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What Lies Between

“Drift” explores the middle ground with simplicity and strength.

by Andy Kozlowski

With all the madness of art fairs and their sheer overwhelming volume, it's nice to go to a gallery and see a really subdued show. Weighing in with only five pieces, 1708 Gallery gives us a very sparse but very beautiful exhibition in “Drift,” which features the work of Ledelle Moe and Greg Streak, two artists from Durban, South Africa. Moe, who now lives and works in the United States — and is a Virginia Commonwealth University graduate — presents two large sculptures that shrink the usually vast architecture of 1708. The viewer is pushed against the walls upon entering the space by a large egg-shaped form crafted from steel and concrete. Its imposing size and position keep viewers from getting a full sense of the piece; instead they see only details. Behind it, taking up almost half the gallery, is the monumental “Memorial, Collapse,” a large, undulating mass of earthy concrete. The surface of both pieces is roughly treated, creating a dissonance between the texture of their exterior and the overall smoothness of their form. The real payoff comes when one approaches the back of the gallery. Rounding the corner of “Memorial, Collapse,” we see that what appears to be a solid mass is no more than a woven blanket of steel mesh and concrete, bolted together and held up by spindly-looking supports. The beauty of Moe's work is how she employs concrete and steel to give us a sense of permanence and density, but then unravels it by exposing the frailty and hollowness of the forms she's created. Projected onto the back wall of the gallery, Streak's videos offer a great visual foil to Moe's sculptures. A subtle nod to painting, each video is a meditation on one of the primary colors. In “Leaving” (blue) and “Jaundiced” (yellow), the artist presents visual spaces that seem unreal or confused. By using the reflection of a puddle (as in “Leaving”) or a nondescript watery bath (“Jaundiced”), we're drawn into a world between abstraction and reality. “Dreams in Red” is the most striking of the three works. The frame is cropped in close on a man's face as he sleeps. His breathing is barely audible. Then, in an almost imperceptible flinch, it stops, and a viscous red liquid begins to run from underneath him, blood from an unseen wound. As the red liquid spills across the frame, one cannot help but marvel at its dense crimson hue, nullifying the violence of the scene. Then without warning, the puddle retreats, as if the figure is inhaling it back in, every last drop reabsorbed, leaving no trace behind. It's not surprising that Moe's massive sculptures and Streak's understated videos function so well together. Visually, both artists are speaking different languages, but conceptually, they come from the same place. The works in “Drift” are about in-betweens, about subtlety and misinformation. They draw power from their simplicity by presenting a set of contradictions, allowing viewers to drift between the rational and the irrational. **S** “Drift,” sculpture by Ledelle Moe and video work by Greg Streak, runs through Feb. 24. 1708 Gallery, 319 W. Broad St. 643-1708.