

LEDELLE MOE



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Artist Biography

smac



Fold

SMAC Gallery
Cape Town, South Africa / 2022

Vulnerable Monumentality
by Olga Speakes

Our conversations about the disintegration of the monumental - at times, bemoaned and at times, celebrated - seem to be centuries long. Ledelle Moe is offering a perspective that steers away from either extreme, reflecting our age's ambivalence towards modes of expression that entomb memory, the body and the self within hard surfaces or atop pedestals.

For her first solo exhibition with SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, the artist presents *Fold*, a large-scale, yet intimate, exploration of the limits and the potential within the tradition of figurative sculpture. It is the scale of the work, somehow always unexpected, that first demands the viewer's attention as we confront a human-like figure caught in what may be interpreted as either temporary or permanent repose. It is a body, a shell and a mound, all at the same time. It seems to be morphing into its own medium of concrete and steel, its structural seams are exposed while its boundaries remain uncertain. Swaying between shape and shapelessness, *Fold* appears to be melting into the space of the gallery while insisting on being present with its particular kind of heavy materiality. It is neither an emphatic marker of space and time nor an exercise in deconstruction, despite its modular steel structure. It offers a space away from the linearity of history, a site of refuge, a retreat from the certainty of its narratives.

Return

(SMAC Gallery)

Frere Street, Woodstock, South Africa / 2024

by Jacob Van Schalkwyk

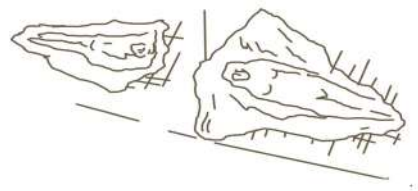
My first encounter with Return comes in a recently reclaimed space on Frere Street in Woodstock, Cape Town. Moe has been using the space as a temporary studio for the sole purpose of completing Return. Walking around her 2.8ton, 7.5m long, 2.2m high, 3m wide new work, I am struck by how different it is to Collapse. Its portside is all barnacled and razored coral – the results of Moe jabbing concrete onto the frame from inside the structure. Here Moe, like a kid building sandcastles from underneath the beach sand, is vehemently and passionately non-figurative. Generous as ever, she leaves us stuff to engage with in this sodden underworld we have no measure of: the exposed undercarriage, the mesh, the steel protruding from the hull. Round its keel and Moe has turned southpaw, adopting a stance of sculptor as painter. Her concrete brushwork is emphatic: desperate, hopeless strokes contend with determined, sweeping, overhand cuts. Again, she leaves some recognisable form to cling to: a head, a face, a body. If in the year 2000, Moe was going toe-to-toe with ambiguity in America, here on the streets of Cape Town, two decades of chewing fate later, Return sees her emerge from a slugfest with the collision of oppositional forces in ways that take one's breath away.

Having circled its form, sitting down for a second, taking it all in, I find myself nudged adrift by what Moe refers to as "waves of clarity, incoherence, loss and an abundance of forces." Kinship with the invisible insides of Return is less a matter of sticking to a single genotypical logic than it is to attempt floatation with the abundance of concurrent lifeforms salvaged from its voyage beyond ambiguity. In their waveform company, floating on our backs, we are returned to a land of propertyless things and constant oscillation, where our bodily functions and their inverse are continuous, where the conditions for awakening what has been slumbering in us are yet to be met, and the relations between us are yet to be determined.



Foldings

Omachi Triennale (Group Presentation),
Omachi Japan / 2024



Created for the Omachi Triennale group exhibition in Japan (August-November 2024) my installation *Foldings* explores the relationship between materiality, time, and place. Constructed from local bamboo and clay, this work took the form of two large scale volumetric relief panels that revealed aspects of recumbent human and animal forms on their surface. The site for my work was a disused concrete tunnel, which dates back to the mid 1800's and sits on the border between Omachi and the Yasaka valley in the Nagano Prefecture. When planning this work, I considered the site as an 'in-between' space. With this in mind, the channel-like architectural cavity served as a metaphoric and literal space to speak about the passing of time and the notion of passing from one state to another. As the works evolved, these inchoate forms oscillated between recognizable imagery and inert, amorphous monumental mass. The notions of fluid, transitory and unfixed states of being were brought into focus with the living organisms that inhabited the space and the mud surfaces of the sculptures became the ground for small plants, (probably seeds from where the rice fields where the mud was extracted).

