





LEDELLE MOE
WHEN

MASS MoCA





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FOREWORD

While lovely indeed, this catalogue of Ledelle Moe's exhibition *When* illustrates the inevitable distance between a photograph of sculpture and the thing itself. This perceptual gap is especially poignant in the case of this powerful ensemble of works. For one thing, although the exhibition is comprised of individual sculptures, the feeling of being amidst this convocation of shapes is encompassing, cyclical, and almost operatic—vastly more complex than a series of discrete encounters.

As one moves through the show, the work (and the space around it) gathers light. Giant fallen heads give way to truncated and twisted bodies, shrink, then rise, and finally—with a kind of Brownian motion—explode across the far wall of the gallery, some two hundred and fifty feet distant from our original point of entry. At first glimpse, that far wall has the look of a delicate drawing. As one makes the long processional through the room, images of lugubrious mortality and a sense of mysterious ceremony give way to a vibrating energy of flight, the abstract wall drawing revealing itself to be a constellation of small heads, each carefully lit so their shadows become feather-like wings. And then the narrative replays, in reverse, as one surveys the carcass-strewn landscape from the floor above.

Here, on the second-floor mezzanine, Moe gives us a generous glimpse into her process with a collection of models and studies in foam, plaster, and bronze—miniature versions of the large forms on the main floor. Spread out on a low plinth, these maquettes are joined by found objects that served as visual references for Moe's work, from a sea creature's sand home to chunks of raw iron that look both figurative and geological. The artist also offers us a sort of respite in two dimensions, with a selection of mesmerizing drawings presented under glass in large sarcophagus-like vitrines. As with the drawings of Henry Moore, one can feel the generative quality of Moe's

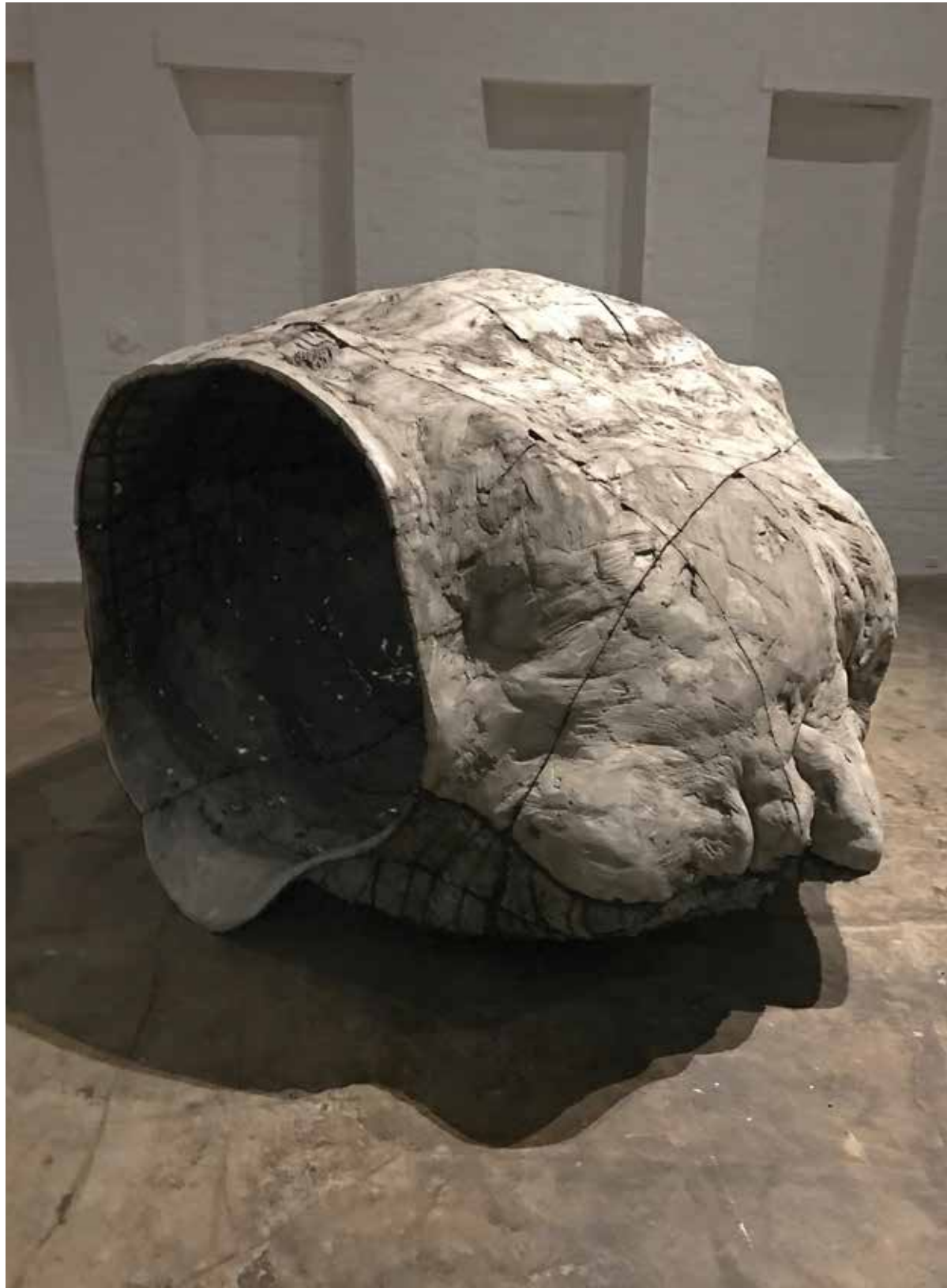
sculptural thought within these delicate line drawings, the swirling point of a fine pen first describing a circle, then a sphere, then the curve of a woman's back. There is something thrilling about seeing visual thought in formation, and then to see it manifested physically at such a vast scale before our eyes.

We hope this book captures that excitement. I join my colleagues and the MASS MoCA Board of Trustees in thanking Ledelle Moe, and our Senior Curator Susan Cross, for bringing this extraordinary visceral and profoundly moving experience to us in North Adams.

