circle. One is dark green and headless but with arms and limbs; the second is a tall, yellow, almost phallic form with an arrow-like head marked by two angled red stripes; and the third is a brownish-green figure, whose top narrows as it ascends. Fabric fragments of different colors—blue, white, brown—are scattered on the floor. One hesitates to align such a resolutely contemporary work with art history, but the French title may reference a painting by Cézanne of naked bathers in nature.

Chan, who is also a writer and publisher, draws on influences ranging from outsider art to political theory to inform his approach to contemporary issues (globalization, pornography, violence). He certainly feels the resonance between past and present, using it here as a way to deepen the raw reality of these haunting figures and their penchant for slightly menacing movement. One small room contained 10 small effigies outfitted in muslin. They stood on a simple table, its surface covered with carved designs and words in English, Greek, and Latin. These small sculptures—in direct rejection of technological imagery, both in shape and materials—connect to Chan’s interest in writing. If we are left a bit bemused by what exactly is meant by the words, it is enough to know that they establish a cultural base for current musings on time-honored vexations about human nature—the connection between life and consciousness—and its meaning.

—Jonathan Goodman

SAN ANTONIO
Sabine Senft
Artpace

Sabine Senft’s stone towers stood guard at the entrance to “Borderline Reality.” Entry portals made from massive river rocks gathered along the West Texas border, they represented the checkpoints that Senft encountered as a small child growing up in West Germany, yet they also recalled checkpoints closer to home between the U.S. and Mexico. Senft juxtaposed two cultures in this narrative exhibition, revealing subtle similarities while giving us a chance to engage the past and avoid the haunting possibility of history repeating itself.

Rocks, which act as recorders and keepers of the earth’s memories, contrasting human and natural history, appeared throughout the show. Senft’s memories of family tragedies during the years of the Berlin Wall formed another undercurrent. For instance, the rose-patterned curtain of 1989, hanging on barbed wire, resembles the curtains that hung in her childhood home, but it also references the Iron Curtain, a border that once divided Europe.

“Borderline Reality” also explored the ever-present dichotomy between beauty and suffering. Senft’s story started with the tale of a young German girl clutching at candy tossed from the hands of American soldiers and ended with a woman in Texas collecting border remnants of lost dreams—tires, candy, and pieces of immigrant campsites. A projected image of a beautiful landscape morphed into a river of candy flowing across the floor, a symbol of American gifts and the sweeter life that immigrants hope to find when leaving their homes. Viewers were invited to take a piece of candy to “eat away at the border,” but this treat did not come without a price.

Looking closely, you could see projected images of victims of border violence. Yet natural beauty persists even in places of great suffering—an irony that Senft brought to light in her representation of the Rio Grande, the grandiose natural border of Texas.

Two wall-hung bodies of work subtly played with language. “Drag” are digital images of the large tires used by the border patrol to create smooth dirt surfaces on which to track footprints of people crossing. When caught, those people are dragged back to the border. In “Surges,” sprays of gold leaf and discarded objects that Senft collected at crossing points along the Mexican border are arranged on paper. These cultural fingerprints refer to recent surges of immigration across the globe. According to the U.N. Refugee Agency, 65.3 million people were displaced from their homes in 2015. In 1989, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hungary opened the Iron Curtain to Austria. In September of that year, more
than 13,000 people escaped East Germany in three days. Both surges are represented through Senft’s gestural strokes of paint covered in 23-karat gold leaf, which hearken back stylistically to her years spent in Japan and Brazil and her upbringing in Baroque-inflected Bavaria.

In the large “Surge” installation Your View Here, raw canvas splits down the middle, held up by a large branch of crepe myrtle. The man-made fabric and the natural branch work in unison to provide a symbolic and historical perspective on the Iron Curtain. The golden circle painted on the canvas stands for the globe, unity, and the female—the maternal line of Senft’s family was completely cut off by the Wall. Visitors were encouraged to pull back this curtain, revealing the text: “Ihr Ausblick/Your view here.” Here, “Borderline Reality” became personal. Ausblick not only means “view” in German, but also the “prospect of” or the “chance of.” We have a chance to learn from history and not repeat the same disastrous divisions of cultures.

—Susan Oliver Heard

**Rutland, Vermont**

“Revival: Stone and Steel”
Castleton Downtown Gallery

The artists featured in “Revival: Stone and Steel” bring new life to their chosen materials in unique figurative, botanical, mechanical, and conceptual ways. Selected by curator Oliver Schemm for their versatile skills and hands-on manipulation of media, they all come from the Rutland and Barre regions of Vermont, where quarrying, carving, and forging are part of the local language.

Sabrina Radlak’s Burdock, an intricate sculpture incorporating steel and gold leaf, consists of 108 forged steel tapers with curlicue tips emanating from a golden core. The marks of the hand, hammering on what was once molten metal, are as sensitive as the strokes of a drawing. Wisteria features pods of sheet metal, with welded edges suspended on hand-forged stems. The voluptuous forms, inflated with air, dangle provocatively in space and entice with their magical essence.

Paul Marr Hilliard’s sense of curiosity lends itself to imaginative sculptures that often combine marble and steel. Wanderer, simultaneously graceful and awkward, stands on six legs of forged steel with marble feet, the head capped by smooth marble. Introspection, a carved gray marble bust, carries an enormous round weight on its head, gazing out with a piercing expression as if “living the question,” in Rilke’s words. Bird Hammer humorously combines unlikely ideas, bringing to mind a prehistoric carving. Rough surfaces contrast with smooth ones, and the open beak of the bird resembles the claws of the hammer.

The hearts in Heather Ritchie’s stone sculptures express various emotional states. A marble Torso with Sacred Heart exposes a flaming heart surrounded by a ring of thorns. Vulnerable yet strong, the heart seems to speak of the cost of love, open sharing, and no-holds-barred surrender. Other small sculptures, integrated with book or fiber components, continue Ritchie’s ongoing exploration of hearts and bodies.

Don Ramey, who also works in a figurative vein, is a skilled carver of marble and limestone. Some of his figures are highly finished, while others have textured surfaces. The small-scale, bronze “Zoë” series, explores the same figure in different poses. In each of these works, Ramey deconstructs the modeled body while it is still in the wax state and then reconstructs the pieces before the final casting. The openings in the elegantly pieced-together bodies expose their hollow interiors, which are covered in gold paint to give an inner glow. Adam/Eve I—First Breath is an absolute tour de force, showing the figures at their moment of animation. The openwork bodies feel electrified, with a tension right down to their fingertips, frozen at the moment of emergence. We seem to be witnessing the complicated genesis of the human condition right before our eyes.

Working in highly individualized veins, each of the “Revival” artists is a master of his or her chosen craft, but the force of their combined sculptures transcended expertise. Their statements go beyond traditional materials and force us to ask questions of deep relevance to our contemporary lives.

—B. Amore