,

Megan O'Grady,

Erin Marie Spelie, Brianne Cohen

ABSTRACT

01 INTRODUCTION

02 MATERIAL EXPLORATION

TWENTY MILE MINE, COLORADO

MAG SILVER, UTAH

RED STONE YULE MARBLE QUARRY

03 (UN)POWER

04 CONCLUSION

(UN)POWER

Those who have the means to extract from the Earth hold not only the power to dominate the so-called nature but also to exert control over invisibilized bodies and silenced histories—a dire truth that reveals the hierarchies of domination underpinning a world order shaped by the logic of industrial capitalism.

At the intersection of geology, gender, and extractivism, I present a body of work that reclaims the discarded remnants of mining ambitions—projects that have played a central role in shaping national identities in both Mexico and the United States. In my sculptures, core drill bits, stone fragments, and mineral waste become agents of resistance and reimagination, engaging in dialogue with marble, obsidian, and materials recovered from mines. Through evocative assemblages, these elements reflect on the intertwined legacies of extractive industries that impact both territories and bodies through practices of slow violence.

Through a research-based practice grounded in relational methodologies, for over a decade, I have collaborated with

the obsidian mining community in central Mexico—a mineral deeply embedded in cultural and historical legacies. After relocating to the U.S., she began working with the community of Marble, Colorado—a site with its own nationalist symbolism, given that the exceptional quality and luster of its marble have made it the material of choice for national monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

These installations resist containment—they loop, drip, and scar—proposing new systems of flow, intimacy, and care. As such, they become both critique and proposal; they embody both solidity and fluidity. Their dual nature enables alternative avenues of reflection—ways to navigate the fractured terrains of extractive capitalism and the fragmented identities shaped by coloniality, ultimately arriving at other ways of coming to know.

In these spaces, vulnerability is not the opposite of strength, and power is no longer static; it is contested, redistributed, and ultimately redefined: it is unpowered.

Introduction

As a Mexican artist and researcher, I examine the intersections of materiality, epistemologies, and ecologies. My creative research focuses on the cultural, geological, and political narratives embedded in various stones and minerals. I use transdisciplinary methodologies that navigate the crossroads of art, field research, and geology to critically dissect the landscape's constant mutation/deterioration due to extractive capitalism.

I work with obsidian, marble, ceramics, and mine-recovered objects to create sculptural objects and installations that amplify the metaphoric meaning and potential of geologic bodies with long cultural traditions to provoke reflection on the culture/nature divide across different regions and historical moments. I also use time-based media and oral history recordings to document the extractive (often violent and exploitative) processes associated with these materials, from the gender politics and

labor practices of mining to the ecological impacts of industrial capitalism. Through these examinations, I aim to reflect on our relationship with the planet, considering its different sense of scale and temporality and the narratives embedded in these ancient materials.

My practice is informed by twelve years of research in the obsidian mines of Sierra de las Navajas, Mexico, where I have developed a close relationship with obsidian—a volcanic glass formed when lava rapidly cools after the eruption. This relationship extends beyond materiality to encompass the artisan and mining communities that extract and work with it. This mineral was essential to pre-Columbian cultures in Central Mexico and remains a primary source of income for communities that have inherited this craft as an economic model. My research primarily focuses on obsidian production techniques and cultural tensions. With a collaborative

and experimental approach, I reflect on the dynamics that intersect different forms of creation and propose alternative production methodologies that can directly benefit the local community.

Moreover, my passion for stone and mining heritage led me to pursue my MFA in Colorado, specifically in the Sculpture and Post-Studio program. Its art-making approach goes beyond the studio's traditional boundaries, emphasizing engagement with the world and the environment. By employing experimental methodologies that evolved into transdisciplinary approaches, I was able to develop a deeper understanding and uncover alternative ways of learning. Every step of my research is a process of discovery through historical data and personal experiences, each influencing the other. This approach is about engaging with the region, the landscape, the people, and the culture, and building knowledge through lived experiences and relational encounters. However, borrowing methodologies from the social sciences and ethnography, post-studio practice inhabits the grey

areas between disciplines, making a fixed definition impossible. It must remain fluid and permissive.

Since my relocation in 2022, I have visited various extractive sites to better understand how industries and the towns surrounding them are shaped physically and culturally by the materials embedded in their landscapes. I have explored sites where coal, silver, copper, and marble are extracted, studying the distinct processes involved and how these materials influence and define the territories they inhabit. Each material serves a different function and carries a different weight—coal powers energy and industry, often extracted far from the places it fuels; marble holds a legacy of monuments, architecture, and memory, physically linking us to history; and silver, with its dual role as currency and technology.