We also thank our sponsors, Xtina Parks and James R. Parks, and ROAM: A Xtina Parks Gallery; they bring so much to our region and now have helped make Ledelle Moe part of our community. We are also grateful to the Henry Moore Foundation for supporting Moe's work and the museum. And we are thankful for the steadfast support of the Barr Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, and Mass Cultural Council. We would also like to express our gratitude to Stellenbosch University for its support of this publication, and to all of those who have made it possible, especially Siemon Allen of Flatinternational and authors Virginia MacKenny and Lize van Robbroeck. This exhibition will surely linger in all our minds and, gratefully, will now live on in this book as well.

Joseph Thompson
Director, MASS MoCA





LEDELLE MOE: WHEN Susan Cross

Recalling monuments from various cultures, Ledelle Moe's monolithic heads and figures have an eerily timeless quality. The oversized works bring to mind both relics from an ancient civilization and more contemporary statues torn down during political upheaval, from the colossal basalt heads of the Olmecs to the toppled likenesses of Lenin and Saddam Hussein. Moe's potent sculptures acknowledge the universal desire to mark our presence and to remember others': to create something permanent in the face of life's transience. Yet, unlike traditional monuments that immortalize our heroes and loved ones in enduring granite and bronze, Moe's works have an unstable look and seem to age before our very eyes. What appears to be timeworn stone, on closer examination, reveals itself to be concrete; and the massive forms are, in fact, hollow and pieced together from smaller sections joined with steel seams. Indeed, despite their immense size, these figures seem fragile—like beloved objects broken and glued back together, treasured for the memories they hold. Public monuments can inspire similar nostalgia, functioning as both repositories and producers of collective memories and belief systems. Yet Moe's imperfect figures—fallen, precarious, marked, and scarred with the traces of their making—subvert the usual characteristics of monuments and prompt questions about whom we choose to honor and remember, and how.

Moe has spent two decades thinking about monuments and the role they play in the public imagination. She began her ongoing series *Memorial (Collapse)* in 2005 as a tribute to anonymous victims of violent conflict. Moved by the death of a young man killed in Liberia, along with similar incidents briefly reported in newspapers and online, Moe began giving solid form to the fleeting lives of strangers as a way to acknowledge the weight and gravity of their deaths and the events that caused them. The news photographs of the dead became her models for the large works—which lie on their sides and appear as if they are sleeping, like the subjects of Constantin Brancusi's heads. The artist found the placid expressions in her source images a marked contrast to the brutality and trauma of her subjects' deaths.¹ The three most recent heads in the series—all dated 2019—reference the spate of xenophobic attacks on immigrants who have moved to Moe's home country of South Africa looking for work. These portraits are based on news images as well as people on the periphery



above Ledelle Moe standing amongst the three *Memorial (Collapse)* heads during installation.
left *Memorial (Collapse)*, 2019. Concrete and steel.
previous and next page *Memorial (Collapse)*, 2019. Concrete and steel.



right top Untitled, ca. 2009. Pen on paper.

right bottom *Relief*, detail, 2010. Concrete and steel.

next page *Relief*, 2010. Concrete and steel.

of the artist's daily life. They function as elegies for these individuals while simultaneously acknowledging a long history of nameless victims of violence—millions over millennia—whose stories have gone untold, unremembered. Hollow, the heads function for Moe as vessels, or skins, which hold not only what has been lost but also, in her words, “what connects us”—like the breath between us.²

Differing from the strength articulated in more conventional monuments, which tend to honor victors rather than victims, Moe's works articulate the fragility of her subjects and that of life itself. Fittingly, she has replaced the usual verticality of public statuary, and their elevated pedestals, with predominantly horizontally oriented sculptures that sit—or appear to have fallen—directly on the ground. Her 2010 work *Relief*, an enormous animal, awkwardly sprawls across the floor. Straining on its back, with chest distended and legs splayed, it is an image of struggle, trust, or, as the artist and the title suggest, the relief that can come with submission or acceptance. The writhing figure suggests both a dog and a horse, animals that appear frequently in the artist's drawings, often contorted and baring their soft bellies and groins or morphing into their human companions. The creature depicted in *Relief* can easily be read as a fallen mount, its rider missing. Moe seems to have literally and symbolically upended the ubiquitous equestrian statue that honors generations of triumphant warriors in countless town squares and plazas across Europe and the Americas. The defenseless animal points to the casualties—and the dynamics of dominance—that shore up the narratives of masculine heroism and colonialism that we usually see immortalized in bronze.

These themes, which have preoccupied Moe throughout her career, mirror recent global conversations about the role of civic statuary in perpetuating white supremacy and normalizing systems of inequality. Recent protests in Moe's hometown called for the removal of a monument to Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town and sparked an international movement.³ The former prime minister and British imperialist (for whom Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, was named) has come to represent not only South Africa's colonial past and the subsequent era of apartheid but continuing obstacles to equality and social justice. Similarly, the past several years have witnessed the removal of Confederate statues from public sites in the United States (many of which were erected in the 1910s) as well as passionate—even violent—protests both for and against their continued public display.

In contrast to the historical struggles suggested by Moe's flailing animal, the floating, horizontal figures of her *Transitions/Displacements* series (2012) look serene and peaceful. Reminiscent of effigies removed from their sarcophagi (traditionally reserved for individuals of a certain status), these three women recline, naked, with their arms at their sides. In this







attitude, they resemble bodies lovingly prepared for burial. The artist made these works following the deaths of her mother and grandmother in close succession, but it was not until she was wetting the concrete forms, moving a damp cloth over the surface, that Moe consciously connected the works to her own loss.⁴ The carvings are not likenesses; instead, the artist's subjects have been transformed into anonymous archetypes. Moe likens them to Mother Earth—metaphorically, the very ground beneath our feet, our symbolic home. The female body has long been conflated with landscape, and explored by artists from Louise Bourgeois to Ana Mendieta and Kiki Smith. The scale and exaggerated horizontality of Moe's elongated figures of *Transitions/Displacements* suggest a softly undulating horizon line, the curves of the bodies taking on the appearance of rolling hills and valleys. From a distance, the silhouettes of the recumbent figures recall an interconnected mountain range—the gulfs between them visible only from a closer vantage point. Moe often discusses the confusion of scale in her work in the context of the Karoo, a desert terrain outside of Cape Town where the sprawling distances fool the eye.