The materials I used for this work were elastic and responsive to the fluctuating temperatures and moisture in the tunnel. Over time, the clay 'skin' shrank onto the bamboo form revealing cracks and contours of the skeletal bamboo form. This transformation echoed concepts of

permanence and impermanence, ruins and fragments that recur in my work. In addition, the work was in dialogue with evidence of layered time, the patinas of the tunnel and also the surrounding geological formation of the magna fossa fault line of the Northern Alps, within which the tunnel was situated.

When reflecting on the experience of the space, the materials and the work, I turned to Yanping Gao's reflections on Bachelard's theory of Material Imagination in their text *Between Matter and Hand: On Gaston Bachelard's Theory of Material Imagination*- Referring specifically to Bachelard's text in *Water and Dreams* Gao explains that paste (clay), is "a perfect synthesis of yielding and resistance, a marvellous equilibrium of the forces of acceptance and refusal" (Bachelard 2002, 61) and that "paste is a combination that has unfinished and indeterminate shape" and has the qualities of both "fluidity and solidity" (Bachelard 1999, 11).

The relationship with the humid environment (that I shared with frogs, snakes, racoon dogs and cicadas) was direct and all consuming. Ashraf Jamal in his text, *An Intimate Materialism*, states that for him, "What is of special significance ..., is not the many uses to which clay has been put - its role as a prosthetic extension of ourselves, as though it were a material subject to human use - but its somatic and physiological connectedness to our very Being." (Jamal, 2023:14)

Jamal refers to Bachelard's insights on clay and the dependency that material has on immateriality, the elemental and transitory qualities of the material and its relationship to air, water and heat. He states that "this enigmatic core of all life is also the mysterious temporal quality we find in Bachelard's generative understanding of clay - the profundity of its materiality." "Made of water and earth, but also of air and fire, it is an absolutely elementary substance that depends upon both density and porous-ness to make sense." (Jamal, 2023:15)

Sean O'Toole explores Irma Stern's use of clay and how it behaves in a way that is humbling, fragile and sensuous. He refers to Bourdin's writings on Stern's work to expand on how the clay's impressionability echoes Sartre's existentialist writings on "ambiguity (*l'ambigüe*) and slimy viscousness (*le visqueux*) in his defining book, *Being and Nothingness* (*L'Être et le Néant*, 1943)". (O'Toole, 2023:18)

