

Comb-like. This is the word Trisha Donnelly uses to describe (to divine?) the process through which sound (a Russian Men's Chorus) becomes sculpture. It appears in the typewritten text "The Vortex Notes," 2002, a guide of sorts related to her edifying 2003 demonstration *The Vortex: TAKE THE HIGHEST MALE VOICE. LISTEN AND TRACK IT THROUGHOUT THE RECORDING. THE SOUND CAN COMPRESS LIKE A PHOTOGRAPH. WHILE LISTENING, FLATTEN IT INTO AN OBJECT. IT'S A COMB-LIKE STRUCTURE.* Attempting, successfully, to evoke an experience of synesthesia via a visual eddy in the mind's eye, the short text collapses easy distinctions among media, producers, and audiences—a gambit central to Donnelly's practice. In this exhibition, there were four stone monoliths on view: One had a small, carved biomorphic relief; the others featured jagged, toothed, or feathered *comb-like* forms.

Cut by hand and with a rotary blade, the works were extracted from blocks of quartzite, travertine, Black Portoro limestone, and Rose of Portugal marble, and were installed with enough distance between them that navigating to, from, and around these firm figurants, some on wooden blocks, impelled a contemplative stroll. Donnelly dimmed the fluorescent lights of the galleries with gray gels and altered the architecture to create a series of parallel entrances. The looped, icy sounds of a mechanical jingle-jangle (bringing to mind the blade) emanated from above. The stage was set, and yet the performance seemed to be over—but time is never linear in Donnelly's art.

Yet despite—or perhaps because of—this disordered temporality, the show elicited a distinct feeling of anticipation, an undercurrent one senses in her exhibitions, which functioned here like a distorted telegram from her previous output. The comb-like indentations made the works seem at once old and new, perhaps of a different world and waiting to go back to it. A black-and-white photograph of a wave appeared as a cipher, pointing to epic, geologic processes that also conjure a slow sense of expectancy: the sedimentation of limestone, limestone's metamorphism into marble, sandstone's metamorphism into quartzite, and water's erosion of stone. The image appeared as an analogue to "The Vortex Notes," here linking water and waves to metamorphic rock as the text connects sound waves to comb-like structures.

The most peculiar work stood near the entrance of the gallery, before the reception area. Facing the doors was a meticulous reproduction of a vintage wooden desk, a hub for information left vacant, transformed into an empty vessel. Absences were important: The emptiness of the desk echoed the show's lack, at the artist's request, of a press release; moreover, all of the works except for this one, *The Secretary*, 2010, are untitled. It is fitting that the art world's desire for publicity, for facts and details, should be met with this, a new kind of control center, which also seemed a rejection, and a refusal of sorts. Donnelly's *no*, however, is an undoubtedly important *no*: an art "against meaning," to apply an idea from a remarkable recent talk by David Joselit, of a kind "whose nature is dynamic—whose form literally changes state either through material transformation, temporal reenactment, or spatial dislocation." Such dynamism, in Donnelly's art, is often left in suspension, with a plethora of thoughts and ideas (hers and ours) fading in and out of focus. It seemed necessary to put some of these fragments into words as I passed the desk, its empty top inducing one last moment of expectancy, on the way out.



Trisha Donnelly,
Untitled, 2010.
travertine. 61 7/8 x
32 x 7 7/8".