The smallest of the trio is oriented in the opposite direction—possibly

a reference to the artist herself being left behind as her loved ones depart. She is partially shrouded by small, suspended bird-like forms creating a kind of shawl that hovers around her shoulders and face. Funerary objects in many cultures picture birds, which are often believed to transport the soul to the afterlife. For Moe, the avian imagery has multiple associations. She cites numerous influences, such as the ancient Tibetan ritual of feeding corpses to vultures (an ecological way of burial), which connects the dead to nature's cycles of life and death. The throng of birds also alludes to the uncanny power of groups, from the murmuration of starlings to shoals of fish that can mysteriously move together like a single organism.

In nearly all of her works, Moe draws on the relationship between the individual and the collective, between mass and matter both in the scientific and spiritual sense. Her most recent sculpture, an eighteen-foot high kneeling figure, is surrounded by clusters of small organic forms, not unlike the abstracted bird shapes of *Transitions/Displacements*. Here, they suggest amoebas, mussels, jellyfish, petals, and more. It is unclear if they are emanating from the figure or drawn in by her. Though these forms appear to float and vibrate, a roughly welded grid of thin metal rods supports them. This geometric lattice allows only partial access to the immense, hauntingly familiar figure. While Moe describes the work as androgynous, the image of a kneeling woman is seen across world cultures, from the Aztecs in Mesoamerica to the Yoruba in West Africa and to the Christian church, where the Virgin Mary is often pictured in this pose.⁵ Indeed, the delicate metal grille that flanks Moe's sculpture was partially influenced by a visit Moe made to a Methodist church in Cape Town. The gate-like structure brings to mind a rood screen, a partially open tracery that traditionally separates the nave of a church from the chancel. This sacred space contains the altar and crucifix ("rood" meaning cross in Old English). While the Virgin Mary usually plays a secondary role at the altar, sometimes flanking the cross, Moe has put her front and center, foregrounding this symbol of life, love, grief, and resilience. Whereas the figure's gesture conjures that of prayer or devotion, Moe also sees the pose as "an act of waiting . . . a moment before or after action."⁶ The title of this piece, *Remain*, brings to mind those who remain—the people left behind—and the life that continues on, generation after generation. The cell-like organisms swarming around the figure articulate this generative cycle while referring to the microscopic building blocks that make up all living things, all matter.

On the back wall of MASS MoCA's large gallery, an expansive relief titled *Congregation* (2005–19)⁷ mirrors the accumulation of small forms circling *Remain*, and similarly implies the interrelatedness of the individual and the collective. The expansive relief is composed of hundreds of small portraits, each just a few inches high. This accretion of detailed faces

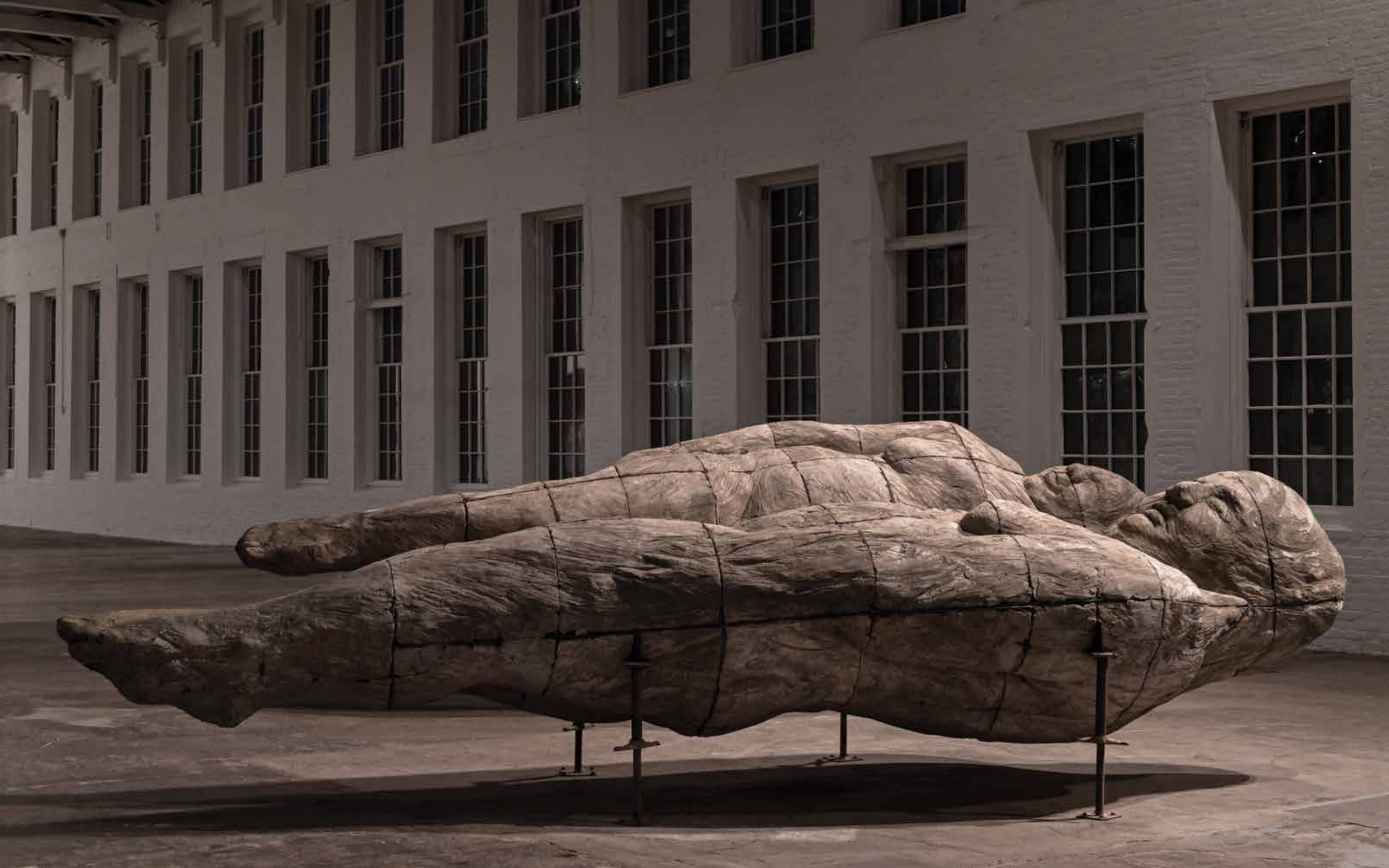
left Ledelle Moe standing with *Transitions/Displacements*, detail, 2012. Concrete and steel.

