

Contemporary  
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## Karen Lee Williams at Monte Vista Projects

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Text by Anna Garner



Karen Lee Williams, *Portuguese Bend* (installation view) (2017). Image courtesy of Monte Vista Projects.

With fault lines and landslide prone regions, Southern California's unstable grounds are palpable even when camouflaged by sublime landscape or manicured development. Portuguese Bend—an upscale coastal community near Palos Verdes—epitomizes this dissonance between calm surface and uncertain substructure. Though the region boasts luxury homes and pristine coastlines, it has an extensive record of landslides, ground failure, and coastal erosion. In her exhibition, *Portuguese Bend* at Monte Vista Projects, Karen Lee Williams references the tension of this site, addressing the complications of overlooking latent risk.

Delicate forms utilizing cotton rope, wood, concrete, muslin, and silk evoke a gossamer presence that emphasizes the flimsy facade of placid surface. In *Offshore Flow* (all works 2017), a woven rope, similar to a tennis net, hangs listlessly, falling to the floor and unravelling at the ends; on the wall behind, graphite marks describe shadowy forms reminiscent of tire skids, or ghostly apparitions, indicating the charged danger of shifting roads and supernatural myths that shroud the location. *Abalone Cove* includes two cylindrical cores exposing varied layers of rock and sediment. Through foregrounding local lore of material and immaterial risk alongside *Abalone Cove*'s exposed geology, Lee Williams creates a multifaceted read that underscores the subconscious anxieties of disaster.

The overlooking of geologic data by early developers of Portuguese Bend is echoed throughout the exhibition, intersecting deliberate and accidental forms of concealment, such as concrete and marine layer, that subdue the lurking uncontrolled nature. While remaining specific to Portuguese Bend and the experience of living in earthquake ridden California, the work also points to social and political anxieties; realms that carry similar substructures of ignored realities and instability.

Karen Lee Williams: *Portuguese Bend* runs August 5-27, 2017 at Monte Vista Projects (1206 Maple Avenue, #523, Los Angeles, CA 90015).



Karen Lee Williams, *Abalone Cove* (2017). Image courtesy of Monte Vista Projects.



Karen Lee Williams, *Off Shore Flow* (2017). Image courtesy of Monte Vista Projects.



Karen Lee Williams, *Portuguese Bend* (2017). Image courtesy of Monte Vista Projects.





Karen Lee Williams, *Wayfarers God Only Knows* (2017). Image courtesy of Monte Vista Projects.



Karen Lee Williams, *Lucky Bird*(2017). Image courtesy of Monte Vista Projects.