Witnessing firsthand the techniques and practices of extraction opened up conversations about gender dynamics, as many of the tools, forms, and gestures echoed human anatomy and mimicked the



Old Gallery at the Yule Marble Quarry.

physical movements associated with sexual intercourse, leading me to critically question: How can a Post-Studio Practice perspective open new avenues for understanding the cultural and ecological consequences of modern extractive practices, and how these reflect broader patterns of exploitation within the global economic system? As Maristella Svampa discusses in *Feminismos del Sur*,¹ the issues extend beyond environmental degradation, exposing deep social crises rooted in power and control systems. Svampa argues that humanity's impulse to dominate the "other" is visible in our treatment of the

Earth and how we relate to one another. This logic of domination establishes structures of marginalization, where what is considered "different"—whether women in relation to men, or nature to humanity—is devalued.

This also informs what Kathryn Yusoff describes in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*², the "geological gaze" as a way of seeing the Earth that objectifies land and bodies as extractable resources, rooted in racial capitalism. Within the geological gaze, extractive capitalism treats nature as something to be consumed, controlled, and

1 Svampa, M. (2015). *Feminismos del Sur y Ecofeminismo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Kalathos.

2 Yusoff, K. (2018). *A billion Black Anthropocenes or none*. University of Minnesota Press.

commodified. The Earth is viewed as passive and available for exploitation, encompassing physical acts and ideological dimensions. We justify the forcible extraction when we view the land or the Earth as a passive entity. The geological gaze then becomes a tool to examine how extraction is entangled with systems of power critically. Each act of drilling, cutting, or excavation is materially impactful and symbolically charged, carrying with it long histories of violence and erasure.

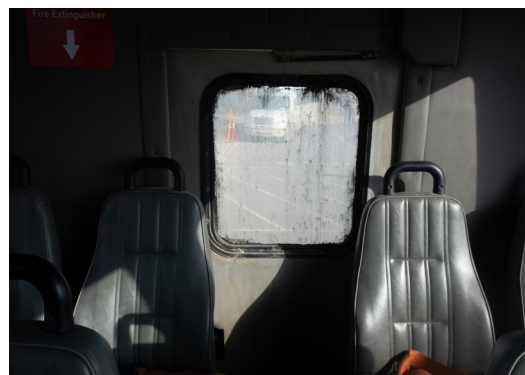
Some of the consequences that often emerge within an extractive framework include exploitative labor practices marked by poor working conditions and unsafe environments. Displacement is very common when extractive industries claim land, forcing local communities to make way for resource extraction, leading to the loss of cultural heritage and community ties. Ecological destruction, such as deforestation, pollution, contaminated water, and soil, also threatens the communities.

Considering the concept of body-territory, initially introduced by Lorena

Cabnal³ and later expanded by Verónica Gago⁴, provides a crucial framework for understanding the effects of extraction on individuals and the land. The exploitation of communal territories, whether urban, rural, or Indigenous, is closely connected to the violation of both individual and collective bodies. According to Gago (2020), extractive industries harm the body in a particular way. These territories are not simply land or, as extractivist projects often perceive, empty spaces to be exploited; they are deeply intertwined with identity, culture, and history. Exploiting these territories harms the people

3 Cabnal, L. (2010). *Acercamiento a una propuesta teórica desde la experiencia de lucha de las mujeres indígenas comunitarias feministas de Iximulew*. Guatemala: Asociación Feminista La Cuerda.

4 Gago, V. (2020). *Feminist international: How to change everything*. Verso Books.



Guided tour of the Bingham Canyon Mine in Utah.

who hold a deep connection to them if we think of the body as a permanent condition of experience that is inseparable from the land it inhabits.

Drawing on Macarena Gómez-Barris's concept of the "extractive zone,"⁵ as these geographies where capitalist and colonial logics render entire ecologies and communities expendable. In these places, extraction disrupts ecosystems and cultural and spiritual ties to the land. This paper outlines my research methodology and material exploration across three specific "extractive zones" that I was able to access, visit, and initiate dialogue with. Although gaining entry to mining operations is often restricted, I have found ways to navigate these barriers by being persistent and trying different approaches. During these visits, I collected a range of objects—from industrial debris to a technological relic used in the construction of a national monument. These materials are integral to my research

and the sculptural installation, as they hold significant meaning, as they have all been participants in the extraction process. Susan Schuppli's concept of the "material witness"⁶ offers a way to understand how non-human entities have the potential to document their interactions with the world. These materials undergo ontological changes and create record-like evidence to reconstruct a history. It's not just about matter responding to external events; it's also about how these materials reveal the processes and practices that enable them to serve as witnesses to history. Though they come from different origins, the objects of this installation share parallel stories and destinies.