below Preliminary sketch for *Remain*, 2019. Dry point on paper.

bottom *Remain*, 2019. Concrete and steel.

next page *Transitions/Displacements*, 2012. Concrete and steel.







above *Congregation*, detail, 2019. Concrete, steel, and gold leaf. Collection of Xtina and James R. Parks.

right *Lament (Foghorn)*, still, 2019. Video with sound.

next page *Transitions/Displacements*, 2012. Concrete and steel.

pages 28–29 *Congregation*, 2005–19. Concrete and steel. Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, gift of Jorge M. and Darlene Pérez.

represents people Moe has encountered on her travels around the world and those lodged in her memory and imagination. Reminiscent of the flocks and swarms she has referenced elsewhere, the amorphous mass of heads also resembles a map without borders, suggesting the migration of both animals and people, including her own family, her paternal grandmother having made her way to South Africa from the Shetland Isles via Egypt during World War II. The work powerfully visualizes that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves, connected to each other, to our ancestors, to the land, and to cycles of time.

When adding to the collection of heads, Moe mixes soil from the location where she is working into the concrete, making links between distant people and places. The artist’s incorporation of dirt into her work acknowledges the significance of particular sites and the histories embedded there, while connecting us to the land that we share. Moe’s use of earth extends beyond its role as material in her work to its function as a mold. She digs small holes in the ground into which she pours the concrete mixture from which she carves her small heads. The figures and organic shapes that make up *Findings*, a wall installation in the upstairs gallery, are created with the same method of pouring concrete into hollows in the ground. When the material is mostly dry but still soft, the artist removes the form and carves into it. The title *Findings* suggests that the work was already there to be discovered. Moe’s use of soil is a reminder that we are all of—and will return to—the earth. Death haunts the entire exhibition, and fittingly, its title alludes to an inevitability—that we will at some point face death, despite our efforts to deny it. It is not a matter of if, but when.

Moe references classical funerary sculptures and Victorian-era cemetery monuments with the three works in her *Erosion* series (2009). The trio of female figures acts as a coda to the exhibition, installed in its own gallery at the far end of the space. Clothed in flowing, pleated gowns, they nonetheless appear stiff, as if knocked over from a once-upright position. They have the air of ruins, their title a reference to the decay of both built structures and memory. They suggest that the monuments we create to the dead might also have a limited life. The only clothed sculptures in the exhibition, these figures reflect the fashion and mores of a particular moment, reminding us that values—and thus how we understand history—can change.⁸ As an image of erosion, and even destruction, they are an admonition that work is required in remembering and tending our history, passing it on for the next generation to steward or to reassess. Like the memorials that help us process our grief and its vicissitudes, monuments might best be understood as vehicles through which we may engage history and its changing narratives rather than as a way to entomb them.

The conflicting forces that play out in Moe’s work—permanence and impermanence, strength and vulnerability, the individual and the

collective—are reflected and reinforced in her signature medium. The artist’s choice of concrete is as symbolic as it is practical. Mostly made of sand, rock, and water, it might last a century or deteriorate more quickly, especially as Moe uses it—as a thin skin—breaking down into its original elements, returning to the earth, as it were. Installed on MASS MoCA’s concrete floor, the sculptures that make up *When* appear fittingly unified in the mottled gray surface that stretches to the back of the gallery space, like an ocean reaching toward the horizon. A foghorn can indeed be heard in the distance. The sound belongs to a video titled *Lament (Foghorn)*. Shot during one of the artist’s many kayaking trips off the South African coast, the work captures the smooth but giant gray swells of the Atlantic. The mournful tone serves as a guidepost, much as monuments try to do, leading us through a vast expanse of time and space.

1. Paula Crawford, *Ledelle Moe: Memorial (Collapse)*, exh. cat. (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Fine Arts Gallery, 2006).
2. The artist in conversation with the author; November 8, 2019.
3. The Rhodes Must Fall Movement (#RhodesMustFall) is a protest movement that originated at the University of Cape Town in South Africa in March 2015. Calls to remove a statue of the British imperialist Cecil Rhodes gained global attention and grew into a broader campaign for decolonization at universities around the world.
4. The artist in conversation with the author; November 8, 2019.
5. Moe also mentioned as influences the Marina Warner book *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, the imagery of Sharon Olds’s poems, and figures depicted in the reliefs of Ephesus.
6. The artist in correspondence with the author; December 4, 2018.
7. For the exhibition at MASS MoCA, Moe added additional concrete heads to this work from the collection of PAMM, thus the date has been altered from 2005–15 to include the recent addition for this particular iteration.
8. Alois Riegl’s 1903 article “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin” is a classic text introducing the problems of monuments and changing values.









THE SPOILS OF HISTORY

Virginia MacKenny



above and previous page *Remain*, 2019. Concrete and steel.
top and bottom right Details of *Remain*, 2019. Concrete and steel.

Huge heads—fragments of giant fallen figures, lumpen and inert—lie scattered across the open gallery floor. Seemingly salvaged from some larger context, these territorial spoils of some forgotten war, victims of some iconoclastic dispute or merely the remnants of history, of some other place and time, are the constructions of sculptor Ledelle Moe.