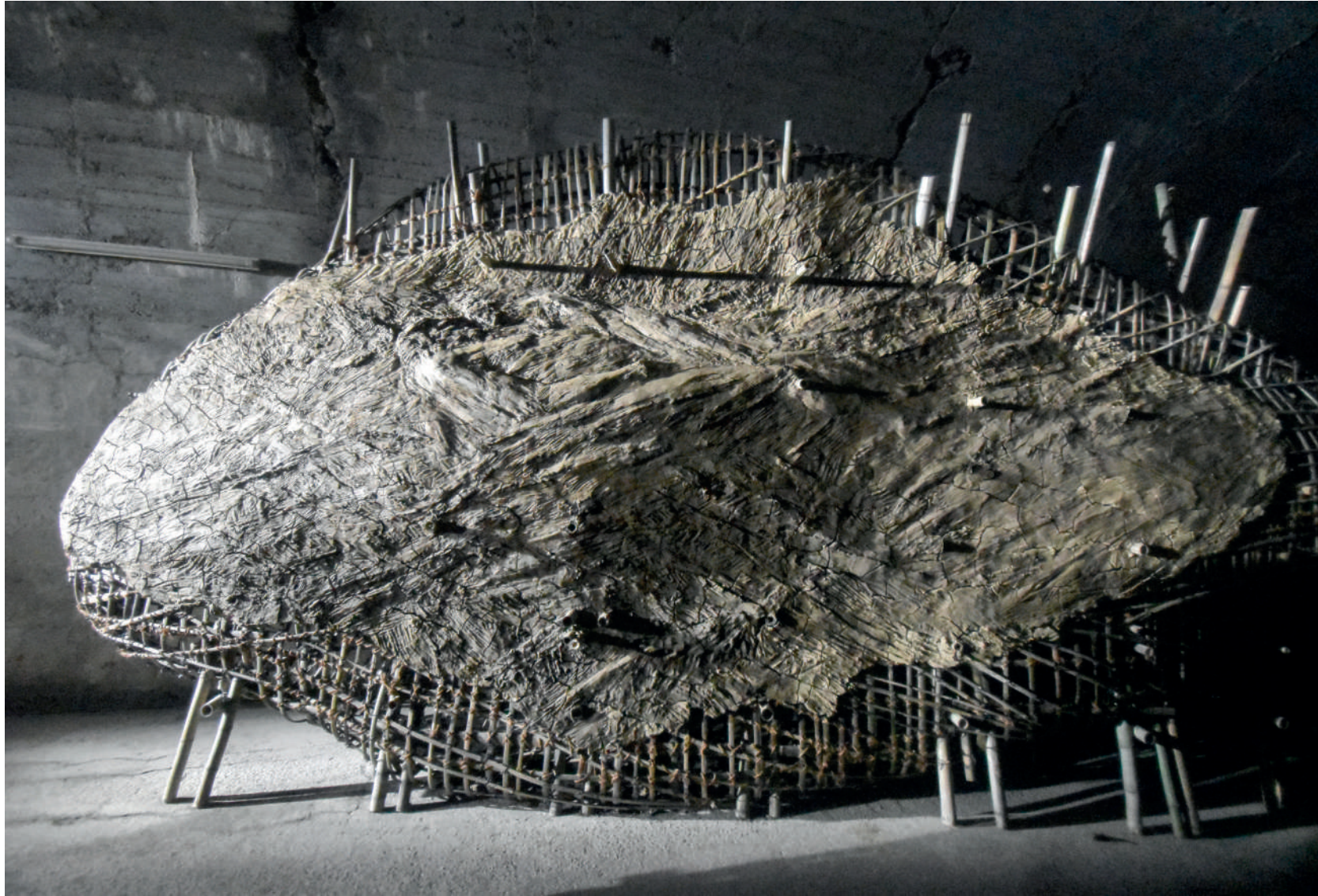
Working onsite allowed for a complex relationship with the landscape, the community and the materials from that area. As the sole author of the work, I embrace a practice based and autoethnographic research methodology and grapple with the research question: how can site-specific artistic creation facilitate an embodied understanding of the interconnections between physical landscape, community engagement, and material context, and how might this practice

illuminate the relationship between actual and imagined spaces.

In keeping with Fram Kitagawa's vision for exhibition, this work engaged with the land, and the matter and materiality of the place. It allowed for reflection on the nonlinear nature of time, the relativity of moisture in the materials, myself and the surrounding environment.

Alva Noë states- "We are in the world and of it. We are patterns of active engagement with fluid boundaries and changing components." (Noë, 2010) As I set out to make and shape this work, it ultimately shaped me, leaving me with a humbling sense of entangled connections and a lived experience of the impermanence of materials.

In addition working on site and exhibiting, I also participated in two artist presentations. These talks were part of the larger Echigo-Tsumari Asia Forum, which is the umbrella organisation for the four triennials that took place in Japan over the course of the year. I presented my work at both forums to a public international audience.





Undulation / Cape Town, South Africa / 2025



Undulation

SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
2024 / 2025

Undulation is a continuation of core thematic concepts in my work including concepts of monumentality, fragments, and ruins. Created from concrete and steel, this inchoate form oscillates between recognizable imagery and an inert, amorphous monumental mass, grappling with notions of permanence and impermanence, strength and vulnerability.

Informed by an embodied sense of pressure, weight, and mass, the work is an attempt to give form to fluid, transitory and unfixated states of being and to wrestle with forces that are visible and invisible.

Embedded in the undulations of the surface are marks made with steel and concrete. I consider the sculpture as a drawing, the result of a generative process of lines and forms that undulate and shift restlessly over the skin/membrane of the form.



Undulation III

Soil and Water (Group Presentation)
Nirox Sulpture Garden / 2025

Undulation III is a continuation of core thematics in my work including concepts of monumentality, fragments, and ruins. Created from soil, cement, water and steel, this inchoate form oscillates between recognizable imagery and an inert, amorphous monumental mass, grappling with notions of permanence and impermanence, strength and vulnerability.

"The Latin word "humus" means "earth" or "ground," and is the root of the word "human". This connection highlights the idea that humans are fundamentally connected to the earth, both in origin and in our physical make-up, as we are composed of elements found in the soil and ultimately return to the earth. The term "humus" also refers to a component of soil, specifically the dark, organic matter formed from decaying plant and animal matter".