In the first section, I will describe the drill bit, the first object I was given. This piece came from the Twenty Mile Coal Mine in Oak Creek, Colorado. This drill bit does the task of removing coal from the coal seam. The second section turns to Silver extraction in Marysvale, Utah. The project is still in its discovery phase, which

5 Gómez-Barris, M. (2017). *The extractive zone: Social ecologies and decolonial perspectives*. Duke University Press.

6 Schuppli, S. (2020). *Material witnessing: Toward an evidentiary politics*. MIT Press.

means drilling and extracting core samples for testing. I brought back the drill pipe; this essential part of the equipment is used to bore holes as deep as 1,500 meters into the Earth. The third section focuses on the extraction of Yule Marble, extracted at the Yule Marble Quarries in Marble, Colorado. Here, marble is pierced, carved, or cut into blocks. Discarded stones, diamond wire used in cutting, and PVC curtains made their way back with me, accompanied by a cutting ring, almost an archaeological object, that was used in the 1914s in the quarry. Each of these materials carries the imprint of history's extractive force, revealing the gendered and violent logics that underlie acts of mining and material transformation.

S01. COAL

Twenty Mile Mine, Colorado

Coal is a black opaque material with bits of gloss. Over millions of years, it was formed as dead plant matter decayed into peat, subjected to intense heat and pressure from deep burial in ancient wetlands on the Earth's surface, and generating or storing electrical components, depending on the surrounding geologic forces. Over millions of years, this organic sludge turned into different types of coal, depending on the pressure, heat, and time involved. By manipulating the material through fire, it introduced heating systems to homes and fueled the Industrial Revolution, powering steam engines and electricity. This marked the beginning of accelerated material extraction, which is driven by coal's organic components, which define its productivity and price.

Due to the large deposits of bituminous coal in Routt County, the Twentymile Coal



Areal view of the Twenty Mile Mine in Oak Creek, Colorado.

Mine is today one of the largest underground longwall mines in the United States and Colorado's most productive. The mine was key in attracting settlers to the region in the late 1800s, creating a mining town 19 miles southeast. Oak Creek and its community grew around the coal industry, which became the backbone of the town's development.

Nowadays, the mine is owned by Peabody, the largest U.S. coal producer and a leading player in the global coal industry. Peabody mines include the North Antelope Rochelle Mine, which is in the Powder River Basin, Wyoming, and is the largest open-pit mine in the world. Coal from the Twentymile Mine is distributed to a diverse array of domestic and international customers.

While trying to access the Twenty Mile mine, I visited OakCreek, prioritizing my engagement with the local community through casual conversations, interviews, and media documentation. Through this form of territorial recognition, I accessed invaluable stories about the region, their experience of life, and, foremost, their connection to the local mining industry and its legacy, which is embedded in the town's identity and heritage. Nowadays, most of the town is inhabited by bystanders of the mine since most of its workers come from different towns. However, Oak Creek struggles with water contamination, pollution, and land subsidence due to the removal of materials or the collapse of mine tunnels, which causes the ground above to sink.



Woman's dressing room - Twenty Mile Mine in Oak Creek, Colorado.

The coal industry's environmental impact has caused many mining companies to become increasingly secretive and closed off to outsiders. However, through persistence, I was granted access to an insightful tour of the mine, 1,500 feet deep and 40 square miles underground. This city-sized mine is a labyrinth of dark pathways coated in white limestone dust, with wire mesh and rock bolts reinforcing the roof and walls.

During the tour, I was provided with thorough explanations of the safety measures, the daily operations of the mining equipment, and the workforce demographics. I had the privilege of observing the 10-foot coal seam and the longwall machine, a shearer that

cuts coal along the face of the seam at close range. In a longwall mining system, drill bits are part of the machinery that helps extract coal from deep underground. These phallic metal drill bits can extract up to 1.5 million tons of coal annually. These bits are used to break into the Earth and have the ability to scratch, harvesting its valuable, black organic substance. Fortunately, one freshly replaced drill bit lay on the floor, and I was allowed to take it. Once extracted from the seam, coal is transported via a conveyor belt to the surface.