Homi K. Bhabha notes in *The Location of Culture* (1994) that there is a need for an art that deals with history in a way “that does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent” but also “renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.” This “past-present,” Bhabha asserts, “becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living.”¹ In Moe’s work, the “past-present” is evident in her engagement with monument-making and its concomitant dismemberment. Raised in the hope of enduring, such markers of belief rarely survive the vagaries of history intact, and it is the broken and the dismembered that interests Moe. She examines the constructs of power as embodied in fragments of monuments that might be religious or political icons. Permanence is only present in the constant cycle of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Similarly, the iconoclastic impulse reveals its dependence on the iconophile.² As an artist interested in the fragment, Moe is also invested in the whole; as image maker, she is also an image breaker.

This slippage of one thing into its apparent opposite is evident throughout the artist’s work. Concrete as material is mundane. It lacks the value of traditional sculptural materials like bronze or stone, yet historically it is the stuff of Roman monumentalism, and its ability to be writ large embodies a valorizing power. The large, heavy forms appear to exemplify permanence and durability, yet their surfaces are abraded, their edges crumbling. Canopies of concrete billowing in frozen form unfurl into a rolling terrain whose topography coalesces into recognizable body or facial features. The concrete is like skin, prone to wrinkling, sagging—a certain softening. Malleable when wet, once it sets hard it maintains the indiscriminate mark and the tension of the moment of its making. While the bulky forms are awkward, up close they reveal a myriad of distinct characteristics, of surface nuance. Such nuance promotes a sense of intimacy, a curious tenderness towards the fallen forms, poignancy even. It calls us to reach out and touch, yet this invitation, if acted upon, produces





left: *Remain*, detail, 2019. Concrete and steel.

the reverse of what is expected—the felt surface is found to be rough, its softness an illusion. Relying on sight, we are led astray; the affront to our senses distances us.

The dance between intimacy and detachment continues throughout Moe's work. The small heads gathered in *Congregation* are so convincing in their evocation of features that they recall the casts of the inhabitants of Pompei who, overcome by volcanic ash, were each wrapped in a shell of dust and sealed in at the moment of death. Elegiac in tone, they are, however, less than life-size, many small enough to be held in cupped hands. With definition suggested rather than stated, these heads are like timeworn archaeological artifacts or rocks organically shaped by water or eroded by windblown sand.

Dislocation, displacement, and a sense of loss pervade. As viewers, our focus vacillates. In the larger pieces, we waver between recognizing either the figures described or acknowledging the method of their production. The patchwork construction reveals evidence of its constituent materials. Chicken wire, round bar, and concrete dismantle our belief in the forms even as they construct them. The armature that reinforces volume reveals the void behind it. Revelation exposes artifice. These are hollow men, "paralysed force, gesture without motion."³ Despite the confidence of their scale and the conviction of their presence, the assertive masculinity that informs them is undermined. Brought down, these toppled figures lie prone and exposed. Lacking in substance, they reveal only a shell between outside and inside.

It is through this sheath that Moe both trespasses into the territory of the large public statement and invites us into the private spaces of the body. In her earlier photographs, she brought us up close to animal skin and genital areas, unabashedly leading us into intimate bodily folds and wrinkles, whether puckered armpit or inner groin crease. In her sculptures, she draws us beneath the surface, underground, into the caverns and caves of a subconscious terrain akin to Louise Bourgeois's constructions of hollow, organic interior spaces. In her "Lairs" and *The Destruction of the Father* (1974), Bourgeois is interested in "unmasking the facades . . . of grandeur and power, the monolithic and the megalomaniacal, emphasising instead fragility."⁴ She "operates in a matriaxial field, where the feminine is asserted instead of fading away in front of the Other."⁵ Similarly, Moe penetrates the forms of phallic power, metamorphosing them into containing spaces. As Rosi Huhn notes, in metamorphosis, "the subject encounters the Other, it changes its nature as much as it changes the nature of the Other . . . each one adopts aspects alien to it."⁶ Moe's sculptures are memorials emptied of their traditional significance, their vacated interiors making way for new meaning.

In *Remain*, we see a figure not weakened to the point of collapse but one in the quiet repose of genuflection. To genuflect, to drop to one or



above Untitled, detail, ca. 2009.

Pen on paper:

right Untitled, detail, ca. 2019.

Pen on paper:

pages 38–45 *Erosion*, 2009.

Concrete and steel. Sketches for

Erosion. Pen on paper.

both knees, signals respect or reverence. The Latin *genuflectio* originally meant to bend both knees. The word “knee” in French (*genou*) comes from the same root as gene, generate, and engender.⁷ Here is a place of heritage and growth. Historically, to be on one’s knees, to drop to the ground, is a sign of humility. Humility—etymologically connected to humus, ground—is also the root of the word “human.” This connecting relationship from human to earth, rooted in the humble, is a reminder of that which needs revivifying. Our centuries-long striving for mastery over the planet has made us “manunkind,”⁸ as e. e. cummings put it, and decidedly care/less. Mastery, a gendered term of power, is “power over” or power from above. Manifest in all the great patriarchal religions of the world, where ultimate power is transcendent, it is in contradistinction to the immanence of matriarchal faith, which brings us back to earth.

Manifest across the globe, ancient images of women kneeling include Chalchiuhtlicue, the Aztec goddess of water who invokes fertility, Mesoamerican figure traditions of the kneeling figure or, in the African context, the medieval terra-cotta kneeling figures of Mali or bronze Yoruba sculptures. All invoke and acknowledge the generative relationship we have with our planet.

