Perla Krauze and Barbara Liotta
Mexican Cultural Institute

If stones could speak, it would be in the language of Mexico's Perla Krauze and Washington, DC's Barbara Liotta. In their sensitive, site-specific collaboration, "A Dark and Scandalous Rockfall," curated by Laura Roullet, each stone told the story of its artistic creation, geopolitical location, and particular history. Together, the individual bodies of work gained new purpose as they wove a thought-provoking portrait of a landscape, its lyrical beauty edging on embedded social message.

The exhibition took its title from Pedro Serrano, who writes a parallel between the make-up of a fracturing terrain and the structure of a poem to conjure the painful descent into collapse and ruin. It turns out that this poignant oxymoron is an actual meteorological event, which occurs when precipitation evaporates before hitting the ground; in the hands of Krauze and Liotta, dry rain becomes a metaphor for the lived reality of the ever more contentious U.S.-Mexico border.

The centerpiece of the show was the jointly made installation, "A Dark and Scandalous Rockfall" (2017-18). Rising and falling over the length of four galleries, it featured shards from the U.S.-Mexico border region. Krauze erected a low-lying, crazy mountain range from the floor up by layering stone fragments against each other, and Liotta composed a night sky from the ceiling down by suspending elements with string. Akin to a meeting between a graphic chart and a musical score, the shards created an overlapping, textured panorama, and the strands acted as bands of dry rain, lifelines, and tears. In the amalgam, this evolving procession asked what it feels like to be stacked together or dangling alone when you are the deciding agent in neither scenario.

The call-and-response approach also extended to Liotta's individual installations. Facing A Dark and Scandalous Rockfall, two horizontal works—stones hanging from strings—gathering new force in their contaparative context. Chorus (2011) featured three vertical rows, each string bearing a band of sparkling white marble fragments at about waist height. Below the stones, the strings multiplied to form separate pools on the floor. The drama heightened with Talco (2017), a work named after the Aztec god of rain and fertility. Set against a dark blue wall, a single row of gray-veined marble fragments hung from a rod, suspended just below knee height. In this case, the strings amplified into a communal mass on the floor.

Magical realism took over in Krauze's wall arrangements, fortresses, and other works on paper. Imprint #18, Recal Series (2017) masterfully beckoned with the image of a ghostly rock hovering over a receding grid. Imprint 15th Street, D.C. Series, done on drop cloth, recorded the parking lot of the Mexican Cultural Institute and the artist's 2017 stay in DC. The work draws parallels to veils found in leaves and stone fissures, its worn surface of fibrous fabric blending with the impressions of street cracks. The miniature wall diorama Horizontal Installation (2018) acquires a jewel-like and sacred quality from Krauze's application of gold.

Seven paintings, each measuring about eight by eight inches, line up above a metal shelf holding seven arrangements of stones, local slate, and resin. Considered individually, the compositions evoke enigmatic yet purposeful archaeological finds. As a whole, the composition hints at some ancient calendar or counting system whose meaning has been lost in time. Krauze and Liotta offer a portal into the pursuit of uncluttered intentionality that is at once rooted in the sensuous exploration of stone and a need for order. While aspects of Land Art and Minimalism inspire both artists, Krauze engages viscerally with the land and the materiality of stone, traveling to the border to gather shards. Liotta, a former dancer, emphasizes the performative potential of the material and its uses in Greco-Roman classicism and the groundbreaking work of Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy.

"A psychodrama of role-playing and self-reenactment emerged from their exhibition. "A Dark and Scandalous Rockfall" not only became a metaphor for the reprehensible violence at the border, but also held out the possibility of healing, not least through the example of collaboration. BOLDLY mining the immaterial force of the physical world, Krauze and Liotta revealed the force of its soul."

—SARAH TANGUY