This rare opportunity to observe operations up close inspired me to explore the layers beneath dominant historical narratives. It allowed me to trace the connections between labor and the often-overlooked gendered power dynamics within coal extraction. Historically, women's roles during industrialization were vital—not only as wives and mothers who maintained coal camps and families or as temporary labor during the world wars but also as activists, organizers, and participants in labor strikes, many of which continue to this day. The fight

for women's inclusion in mining has been long and hard-fought, as they sought better employment opportunities, fair wages, and equal rights, and even though there has been progress, the industry remains shaped by a hyper-masculine culture and a legacy of exclusion, sexual abuse, discrimination, and violence.

Coal extraction and its long history echo what Verónica Gago defines as extractivism as a “biopolitical project”¹ as a system that operates through the entanglement of “patriarchies, sexism, and discrimination based on gender” within an extractive activity. These dynamics expose how mining is about material removal and the assertion of power over bodies and land.

1 Gago, V. (2017). *La razón neoliberal: Economía, derechos, y política en los países del extractivismo* (The neoliberal reason: Economics, rights, and politics in the countries of extractivism). Tinta Limón.



Exterior of the Twenty Mile Mine, Colorado



Exterior of the Twenty Mile Mine, Colorado





Interior of the Twenty Mile Mine, Colorado







SO2. SILVER

Deer Trail Project, Utah



Used drilling pipes

Silver forms when hot, mineral-rich fluids move through volcanic or sedimentary rock fractures, depositing metals as they cool. Silver is revered as one of the most historically valuable metals. It fueled colonial expansion, bringing with it systems of oppression and leaving behind a profound legacy of extraction that is still shaping communities globally.

DT Mining: Deer Trail Project is a silver extractive project in Marysvale, Utah. The Deer Trail Mine has been deeply woven into Marysvale's history since 1878 when gold

was first discovered in the area. However, the mine shut down in 1923 after a fault cut through the mineral veins, rendering the gold inaccessible. Over the decades, various companies attempted to revive the site, but it was not until 2019 that MAG Silver became the official owner and operator. After meeting management team members at a mining convention hosted by the Colorado School of Mines, I was invited to witness their ongoing drilling operations firsthand.

The mining exploration phase can last anywhere from 3 to 15 years, depending on how much effort and precision are put into the core examination process to be able to follow a silver vein to be fructiferous. Drilling to a depth of 15 meters takes roughly 60 days, and the likelihood of discovering valuable minerals varies widely. If fortunate, a company's years of extraction might find

a core composed of a high enough matter concentration to initiate the production phase.

However, it is the same kind of luck that led to the 100-year-old Bingham Canyon copper mine near Salt Lake City to develop and has had a vastly negative impact on the environment. The mine is the site of a pit that is 1.2 kilometers deep and spans 4 kilometers across. It was the first and largest open-pit mine, developed by Daniel Jackling, a central figure in twentieth-century mining and the inventor of what became known as the Bingham Open Pit Mining System. The radically scarred and transformed landscapes of the past century result from powerful historical figures and the invention of mass destruction technology in the twentieth

century, as noted by Timothy L. Cain in his book *Mass Destruction*¹. Unfortunately, these technologies dramatically altered the natural environment and dictated the lives of those who worked within it, often leaving behind ghost towns and mass unemployment in their wake.

Excavating involves drilling, shattering, piercing, fracturing, and ultimately transporting rock from the interior of the planet to the Earth's surface to be analyzed in the hopes of turning the matter into a commodity. Considering the vertical orientation of geological excavation, we begin to realize that the dynamism of the hole has blurred the line between what is considered factual and what is merely imagined.

The drilling process creates an apparent dichotomy between the subject (the one doing the excavating) and the object (what is excavated), resulting in a binary between



Drilling advertising at the Denver Mineral Exploration Summit 2023

¹ Cain, T. L. (2020). *Mass destruction: The cultural and political impact of extraction* (1st ed.). Routledge.

underground and above ground. This mirrors the power asymmetry in which some people hold positions of dominance. Judith Shapiro suggests that extractive practices are sustained by what she describes as “Symbolic Violence,”² the violence exercised upon an agent with his or her complicity, and extraction is often taken for granted and sustained within a capitalist order. Symbolic violence, she argues, then defines what is to be critiqued or problematized and what is defined as naturalized and thus not to be questioned, hence allowing the continuation of practices with violent effects (Shapiro, 96).