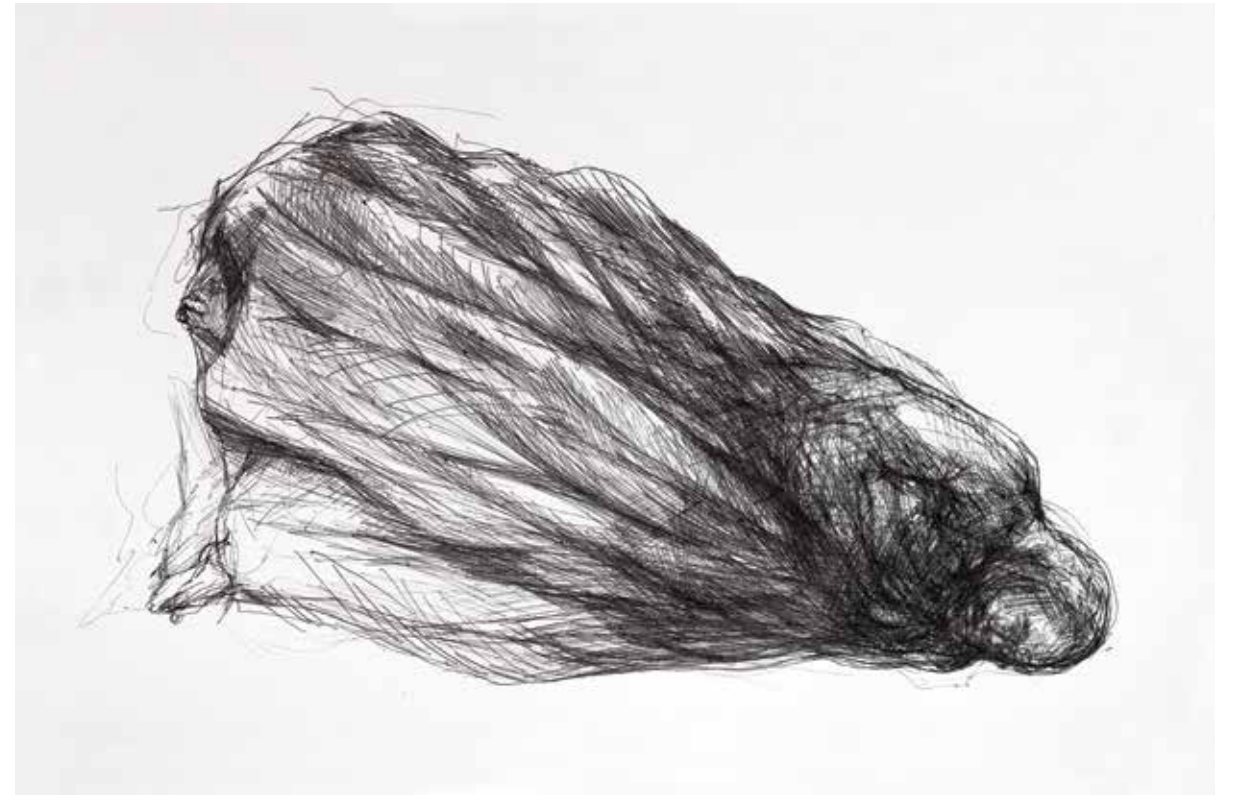
Patched, beaten, and abraded in Moe’s incarnation, this figure of regeneration nevertheless rises above us. Riven by a grid of fissures, yet pieced together in an undulating framework of panels, this earth goddess that connects is surrounded by clusters of small organic forms that echo flowers, birds, fish, mollusks, or vulvas. On bended knee, in supplication, in obeisance, in reverence—waiting.

1. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.
2. See Dario Gamboni, “Image to Destroy, Indestructible Image,” in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM Centre for Art and Media; and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 88–135.
3. T. S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men,” in *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 89.
4. Rosi Huhn, “Louise Bourgeois: Deconstructing the Phallus with the Exile of the Self,” in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 136.
5. Huhn, “Louise Bourgeois,” 141.
6. In metamorphosis, *metra*, like matrix, etymologically refers to the uterus. See Huhn, “Louise Bourgeois,” 141.
7. Annick de Souzaenelle, “Malkhut II: The Knees,” chap. 8 in *The Body and Its Symbolism: A Kabbalistic Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2015).
8. e. e. cummings, “pity this busy monster; manunkind,” in *l x l* (New York: Henry Holt, 1944).















A MEDITATION ON MATTER AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Lize van Robbroeck

Ledelle Moe's astounding installation *When* provides rich substance for a New Materialist reading. In their massive, concrete materiality, her sculptures are a meditation on the complex interweave of matter and consciousness, of permanence and change. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "vital materialism," according to which vitality is immanent in all matter, and indeed coextensive with it, provides a means of decrypting the powerful affects of her work.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett proposes that the agency of matter works in and through us, that it is both physical and metaphysical.¹ Such a vitalist perspective, formulated by Spinoza during the Enlightenment and reactivated through the lens of contemporary sciences, compels a reimagining of the affective power of artworks as material presences that emanate vital force. In keeping with this understanding of the affective power of material objects, Moe's mammoth installation does not ask for interpretation as much as it engulfs the viewer in a deeply arresting experience.

Moe's monumental sculptures radiate the presence of archaeological artifacts, as though they could be excavations of a long-forgotten culture. Replete with significance that cannot be decrypted, we nonetheless experience their semantic force intensely. The gravitational field of the installation bends towards a towering seated figure in magnificent meditative isolation. Titled *Remain*, the inert weight of the figure is absolute, as though she has been sitting there forever. Her features seem worn by centuries of exposure to the elements. Her surface is pitted, marked with gashes and wounds, and carries the patina of great age. She compels awe. We are cautious and quiet around her; we hesitate to disturb her deep repose. Surrounding her is a whirlwind of flying, falling, and gyrating objects. They are comprised of the same matter, as though they emanated from her but cannot escape her gravitational field. They orbit her like planets; their force is the force of atoms engaged in quantum dances. Irregularly shaped, like asteroids hurtling through space, these bits and pieces of cosmic energy could be the meditating goddess's thoughts, fleeting emanations of her material vitality. That the materials of construction are industrial is significant. Steel and concrete are associated with strength and permanence. But the impermeability of these quintessentially modernist materials is undone

left Model for *Remain*, 2019.

Foam, tape, and wire.

previous page *Findings*, 2018–19.

