

ARTFORUM

Vogel, Wendy, "Artforum Critics' Pick: Zarouhie Abdalian at Clifton Benevento," *Artforum*, April 2016

New York

Zarouhie Abdalian

CLIFTON BENEVENTO

515 Broadway, 6BR

March 5–May 14

Displacement, dismantlement, and mirroring are at the heart of Oakland-based Zarouhie Abdalian's first solo show in New York, "A Betrayal." Despite a spare, poetic visual vocabulary, Abdalian's site-responsive work reverberates with frustration and anger toward a failing political system and the violence of gentrification.

Close of Winter (all works 2016), a window gate taken apart into four sections that stand as spindly floor-bound sculptures, testifies to the broken nature of "broken windows" policing. The works, with their delicate, organic motifs—a contemporary response to Giacometti's attenuated, existential figures?—call to mind the steel or wrought-iron fences one associates with dangerous urban neighborhoods. In one of the gallery's windows flutters *Interregnum*, a sepia-colored print on mesh fabric that duplicates the view: Images of an old water tower and an ever-rising skyline blur with the real ones just beyond the sill, causing a subtle visual and psychic disjuncture. In *One into two*, plaster busts of the Roman god Janus face each other, eyes wide open. Rather than representing the past and future, these two heads illustrate an ahistorical echo chamber of clear-sighted—and closed-circuit—myopia.

Abdalian deploys sound as a type of psychogeographic material, much in the vein of Susan Philipsz or Susan Hiller. In 2013, she created *Occasional Music*, a sound installation of ringing bells that resonated across Oakland's Frank H. Ogawa Plaza (which was unofficially renamed the Oscar Grant Plaza by local Occupy protestors to memorialize Grant's death at the hands of police officers in 2009). Here, the quiet of the space is punctured by *Openings*, a mortise lock embedded in the wall that clicks at irregular intervals. While not as politically specific as the Oakland work, this insertion of an interior fitting more often seen in sleek condos casts a mood of uncertainty over the gallery—one of the few midcentury art loft spaces still located on SoHo's Broadway shopping corridor.



Zarouhie Abdalian, *Interregnum*, 2016, printed mesh fabric, 93 x 44".