Marysvale, Utah, located in Piute County, was founded in the 1860s with mining as a central economic activity. It was initiated with gold, silver, and lead; however, it became a hot spot for Uranium during the Cold War era. Mining has been foundational to the county’s economy and identity; nowadays, its legacy persists in the landscape with abandoned mines and tailings. MAG Silver

is an ambitious Canadian project, whose presence in Utah, promises economic opportunities for the town; however, some residents worry about past legacies of environmental degradation.

In 2024, the company reported drilling 5,845 meters from the surface, equivalent to using between 974 and 1,948 drill pipes, depending on whether 6-meter or 3-meter rods were employed. When I visited the site, many of these pipes were scattered across the ground, resting at the edges of the tailings. It made clear that extraction is not just about the act of perforation but also about the tools, materials, and physical leftovers embedded in the aftermath.

² Shapiro, J. (2017). *The environmental politics of extractivism: Symbolic violence and global capitalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.



Exploration Site at the Deer Trail area.



MAG's Silver core logging facility



Deer Trail Project old shaft entrance.





Bingham Canyon Mine, Utah.

S03. MARBLE

Yule Marble Quarry, Colorado



Yule Marble Texture
Area view of the Crystal River Valley.

The Yule Creek Valley is a unique site in which, over millions of years, dense black limestone resulting from the accretion of calcite from layers of marine shells transformed into a gleaming white marble. Located high above the town of Marble, Colorado, the Yule Marble Quarry, recently renamed “The Pride of America Mine,” is

one of the most renowned marble quarries in the United States, owned by Colorado RED Stone quarries and R.E.D. Graniti, since 2011. The quarry operates entirely underground, with multiple portals leading into the mountain, and it is situated at elevations ranging from 9,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level.

Yule Marble was discovered in the 1800s when a geologist found a white marble deposit while prospectors searched for gold and silver among the mountains and valleys. Later, a man named George Yule found the vein and the site of the marble, and it has borne his name ever since. Due to its beauty and strength, Yule marble began gaining attention as a fine building material by 1890, and by 1899, the town of Marble was born. In its early years, the town thrived as a bustling mining community, home to dozens of



Old marble blocks in the quarry.

workers and their families, directly supporting the local economy and infrastructure.

By 1907, the population had reached 700. Residents worked in all roles, from quarrying to processing the stone at the local mill at the center of the town, which became the largest marble finishing mill in the world. The exceptional quality and luster of the Yule Marble made it a preferred choice for several national landmarks. In 1914, the Yule Marble Company had its most significant project, the 36 columns for the Lincoln Memorial, each 46 feet tall and 7 feet in diameter. Then, in 1930, it was commissioned to provide stone for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Extracting the single block required for the monument took over a year; it remains the largest block of marble ever quarried in the U.S., weighing around 124 tons.

The marble industry grew slowly because marble was difficult to extract, and transporting it was a longstanding challenge. The Yule Marble quarry closed in 1941. In 1956, only a couple of residents were left, and it almost became a ghost town. As of 2025, Marble, Colorado, is a small town with a population of approximately 133 residents, with carpentry and construction being the primary income sources, followed by hospitality. The quarry is now a successful project, extracting an estimated 1,000 metric tons of marble monthly.

Over time, the relationship between the quarry and the town has changed completely. Ownership changes, advancements in technology, and the globalization of the stone have shifted how the industry



Lincoln Gallery Entrance at the Yule Marble Quarry.

operates. Today, the Pride of America Mine runs almost independently of the town. The company no longer hires residents but brings workers from outside the area, and its only participation in the town is by renting office space at the historic mill.



Changed trajectory of the Crystal River flow.

The quarry's operations have also impacted the natural environment. The flow of the Crystal River, which runs through the town, was altered to meet the quarry's transportation needs, affecting local ecosystems and landscape. Daily, at least four flat-bed trailer trucks loaded with marble blocks pass directly through the town's main road, leaving residents only as spectators to an industry that once defined their community. For many residents in Marble, the quarry is a complex symbol. It represents a source of historical pride and cultural identity, yet also serves as a reminder of how industrial processes can exploit natural resources while disregarding the communities closest to them.

The Yule Marble, formed for millennia and mined for over a century, is left in remnants throughout the Marble forest.

Still, Marble's identity and craft rely on this stone; there is a local gallery, and the town's sculptors frequently use marble for their creations, which they can find in the community pile, where the quarry leaves free stones every Friday. Additionally, the Marble/Marble Carving Symposium, which I have attended for the last two summers, offers one-on-one consultations and working demonstrations from stone sculptors. This Symposium was founded by Madeline Weiner, a renowned Colorado stone carver who saw the necessity of sharing the craft and passion for stones. Here, a community of more than 100 people comes to carve at the banks of the Crystal River, using the Yule Marble Stone as the medium for their creation.