Working with local materials—sand, water, soil, cement, and steel—I reflect on the material complexities embedded in this work. Concrete presents a paradox: it provides essential solutions for our built environment while simultaneously creating problems for

the natural world. Ubiquitous and impervious, it resists breakdown. This tension between the built and natural worlds represents a precarious balance I seek to embrace in this work.

The processes involved with making this work are slow and arduous. Hand made by myself, these industrial materials are harsh and resistant. At the same time, they require gentle nuances and lend themselves to elastic and malleable forms. Bringing sand, water and cement together is an intimate process for me. This work, is an autobiographical narrative about my tenuous, fragile relationship with the desire for solidity and permanence and the acknowledgement of the of impermanent, unfixed and temporal quality of all things.



Murmurs: Studies and Sketches

SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa / 2025

Known for her monumental sculptures, Ledelle Moe's work often asks us to consider scale, mass, weight and time. This exhibition is a collection of studies - like a stream of consciousness tracing sketches, maquettes and journal entries. These works mark a series of thoughts and ideas. They are considerations of non-linear time and the experiences that often defy the syntactic. In a temporal sense, these murmurous sculptures reflect on the fluidity of time and relativity.

Timothy Ingold proposes that the world is a "dynamic mesh of interwoven lines. These lines connect, tangle, and form relationships." Lines, both physical and metaphorical, build the world around us. They outline, point to, and give texture to our sensorial, intellectual, emotional experience. Moe's sculptures are in dialogue with the dynamism of these lines - how they react to opposing forces of tension and friction, and how they connect and entangle to form knots. They respond to the web of energy that connects us both to each other and to the world around us. According to Ingold this sense of life can be found in "concretions or swellings in animal tissues, and even, by analogy, to rocky outcrops of similar conformation and texture."

Moe's use of concrete and clay embraces both fragile and industrial materials to look at contradictions of stability and loss. Unfolding as both an ancient and contemporary material, concrete and clay has served to translate and give form to architectural and sculptural forms over millennia. These materials hold connections to the land, and the impermanence of its memory.

Ledelle Moe's collection of studies is quiet; they trace how things pull apart at certain moments and cluster together at others. The lines that run between us are in a constant state of flux between tension and slack, singular and knotted. They tie us to each other and to the breathing world around us. By using local materials from the Western Cape, Moe definitively locates her works in this province's ecological, historical, and sociological context.





Undulation (Dream)

Kyrenia, Cyprus / 2025

In my sculptural practice, I have found myself increasingly drawn to the materiality of earth—gathering soil from various locations, embedding it into my work, and using it as a foundation for contemplation on impermanence, and loss. This autobiographical engagement with ground and soil has culminated in *Undulation (Dream)*, a large scale rock form depicting a recumbent female form. The work stretches three meters in length sculpture and serves as both a physical and metaphorical reckoning with the transient nature of existence.

In creating *Undulation (Dream)*, I sought to construct a placeholder—a physical manifestation of the desire to hold onto what inevitably slips away while acknowledging the layers of history and time evident in the landscape.

Virginia Burrus's chapter *Life In Ruins*, in her book *Earthquakes and Gardens* has informed my thinking about this work¹. Her meditation on "ruination and resurgence, grief and consolation" resonates with the underlying tensions in *Undulation (Dream)*. Like Burrus's conception of ruins as providing "traces of previous histories," this sculpture functions as a response to this landscape² and as a repository of personal memory and experiences.

Lewis Hyde's *A Primer for Forgetting* explores the equal importance of remembering and

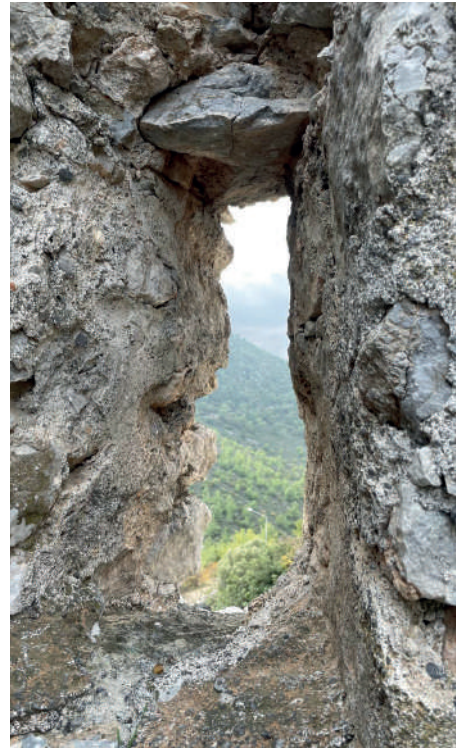
forgetting and how parts of our memories and selves are reassembled while others fade away. I hope to achieve this in the sculpture through recognizable details in the work, while allowing other parts of the form to take on more amorphous and wave-like structures. I see this relationship of form and formlessness as embodying the inevitable entropic processes of erosion and disintegration. The research question at the heart of this work is- how can the creation of a weighty large scale sculpture serve as a means through which to grapple with the sense of inevitable change, loss and impermanence.

