



Rachel Shelton, *Slow Looking*

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Buffalo Arts Studio

On Letting Go

Curatorial Essay by Edward Y. J. Millar and Rachel Shelton

“All the forms of stone, each of which represents some state of its evolution, exist simultaneously in the world: the ancients are all in daily contact with their grandchildren.”

— Francis Ponge, *Le Parti pris des choses*

Entropy¹ is an inevitable and timeless process. Over time, systems naturally move from order to chaos. Nature tends toward maximum disorder and decay. Though we often meet this reality with resistance, reluctant to accept change or precarity, curiosity can transform these inevitable endings into opportunities. As things break down (a tree, a mountain, a creature), they become foundations for new life and new ecosystems. Rather than fearing, fighting against, or trying to control these natural processes, can we instead find beauty and relief in them?

Slow Looking is a new body of work by Rachel Shelton that challenges the negativity so often associated with decay, uncertainty, and precarity. When things shed the weight of their past lives, there is also hope, potential, and relief. New connections and contexts, once thought impossible, become real. With installation work and a series of repeated and reiterated prints of rock forms, Shelton reminds us that it is the nature of things not only to fall apart, but to begin again.

Shelton draws inspiration for her work from the natural world, with rock forms providing one of the best examples of the dualities of growth and decay; of entropy and stability. Despite their inevitable change in form—from mountain to boulder to rock to pebble to sand—we feel a constant sense of awe and wonder at whatever state we find them in. We accept their ephemerality. Just as we look with admiration upon the grandeur of a mountain, so too do we treasure the smallness of a pebble held in the palm of our hand.

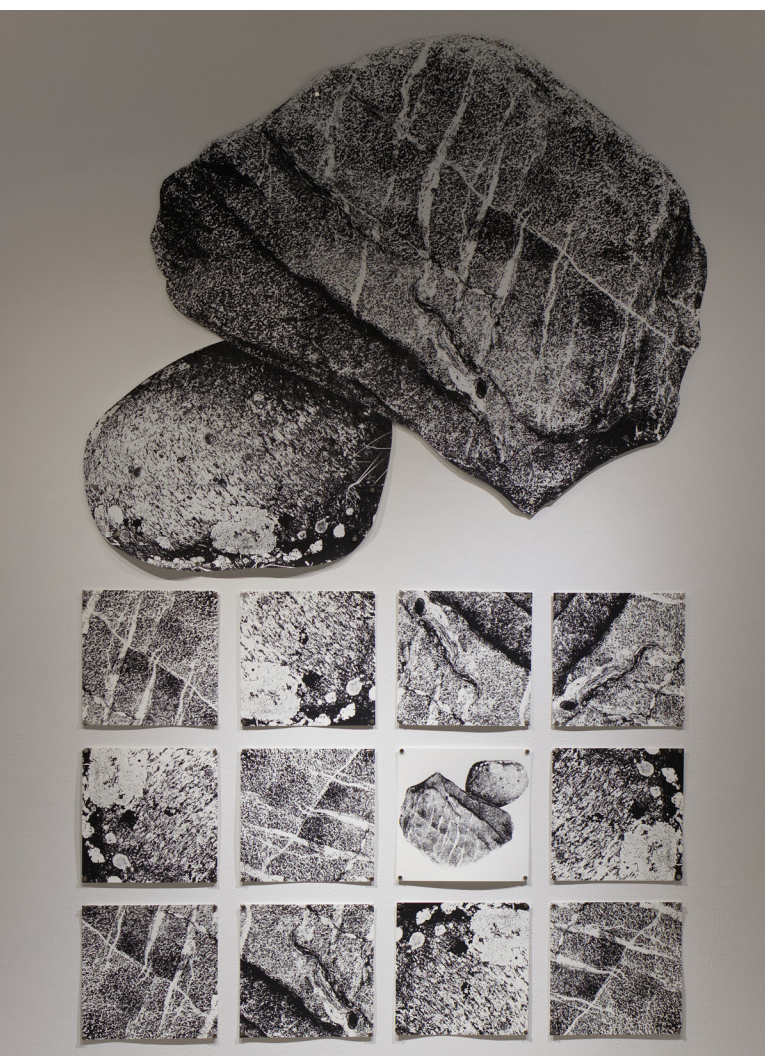
All of the rock forms in *Slow Looking* originate from a single photo of two rocks in a field of glacial deposits that Shelton stumbled upon during a trip to Montana. With adjustments to scale, orientation, color, and surrounding compositions, the prints invite us to shift between micro and macro perspectives and consider the ecosystems pocketed within a life cycle. Her work documents the passage of time via the life cycle of a rock, suggests the building blocks of larger structures, and navigates the network of meaning and connections that forms when things fall apart.

The rectangular etching and carborundum plates in the prints represent time, progress, building, space, and ambiguous scale shifts. They function as a narrative element, a language whose story unfolds print to print, arcing across time to speak on ever-changing compositions and relationships. The screenprinted rocks present the throughline of one object changed over time—forever falling and floating towards a new state of being.

When we accept entropy and precarity, we feel a weightlessness. We feel a sense of clarity as we accept the context of a new reality. Shelton's work creates space to rest in this clarity: to pause and acknowledge the inevitability of disorder, erosion, and decline, to view them in a freshly positive, inquisitive light. *Slow Looking* reminds us that by associating impermanence with gloom, we shield ourselves from other, brighter truths. Decay is literally a shedding of weight, an easing of burdens. Entropy and disorder—the uncertainty of future states—hold hope as much as fear. And in their nature is the promise of potential: each phase of unravelling will always build something new.

Front Page: Rachel Shelton, *On Letting Go*, 2026, screenprint, acrylic on paper and polytab, 100" x 240" (detail)

¹ chaos, disorganization, randomness



Artist Statement

My work investigates our often overlooked yet deeply interconnected relationship with the natural environment. Drawing from my studies in anthropology and archaeology, combined with my multidisciplinary art education, my practice relies on fluid shifts between micro and macro perspectives. This duality is reflected in my images, which often simultaneously recall both large-scale subjects and minute details.

I begin with a loose conceptual framework, then set aside the academic to allow material exploration and curiosity to guide the process. I experiment with materials and methods, observing how each shift affects the resulting image. What qualities do these experiments reveal? How does altering the process or composition change the read? I refine the work through repetition, using these insights to develop a visual language that supports the conceptual thread and adds to the built vocabulary of my practice.

Rather than distilling ideas into a single piece, I aim to make constellations of work that invite multiple interpretations. What begins as a representational image often evolves into something more ambiguous through processing. By focusing on repetition, materiality, composition, negative space, and combined process, I build subtle and open-ended narratives that encourage wonder, connection, and individual interpretation.

Top: Rachel Shelton, *Lineage A*, 2026, intaglio, screenprint, and chine collé on paper, 36" x 24"

Bottom: Rachel Shelton, *The Architecture of Patience*, 2026, screenprint on paper and polytab, 90" x 56"



Rachel Shelton, 2026

Artist Bio

Rachel Shelton centers an experimental and process-based practice around printmaking, expanding into book arts, enamel, public art, and sculpture. Exhibiting her work regularly, Rachel also facilitates creative workshops and is the recipient of various grants and residencies. She received her BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art and her MFA from SUNY at Buffalo.

Rachel is also a Co-Founder and collaborative printer at Mirabo Press, a fine art printmaking studio in Buffalo, NY. While she spends a good deal of time making solo work in her studio, collaboration and facilitation are also at the heart of Rachel's practice. From making collaborative work with fellow artists to facilitating and printing the work of many artists through her print shop, the collective energy of community drives her practice forward and outward.

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