Throughout my field research, I have actively engaged with the community,

witnessing its complicated, longstanding relationship with the material. Building relationships with the quarry has also been central to my practice. By developing a strong link with the mine managers, I have been fortunate to tour the site on multiple occasions. Each visit offers a new glimpse into the evolving interior of the mine, turning deeper every time, witnessing the rapid pace of production, which underscores the reality of stone and mineral commercialization and its consequences.

The extraction process of marble typically begins with a horizontal cut made at the base of the marble wall. Once this foundational line is established, vertical drill holes are placed to divide the wall into sections. A wire saw is then used to cut along the back and sides of each section, slowly



Community pile at the mine entrance.

loosening it into a more manageable block. The final cut is made with diamond wire—an industrial steel cable embedded with small diamonds, the hardest mineral on Earth. Despite its delicacy in appearance, the wire is capable of slicing through on what seems like an easy and delicate cut.

Once the cuts are complete, a metal water bag is inserted into the back cut and filled gradually. The expanding pressure of the water gently pushes the marble block away from the rock face. When it finally detaches, heavy machinery carefully lowers the block onto a soft bed of crushed marble and rubble. These massive blocks are then transported down to the valley floor, where the next processing phase begins. Nevertheless, not all blocks are accepted. Scattered across the floor are the blocks that did not meet commercial standards, those with cracks, fractures, or imperfections. In quarries like Yule Marble, up to 30% of the material is discarded for such reasons. These stones are cast aside not because they lack beauty but because they fail to meet industry expectations.

These repeated visits have allowed me to observe the quarry's physical transformations alongside the rhythms and routines that define the extraction process. In addition, the different materials, fragments, tools, and overlooked objects I gathered became essential to interpreting and reading the site. Although they could be trash or debris, these materials hold action, labor, and key elements in opening up the conversation as to where our resources come from and how they are extracted. In gathering these fragments, I am not simply collecting materials. They allow me to engage with the quarry through its materiality as a complex social, cultural, and ecological landscape.

The PVC-lined tunnel was one of the gestures that continuously struck me as I was in a vehicle passing what marks the quarry gallery's entrance. This tunnel functions as a literal and symbolic threshold, a portal from the outside to the hidden practices inside. The diamond wire, coiled and resting after use, is another significant element; it is the final tool in the cutting process, completing the block's separation

from its place. Curiously, I also recollected a cutting ring that was said to have been used to extract the marble for the columns of the Lincoln Memorial. This relic, dating back to around 1914, was once a central tool at the Yule Marble Quarry.

Lastly, but most importantly, the stone, an organic matter revered for its purity and strength, yet one that bears the deep scars of extraction, revealing the paradox of its beauty and the implications of obtaining it. Stones have played a crucial role in shaping human history. They symbolize permanence, resilience, and memory when used for sculptures, buildings, memorials, and burials. However, their role has changed over time. Today, other materials and processes are often preferred, leaving stone mainly used for practical purposes like kitchen countertops, wall cladding, and flooring. In this shift, stone is stripped of its original form and essence. What remains are thin, fragile slabs, severed from the deep geological and histories they once held.



Yule Marble Quarry, Colorado.



Interior of the Yule Marble Quarry.



Interior of the Yule Marble Quarry.





Exterior of the Yule Marble Quarry.





Open pit at Yule Marble Quarry.



STOP
10-5-20

4X4



(UN)POWER

MFA THESIS EXHIBITION AT THE CU ARTS MUSEUM
APRIL 2025



Exhibition
continues







ARTIST STATEMENT

...

Area Description for
ARTWORKS

...

(UN)POWER marks the culmination of my three years as an MFA candidate in Sculpture and Post-Studio Practice at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Each material in the exhibition was recovered through field research conducted across various mines, quarries, and extractive sites. These materials bear the imprint of extractive force, revealing the gendered and violent logics that underlie acts of mining and material transformation.

The installation's first and largest component is a wall piece of PVC curtain strips from the Lincoln Gallery at the Yule Marble Quarry. These plastic elements—scarred with dust, machine markings, and signs of wear—form a barrier behind which all the activity and abuse unfold. They obscure violence, shielding it from view while making its presence felt.