The melancholic response to ruins that Burrus identifies through Michael Ann Holly's work manifests in *Undulation (Dream)* through its paradoxical embodiment of presence and absence. The sculpture's form anchors it in physical space, yet its wave-like elements suggest dissolution and return to formlessness. This aligns, for me, with Hyde's understanding that forgetting is not merely loss but a necessary counterpart to remembering—each defining and informing the other.

Undulation (Dream) ultimately serves as a meditation on the cyclical nature of existence—the understanding that all forms eventually return to formlessness and the dual processes of individual and collective remembering and forgetting.

¹ This book is a reflection on St. Jerome's hagiography, titled *Vita Sancti Hilarionis (Life of St. Hilarion)*- it is a vivid narrative written in the early 390's and describes St. Hilarion's devotion and constant search for solitude.

² St. Hilarion's castle in Kyrenia - a multifaceted layering of ruins and construction is evidence of complex layers of geological, religious, architectural and political histories. I visited this site as a place of reflection and contemplation.





LEDELLE MOE

b. 1971, Durban, South Africa

Lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.

Ledelle Moe is a sculptor who investigates concepts of permanence and impermanence, location and dislocation, and place and displacement. Travelling to specific sites, Moe collects samples of the earth, which she then uses as an aggregate in cement. The cement is poured and moulded into both small and large statues, bodies which balance on walls and float above ground. Moe's work uses local aggregates to develop conversations about land and identity - asking the viewer to reconsider how political and personal histories are rooted in place and soil.

Moe studied sculpture at Technikon Natal, graduating in 1993 and completed her Master's Degree in Sculpture in 1996 at the Virginia Commonwealth University in the USA. Moe held an adjunct position in the Sculpture Department at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore. Moe returned to South Africa in 2013, where she took up a position at Stellenbosch University, becoming Head of the Sculpture Department at the Fine Arts' Faculty.

In 2025, Moe presented a solo exhibition with SMAC Gallery titled *Murmurs: Studies and Sketches* in Cape Town South Africa. In

2022, Moe presented her first solo exhibition at SMAC Gallery, titled *Fold*, in Cape Town, South Africa. Further selected solo exhibitions include 2020's *When* at MASS MoCA in Massachusetts, USA; *Ruptures* at Semaphore Gallery in Neuchatel, Switzerland in 2017; *Traces*, which showed at GUS Gallery in Stellenbosch and at Commune 1 Gallery in Cape Town in 2014; *Transitions/ Displacements* at Commune 1 Gallery in Cape town and at Kirk Hopper Fine Art in Dallas, USA in 2012; *Untitled* at Factory Square Fine Arts festival in Cincinnati, USA in 2011; *Relief* at Crane Arts Gallery in Philadelphia, USA and *Erosion* at Reynolds Gallery in Richmond, USA in 2010.

In 2025, Moe has exhibited in group presentations including Investec Cape Town Art Fair, *The One and The Many* at the Javett Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa and *Soil and Water* at Nirox Sculpture Garden, Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2024, Moe presented *Foldings*, as part of her Omachi Triennale residency in Japan (NAAF). In 2023 Moe participated in the Congo Biennale in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Moe has also exhibited at Kulturhuset (Stockholm, Sweden) the NSA Gallery (Durban, South Africa), the International Sculpture Center (Washington, DC), The Washington Project for the Arts (Washington, DC) and American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.

Previous projects include large-scale concrete installations at Socrates Park and Pratt Institute in New York City, and The African Museum of Art in Washington DC; Moe has exhibited at institutions such as the Pérez Art Museum, Miami, USA, the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C., USA, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, USA.

Awards include the Joan Mitchell Award in 2002 and the Kreeger Museum Artist Award in 2008.

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