LIA HALLORAN doesn't expect her viewers to return to eighth-grade science class. Nor does she believe the exact nature of creating her hypnotic blue ink drawings should be known. In fact, it's unknown even to her. There's a tantalizing energy coursing through Halloran's solo show, Sublimation / Transmutation, with gallery Martha Otero in Los Angeles: one where the viewer could beg for answers but, instead, enjoys their own yearning curiosity. This exhibition is replete with questions of scientific discovery and how artists may humanize that methodical, icy pursuit.

Half-abstract, half-figurative bursts of imperial blue are hung throughout the space. Finely visible hands, flowing hair, and body contours mesh into spiky patches of crystal. Surrounded by large chips of negative space, the figures float on a shimmering surface: a specialized grade of calming film covered with Mylar. Within the figures themselves, fine fractures, blots, and lines create a secondary alien landscape. The bodies are all female, with even their shoes, handbags, and some clothing clearly recognizable. The crystal mounds are within them, a part of them: their dynamism is completely symbiotic. Separately, a series of seashore sabotes are also rendered in ink, with titles such as Opium, Barle and Ectoplasm. Laid out in the glass with which seashells are familiar, the periodic table of elements is transformed into a living gallery. The tiny drawings bloom with the figures of little men and women bustled in and emerging from rock. Fine details of fingers, boots, hats, and faces in profile are never compromised, but made in response to the parent image: the seashell element.

In speaking at length about her practice, Halloran describes the process of creating her ink drawings as something resonant and held within. Carefully adding and subtracting water to her deep indigo pigments, the customized mix, allows the ink to slightly bleed into the spaces of delicate film and where it meets, red defy especially Halloran's, knows. The dying times are all variably and a sole smudge or run would invalidate an entire day or week of work. None of this kind is "half-assembling" occurring more to the surface on which it sits versus the command of the artist's hand. This would be a complex task with synaptic forms or abstract forms on their own. Halloran, however, flatly rejects the simple model. She incorporates the shifts and movements of live female models in the larger drawings, who disappear and reappear from the crystalline formations. If the ink travels across the surface in an unpredictable manner, she has no choice but to negotiate with the medium and adjust to its behavior. Each drawing exudes vitality in the thin, tangled paths of white space within floating fields of intense blue.

Paradoxically the ink isn't just a literary play for Halloran, she contents that it genuinely possesses a distinct personality and performative nature. Performance is a significant term within the work: the models and the medium from which they issue actively experience a domain, potential energy that bursts into kinetic movement. Like the natural earths that fuel human energies in the world at large, Halloran's "vivid" elements reflect an exuberant, intimate relationship between persons and environment.

The physical properties of pigments and a wealth of quality in-mass making are notable strengths of this exhibition. Halloran is well informed of the deep contrasts and impressions that are possible with ink alone, a trait often neglected to the act of waving the paper before the mark is even delivered. The movements of the ink seemingly have no origin and are instantaneous within the figures of the rocks, but have clear demarcations within the human subjects. Imposing the surface to create texture is, more often than not, exclusive to the specific area of woodcutting, lithography, drypoint, and etchings. That Halloran incorporates the fundamental principles of high-contrast crafts with works apparently generated via sharper tools or the grooves of a lithography printing press. There is no more dating of the reality: although any visible marks on the human subjects suggest modernity. More indicative of the contemporary sphere of production is the active dialogue between organic and inorganic materials. Humans do not control nature nor are they slaves to it. Just as seemingly featureless objects yield invisible power which have only begun to be understood, and are still seldom respected. In a breathless, speculative sense, gallerist Martha Otero displays her own conceptual prowess in granting Halloran room for her works to move and move together well.

The daughter of a scientist, Lila Halloran was born in Chicago in 1977 and has maintained immense interest in both arts and sciences throughout her life. She earned her BFA from the University of California and her MFA in painting and printmaking from Yale. She became widely known for her Dark Skate photographic series, 2006/07, where she strapped a light to a wrist or her head, skateboarding through darkened city and rural parks throughout Los Angeles. Lengthened exposure times created haunting images of light trails slicing through nocturnal spaces. Her previous project, The City Way Out Is The Ocean (2005-10), connects with the geologic mystery of Sublimation / Transmutation, where she recreated the extreme environments of the Cuernos Del Dientes mine in Naica, Mexico. Halloran is a lecturer in the art department at Chapman University in Orange, California. Halloran is a great to her audience in retaining a childlike enthusiasm for discovery in art and science, her work never seeming too pretentious or overly intellectual to the point of animation. Artists have pitting animals in the same fashion as practitioners of the physical and technical sciences, but explore their hypotheses through emotive channels versus unkillable, sequential logic. A respect for classical geology is a certainty for Halloran, but venturing into the creative realm appears to hold greater sway. The marriage of rocks and gases will hardly be inoculated to gallerists: it is Halloran's abundant painted forms that retain her unique brand of intelligent spectacle. Could this be the making of a female da Vinci? Artist and scientist merge with equal passion.