Untitled, 2025

Mine-recovered objects: PVC strip curtains from the Lincoln
Gallery at Yule Marble Quarry, Marble, Colorado

12FT X 66 INCH



In the subsequent pieces, I present different scenes of extraction, highlighting their formal variations. The body of work is centered on intrusion, penetration, verticality, and repetitive motion, mirroring the physical gestures imposed on the land and the body. A soundscape of running water and industrial resonance immerses the viewer in the continuous sonic environment of the mine.

The first scene, *Anatomy of Extraction*, part one, sits in the front corner—a vertical sculpture composed of distinct elements, each bearing its weight and narrative. The base is a marble cylinder gifted by a local sculptor from Marble, Colorado. Above sits a black obsidian cylinder made in collaboration with Silvio González, an obsidian artisan from Mexico. Resting atop these stones is an HQ drill pipe, collected during my field research in the Deer Trail Mine project in Utah. These pipes are essential to the violent, penetrative process of extraction, designed to bore deep into the Earth in search of value. A bronze replica of a drill bit from the Twenty Mile Coal Mine is suspended above the sculpture by

diamond wire. This tool marks the initial point of contact with the Earth. Its sharp tip sets the entire extraction mechanism in motion, literally and symbolically.

Surrounding the entire work is an old steel ring recovered from the Yule Marble; this ring was found on the gallery floor, where the marble for the columns for the Lincoln Memorial was extracted, indicating that it was used for the columns' extraction.



Anatomy of Extraction: PART 01, 2025

White Yule Marble, obsidian, cast bronze, steel pipe, and mine-recovered objects (Yule Marble Quarry, Colorado: HQ drill pipe, diamond wire, cutting ring; Twenty Mile Coal Mine, Colorado: Longwall machine drill bit replica in bronze; MAG Silver Mine, Utah: DQ drill pipe).

74 INCH X 31 INCH



The second part of Anatomy of Extraction presents discarded pieces of grey Yule Marble. Unlike the white, pristine Yule Marble prized for its purity, this grey variety has historically been considered lesser value. The different colorations indicate that it was extracted from a different geological layer, and different minerals are combined in its formation. It was largely dismissed until recently when renewed interest from the Chinese market increased its demand and market price. The stones shown here are doubly discarded, not only because they are grey marble but because each contains visible fractures, making them unusable for architectural purposes and sculptures.

My intervention with the stone revolves around making holes. Every gesture I make while carving the stone echoes the extraction processes required for each material. By creating holes, I represent the nature of extraction, removing rock and adding nothing. When the steel pipe drills into the marble, it leaves a scar, a mark of forced transformation. Every hole leaves its trace. The central piece in this arrangement features a double perforation, a metaphor for intensified human intrusion. I chose to emphasize the finish of these pieces to represent how human intervention alters material. It becomes stylized, aestheticized, and transformed.





Anatomy of Extraction: PART 02, 2025

Gray Yule Marble, Steel pipe, Steel square tube, Swivel Cast Iron Caster

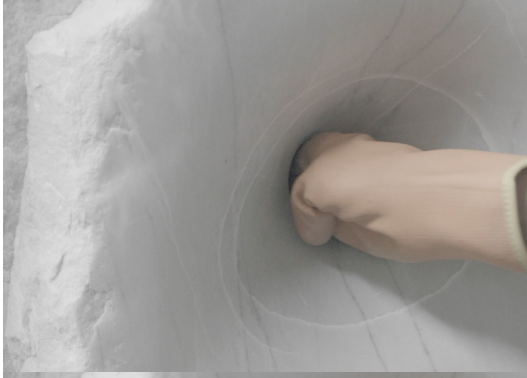
60 INCH X 56 NCH X 30 INCH



Following this piece, I present a looping video titled *Soft Entry*. The slow, repetitive motion of my hand sanding the stone's hole mimics the penetrative action of extraction. The video's slow rhythm, layered with overlapping sounds, generates a breathing sensation, evoking the atmosphere of an erotic film. The work explores how extractive industries enact the geological gaze on the Earth, voyeuristic and persistent.



Soft Entry, 2025
Single-channel video



Lastly—and most importantly—is the centerpiece of the exhibition. This stone is a system of its own. Titled Flow, the piece speaks to the possibility of new flows and repair. It is interpreted as a body of resistance. Even though it has been attacked, perforated from every side, and flattened, it still hangs, resisting.

Flow has the most altered, most intervened marble stone in the exhibition. It contains five drilled holes, each tightly connected to the others by diamond wire. The heavily worked soft surface speaks to the Earth's vulnerability: constantly perforated and left hollow. The diamond wire pulls through the stone while a plastic hose is intertwined, pumping marble water through the holes. The water finally spills into a bucket containing another drill bit replica and flows over its tip. This cyclical action is reclaiming power. This system is hanging by a chain hoist to the gallery's ceiling, making us look to the top until we find the bronze drill bit, amplifying the tension.