Concrete and steel. On pedestal: studies and models in foam, clay, plaster, iron, concrete, sand formation, and rock.



left Model for *Transitions/Displacements*, ca. 2009. Plaster and Polystyrene.
bottom left Models for *Memorial (Collapse)*, ca. 2006. Plaster, foam and iron.
right Models, ca. 2010. Concrete and steel.
bottom right Model for *Transitions/Displacements*, ca. 2009. Plaster and steel. Collection of Siemon Allen.





above *Findings*, detail, 2018–19. Concrete and steel.

top right Model for *Untitled*, ca. 2008. Clay. Collection of Siemon Allen.

bottom right South African ocean worm nest, ca. 2009.

next page Treya Lam in front of Ledelle Moe's *Findings*, 2018–19. Concrete and steel.

pages 56–57 *Congregation*, 2019. Concrete, steel, and gold leaf. Collection of Xtina and James R. Parks.

by the force of the surrounding objects, which seem to rain through the figure like quantum particles.

The enormous heads repose. Their eyes are closed, gazing inward. They are inscrutable, presenting to us the complete, textured enigma of giant cocoons. They seem to dream of future permutations, of hatching into a body, the way a caterpillar morphs into a moth. They are beyond thought, reposing in a dream too deep to fathom. The reclining figures, too, are incubating pupae, wrapped in their chrysalises in a state of deep meditation. Their seeming inertness is loaded with immeasurable transformative potential.

Matter tells stories. Panpsychism, an ancient philosophical notion currently revived through the lens of quantum physics, proposes that rudimentary consciousness attaches to all matter. As matter accrues and forms more complicated interconnections, so too emerge more complex and infinitely diverse configurations of consciousness. Meditation, as a practice in and about consciousness, is such an immersion into the inherent, vital consciousness of matter, seeking to rest the mind in the final undoing of all the dualisms that dominate our ordinary human perception: immanence and transcendence, matter and consciousness, animate and inanimate, all dissolve into the single plane of immanence. These deeply meditative forms remind us that, as philosopher and theoretical physicist Karen Barad puts it, “We are not outside observers of the world. Neither are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity.”² As such, Moe’s installation compels our participation, as material beings, with the sensorial force of her work. If, in keeping with Deleuze, we imagine the transcendental as not only reconcilable but indeed indistinguishable from empirical material experience, what emerges is “a pure a-subjective current of consciousness, an impersonal pre-reflexive consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without self.”³

Ledelle Moe’s work is precisely such a New Materialist meditation on matter and consciousness. If meditation is, finally, about the dissolution of that which we think of as reality in order to awaken a re-enchantment with the world, then Moe’s installation *When* succeeds beautifully. Standing in these sculptures’ presence is a profoundly affective experience. As we are immersed in their inscrutable aura, they rejuvenate our sense of our own material complexity.

1. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
2. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 184.
3. Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: a Life . . .,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, no. 2 (May 1997): 3–7.







EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Congregation
2005–19
Concrete and steel
158 x 341 x 9 inches (dimensions variable)
Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami
Gift of Jorge M. and Darlene Pérez

Erosion
All three works 2009
Concrete and steel
Figure A: 73 x 184 x 81 inches
Figure B: 95 x 182 x 99 inches
Figure C: 91 x 187 x 90 inches

Relief
2010
Concrete and steel
113 x 344 x 134 inches

Transitions/Displacements
All three works 2012
Concrete and steel
Figure A: 65 x 222 x 54 inches
Figure B: 55 x 221 x 73 inches
Figure C: 44 x 131 x 39 inches

Findings
2018–19
Concrete and steel
67 x 324 x 10 inches (dimensions variable)

Memorial (Collapse)
All three works 2019
Concrete and steel
Figure A: 86 x 116 x 118 inches
Figure B: 90 x 152 x 141 inches
Figure C: 77 x 105 x 111 inches

Remain
2019
Concrete and steel
360 x 220 x 279 inches

Congregation
2019
Concrete, steel, and gold leaf
81 x 195 x 7 inches (dimensions variable)
Collection of Xtina and James R. Parks

Lament (Foghorn)
2019
Video with sound

In vitrines:
Studies and models
1995–2019
Pen and ink on paper, drypoint etchings, wood, clay,
iron, bronze, and concrete
Various dimensions

On pedestal:
Studies and models
2005–19
Foam, clay, plaster, iron, concrete, sand formation,
and rock
Various dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Siemon Allen

All works courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.



above Musician, singer, and songwriter Treya Lam performing in response to *When* during the exhibition's opening reception.

BIOGRAPHY AND SELECTED
EXHIBITION HISTORY

Ledelle Moe was born in Durban, South Africa, in 1971. She studied sculpture at Technikon Natal (now Durban University of Technology) and graduated in 1993. She was a founding member of the FLAT Gallery, an alternative art space in Durban. In 1994, she received a grant to travel to the United States, where she studied at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, graduating with an MFA in 1996. Between 1995 and 2002, she held various teaching positions at VCU; Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Baltimore; Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, DC; and St. Mary’s College of Maryland. Moe subsequently taught in the sculpture department at MICA from 2002 to 2013. She received a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant in 2002 and the Kreeger Museum Artist Award in 2008. She has exhibited internationally in venues in the United States, South Africa, Austria, India, Madagascar, Martinique, Senegal, Sweden, and Switzerland. Her work is in numerous museum collections, including Kwa Muhle Museum, Durban; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Pérez Art Museum Miami; and the South African National Gallery, Cape Town; as well as private collections. In 2013, Moe returned to South Africa, where she currently lives in Cape Town and heads the sculpture department at Stellenbosch University.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2019
- When, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA
Transitions, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa
(two-person exhibition with Siemon Allen)
- 2017
- Ruptures, Semaphore Gallery, Neuchâtel, Switzerland
- 2014
- Traces, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa (two-
person exhibition with Miranda Pfeiffer)
Traces, GUS Gallery, Stellenbosch University,
South Africa
- 2012
- Ground, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa
Transitions/Displacements, Kirk Hopper Fine Art,
Dallas, TX
- 2011
- Relief III, Ajit Niwas Palace, Dhrangadhra, Gujarat,
India
Untitled, PAR-Projects (Factory Square Fine Arts
Festival), Cincinnati, OH
Relief, Kidd Yellin Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
- 2010
- Relief, Crane Arts, Philadelphia, PA
Erosion, Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2009
- Erosion, Bank Gallery, Durban, South Africa
Erosion, Contemporary Art Gallery, Southeastern
Louisiana University, Hammond, LA
- 2008
- Matter, Area 405, Baltimore, MD (two-person
exhibition with Carol-Anne Gainer)
Disasters, American University Museum at the Katzen
Arts Center, Washington, DC
Collapse VI, 808 Gallery, Boston University, Boston, MA
- 2007
- Collapse V, Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, NY
Collapse, North Carolina Museum of Art Park,
Raleigh, NC
- 2006
- Collapse IV, Axis Gallery, New York, NY
Memorial (Collapse), G Fine Art, Washington, DC

