



Laurie Walker's Prometheus chained to a rock is one of a quartet of powerful drawings.

## Art Reviews

### Mythic message

Laurie Walker reinvents Prometheus

By David Jager

**LAURIE WALKER** at Susan Hobbs Gallery  
(137 Tecumseth), to January 21.

Though Montreal artist Laurie Walker focused primarily on sculpture, Susan Hobbs is showing four large-scale drawings she completed just before her death last year.

Entitled Prometheus Rebound, the exhibition displays the signature elements that helped forge Walker's reputation: exhaustive research, and a complex involvement with the symbolic and theoretical underpinnings of her process and her chosen subject.

In these graphite drawings on paper, tinged lightly with washes of colour, she reimagines the myth of Prometheus, imbuing it with a contemporary preoccupation with the environment.

Walker's take draws on several tellings of the story. The playwright Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound treats the demigod as a tragic hero punished by Zeus for stealing fire and giving it to humanity. In the poet Shelley's version, Prometheus Unbound, Zeus is overthrown and Prometheus frees himself along with humanity.

Here, however, he's Rebound and finds himself chained to a glacial wall instead of a rock. Fire has given rise to the oil industry, and the father of industrialization is confronted with the consequences of his crime in the spectre of global warming. A tiny oil rig on the horizon of the second drawing bears out this allusion.

There are art historical references as well. The third drawing recalls Barnett Newman's early painting Prometheus Bound, in which an inky sea of black presses down on a single frothing line of white. In Walker's version, an immense wall of ice presses down on a inky black line, a cheeky echo of Newman's painting.

The fourth drawing is an aerial view of the Torngat mountains in Labrador, Walker's supremely disciplined rendering illustrating her love of naturalism. The symbolism is once again cryptic and open-ended: a magic lamp, an allusion to letting the genie out of the bottle, releases the roiling clouds that cover the range.

With her curious blend of romantic landscape, mythological symbolism and a nod to abstract expressionism, Walker's last drawings are a window into an eclectic and unique art practice that compressed weighty conundrums into elegant images.

NOW Magazine January 12-18, 2012