Flow, 2025

White Yule marble, diamond wire, chain, hoist, hose, water pump, marble water, bucket, Longwall machine drill bit, replicas in bronze

























Conclusion

Whether it is coal, silver, copper, or marble, they all bear the weight of extraction. Though the intensity of violence varies, each site functions as an extractive zone, shaped by a colonial and Western vision of progress that stems from the intertwined structures of Modernity/Coloniality. As Philippe Descola argues in *Beyond Nature and Culture*¹, the binary between nature and culture is not a universal framework, but a specific Western construction. This artificial divide is less about separation; it is a mechanism of control that rationalizes the subjugation of land, life, and labor and is about domination.

In the three extractive projects I researched, each was overseen by corporate entities headquartered far from the territories they exploit, physically and ideologically disconnected from the landscapes they transform. As seen in Oak Creek,

Colorado, the Twenty Mile mine is owned by Peabody Energy, which was founded in 1883 in Chicago, Illinois, and is currently headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri. Peabody is one of the largest private-sector coal companies in the world, with operations across the United States and Australia.

Operating in Utah, MAG Silver Corp. is a Canadian mining and exploration company specializing in high-grade silver and gold projects, primarily in Mexico. Its greatest asset is the Juanicipio Mine, located in the Fresnillo District of Zacatecas, Mexico—one of the world's most prolific silver-producing regions and one of the most insecure areas in the country.

Lastly, Colorado Stone Quarries, Inc.'s main office and marble processing facility are located in Delta, Colorado—approximately 75 miles from the Yule Marble Quarry. In 2011, the quarry was acquired and reopened

¹ Descola, P. (2013). *Beyond nature and culture* (J. Lloyd, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

by R.E.D. Graniti, an Italian multinational company headquartered in Massa, Tuscany. Founded in the early 1960s, R.E.D. Graniti has grown into a global leader in the extraction and distribution of natural stone blocks, operating more than 30 quarries worldwide that produce marble, granite, and quartzite.

Extraction operates at vast scales; resource extraction is being optimized while the lives and narratives of those closest to the land are marginalized or ignored. Corporations continue to arrive with capital, machinery, and predetermined agendas, yet without meaningful understanding of—or accountability to—the communities whose land they occupy. What remains in the wake of their operations is rarely regenerative. Instead, it leaves polluted water sources, deforested mountains, and fractured ecologies. Economically, communities are left dependent on boom-and-bust cycles, temporary jobs, and the long-term costs of cleanup and repair. Socially and culturally, local knowledge and traditions are slowly eroded. Identity is then shaped by absence,

by what has been taken.

Rather than seeking to resolve the contradictions inherent in extractive practices, this project aims to linger within them and trace the entanglements between geological processes and the ideologies that act upon them. Post-studio practice becomes a tool to witness what has been discarded, silenced, or erased. This work does not offer solutions but instead carves out space for reflection, inviting us to reimagine these extractive sites not as zones of depletion but as landscapes of collective memory.

CITATIONS:

Introduction:

1. Svampa, M. (2015). *Feminismos del Sur y Ecofeminismo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Kalathos.
2. Yusoff, K. (2018). *A billion Black Anthropocenes or none*. University of Minnesota Press.
3. Cabnal, L. (2010). *Acercamiento a una propuesta teórica desde la experiencia de lucha de las mujeres indígenas comunitarias feministas de Iximulew*. Guatemala: Asociación Feminista La Cuerda.
4. Gago, V. (2020). *Feminist international: How to change everything*. Verso Books.
5. Gómez-Barris, M. (2017). *The extractive zone: Social ecologies and decolonial perspectives*. Duke University Press.
6. Schuppli, S. (2020). *Material witnessing: Toward an evidentiary politics*. MIT Press.

Coal:

1. Gago, V. (2017). *La razón neoliberal: Economía, derechos, y política en los países del extractivismo* (The neoliberal reason: Economics, rights, and politics in the countries of extractivism). Tinta Limón.

Silver:

1. Cain, T. L. (2020). *Mass destruction: The cultural and political impact of extraction* (1st ed.). Routledge.
2. Shapiro, J. (2017). *The environmental politics of extractivism: Symbolic violence and global capitalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Conclusion:

1. Descola, P. (2013). *Beyond nature and culture* (J. Lloyd, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