- 2005
- Memorial (Collapse), Anderson Gallery, Drake
University, Des Moines, IA
Memorial (Collapse), 1520 14th Street (presented by
G Fine Art and Metropolis Development
Company), Washington, DC
Congregation, G Fine Art, Washington, DC
Collapse, Fine Arts Gallery, George Mason University,
Fairfax, VA
- 2003
- Thrust, Flashpoint Gallery, Washington, DC
Collapse, KwaZulu Natal Society of Arts, Durban,
South Africa
- 2002
- Dogs, Decatur Blue, Washington, DC (two-person
exhibition with Carol-Anne Gainer)
- 1998
- Ledelle Moe and Quint Marshall, Anton Gallery,
Washington, DC (two-person exhibition)
- 1994
- Forecast of Human Trembling II (After Hermanides), FLAT
Gallery, Durban, South Africa

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018
- Dak’Art–Biennale de l’Art Africain Contemporain, Dakar,
Senegal
(Don’t) Look Back, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town,
South Africa
Hermanus FynArts Festival, Western Cape, South Africa
- 2017
- TECTONIC, Hazard Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2016
- Re:Semblance, Red Bull Arts, Detroit, MI
Swelter, Page Bond Gallery, Richmond, VA
Hiervandaan/From here on/Ndisuka, Outdoor Sculpture
Trust, Stellenbosch, South Africa
New Monuments, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2015
- Poetics of Relation, Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL
NIROX SCULPTURE / WINTER ’15, NIROX Sculpture
Park, Johannesburg, South Africa
Slow Violence, GUS Gallery, Stellenbosch University
South Africa
Fifteen MMXV, Hazard Gallery, Johannesburg,
South Africa

- 2014
- Festival d’Art Urbain, La Teinturerie, Antananarivo,
Madagascar
K@20: Kreeger Museum 20th Anniversary Exhibition, The
Kreeger Museum, Washington, DC
- 2013
- BIAC Martinique–Biennale Internationale d’Art Contemporain,
Fort-de-France, Martinique
Earth Matters: Land as Material and Metaphor in the Arts
of Africa, National Museum of African Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
- 2012
- Summer Salon, Commune.1, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2010
- Catalyst: 35 Years of the Washington Project for the Arts,
American University Museum at the Katzen Arts
Center, Washington, DC
- 2009
- ÜberPortrait, Bellevue Arts Museum, Bellevue, WA
Penned, Lump, Raleigh, NC
- 2008
- Erosion (in conjunction with the Kreeger Museum
Artist Award), The Kreeger Museum, Washington, DC
The Exquisite Line, Sherman Gallery, School of Visual
Arts, Boston University, Boston, MA
The Invitational Exhibition, American Academy of Arts
and Letters, New York, NY
Far from Home, North Carolina Museum of Art,
Raleigh, NC
- 2007
- Turbulence, Hangar-7, Salzburg, Austria
- 2004
- Post Mortem, Signal 66, Washington, DC
- 2001
- Six Sculptors, Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY
- 2000
- Onceremoved, Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island
City, NY
- 1999
- Fresh Meat, Kim Foster Gallery, New York, NY
- 1998
- Drömmar och Moln: från ett nytt Sydafrika, Kulturhuset,
Stockholm, Sweden

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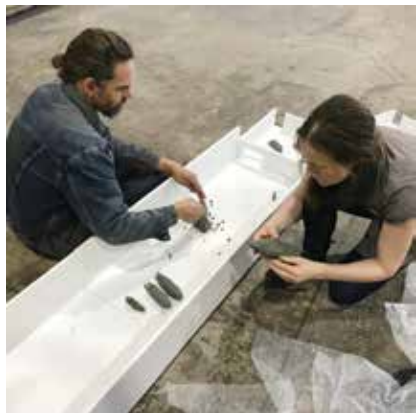
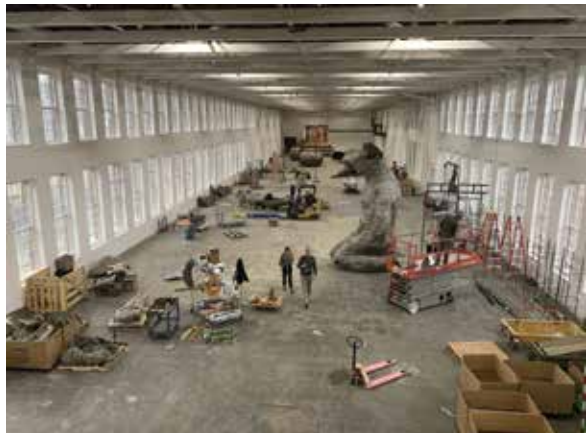
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Susan Cross

Senior Curator, MASS MoCA



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MASS MoCA

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cover *Erosion*, detail, 2009. Concrete and steel.
inside covers *Congregation*, 2019.
Concrete, steel, and gold leaf. Collection
of Xtina and James R. Parks.
pages 2, 6 *Remain*, detail, 2019. Concrete
and steel.
pages 4–5, 70–71 Installation views.
page 8 Model, ca. 2015. Plaster and wire.
page 64 Untitled, ca. 1998. Etching on
paper. Collection of Siemon Allen.

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