

DAWN ROE

Mountainfield Study is a project that grew out of work done at the Listhús Artist Residency Program in Iceland and the Banff Center for the Visual Arts in the Canadian Rockies. These two locations, over 3,000 miles apart, have distinctly different geographies, but their rugged subarctic landscapes play an important role in the aesthetic direction of this body of work. During her residencies, Dawn Roe spent her time amassing photographs and video clips of these dramatic landscapes that would later become the combined, multi-view compositions seen in her finished work (fig. 32-40).

The severe climate of these regions has resulted in hardened landscapes marked by sharp contours and abrupt contrasts of tone and texture. Roe captures these features in photographs by showing charcoal grey rocks against glistening snow, barren peaks silhouetted against bright skies and pale ice swirling in dark streams. These strong lines, edges and tonal planes found in the natural environment complement the sharp edges, jumps in scale and vantage points that occur when Roe joins images together.

These montage compositions distance the viewer from the sense that the photograph is a direct representation of the subject. Roe pushes this distancing further by incorporating out-of-place materials such as irregular pieces of aluminum foil or cotton cheesecloth. The crinkled foil catches light in ways that are surprisingly similar to patchy snow and moving water. The thin open weave of the cheesecloth has visual parallels to the topographic undulations of hills and snow banks. Nevertheless, these elements create a visual dissonance that moves the work further toward abstraction.

Roe's photographs capture the striking natural beauty of these environments, but nature is not the primary subject of her work. Photography and video are a means of exploring what she calls the "incongruities" between how we see and experience the world and how it is represented with the camera. The point of departure for *Mountainfield Study* is not only the landscapes of Iceland and the Rockies, but also her experience observing and traveling through them. What was seen or remembered during these trips were subjective impressions, some vivid and complete, others fragmentary and fleeting. Unlike the fixed moment of the photograph, perceptions are often fluid and unsettled. Roe's composite images capture a semblance of these subjective experiences, while also maintaining their integrity as photographic statements.

Mountainfield Study (fig. 31) is a two-channel video installation that brings these ideas to a time-based medium with startling effect. The fractured individual frames now move with mesmerizing energy in all directions at once, colliding, separating and reforming in impossible combinations of land and sky. Sometimes the compositions are kaleidoscopic; sometimes they sweep by like flight in a dream. In time, as the viewer watches, their sense of being grounded in any way vanishes and these eerie remote landscapes become near hallucinatory visions.

fig. 31

Dawn Roe, installation view of *Mountainfield Study*, 2016, split projection single-channel HD video (running time 5:17 minutes), Courtesy of the artist. © Dawn Roe. Photo by Raymond Martinot.