

# ALTMAN SIEGEL

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**Zarouhie Abdalian**

*We can decide*

March 11 – May 1, 2021

Altman Siegel presents *We can decide*, a solo exhibition of new works by Zarouhie Abdalian. The exhibition centers around a sound installation, *threnody for the unwilling martyrs*, which sees Abdalian return to the use of bells as a basis for sound sculpture.

Throughout *We can decide*, a state of suspension pervades the space of the gallery and *threnody for the unwilling martyrs* is its emblem. Set just slightly in motion, five brass signaling bells sound out their indeterminate status, both and alternately signifying and hailing, marking and calling, meaning and doing. In recognition of the mass murder Abdalian asks us to lay at the feet of the U.S. government, it may be read as a memorial and an incitation.

Elsewhere in the gallery, two large sculptures impose themselves as nameless witnessing objects to the present conjuncture. Emptied of its cargo, a 2,500 lbs bulk bag gapes. Nearby, the torso of an internal combustion engine stands as a tribute to social labor and Promethean will.

Suspended from the ceiling, a light sculpture registers time as metronomic count and as a series of indeterminate intervals delimited by brilliant impulses.

On the wall, the anatomy of a firearm reads as a kind of code transmitted in relief.

A poem—the exhibition's namesake—is printed as a takeaway. The text is derived from a 2019 piece titled *Rhymes and Reckonings (for Sverdlovsk and Yekaterinburg)* made with collaborator Joseph Rosenzweig. The body of the text records in irregular couplets the social character of commodity production—that is, the real

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world from which the “readymade” objects of the exhibition are plucked. Abdalian’s interest is not so much in what any given object represents but what of its history can be clarified at the utopian (no place) site of the gallery. History is decided, the poem contends. It can be read as a memorial and an incitation.

Zarouhie Abdalian (b.1982, New Orleans) lives and works in New Orleans, LA. Solo exhibitions include Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA; LAXART, Los Angeles, CA; The Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, OH; and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA. Abdalian has exhibited her work in numerous international contexts including the 5th Ural Industrial Biennial, Ekaterinburg, Russia; Secession, Vienna, Austria; Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; 2017 Whitney Biennial, New York; MOSTYN, Wales; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams; Prospect.3 Biennial, New Orleans; the 8th Berlin Biennale; 9th Shanghai Biennale; CAFAM Biennale, Beijing; and the 12th Istanbul Biennial.

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