

ART

Ashes of Time

TWO-WOMAN SHOW TAPS INTO THE FLEETING, ANXIOUS NATURE OF THE NOW

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MATTER

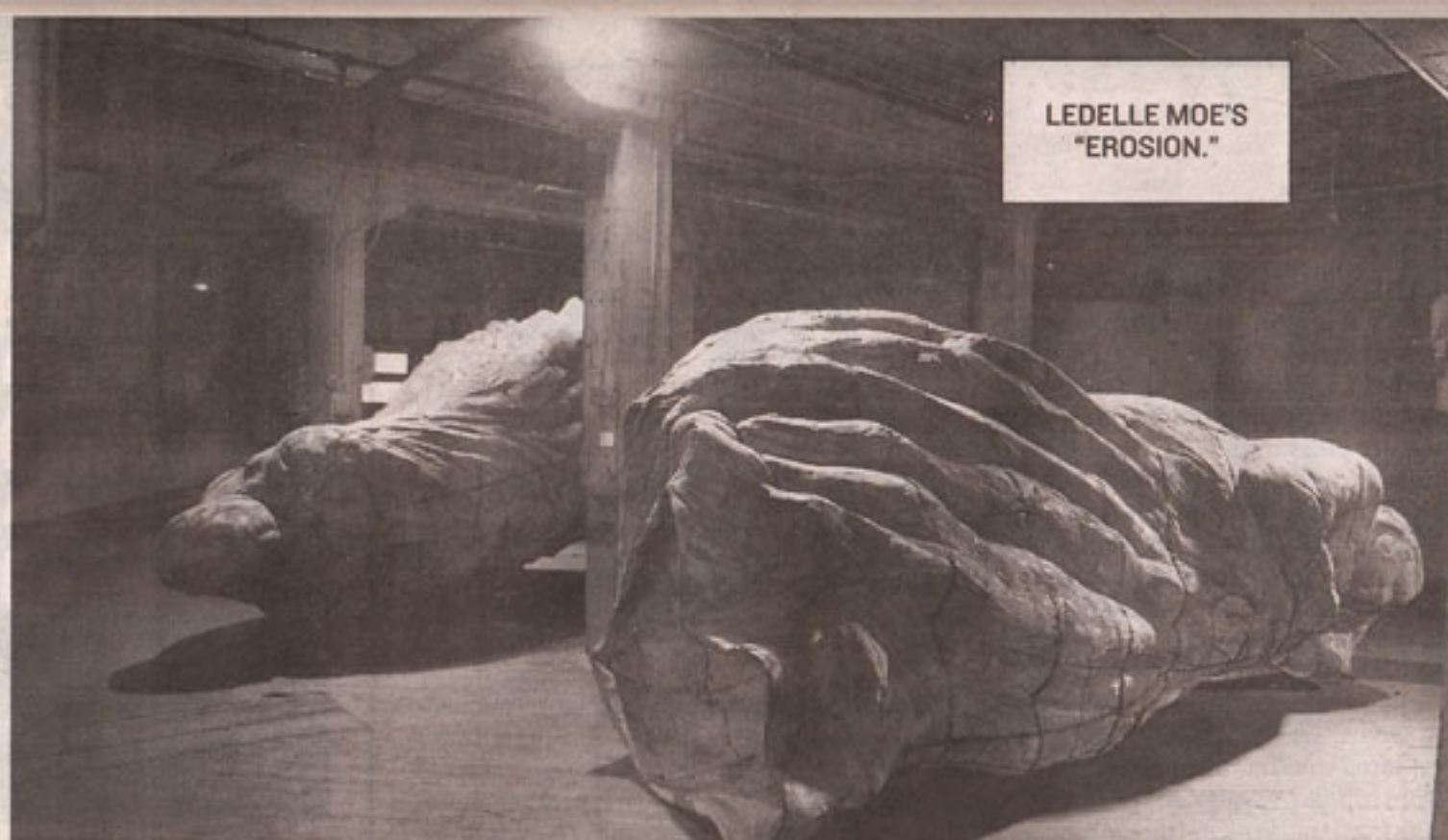
At Area 405 through Oct. 26

MATTER IS A STUDY IN CONTRASTS. FEATURING THE works of South African-born artists Ledelle Moe and Carol-Anne Gainer, *Matter* examines time and the ways in which it relates to the clashing concepts of fragility and permanence, collapse and stability, growth and decay. While Moe's massive feats of sculpture are quiet, somber, and reflective, Gainer's mixed-media installation functions as a covert, multisensory attack, slowly building upon viewers' latent anxieties with an impending sense of dread. Juxtaposed against each another, Gainer's and Moe's pieces are enhanced by their opposing forces.

Moe's works are inspiring not only for their size and construction, but for the uncannily organic quality her industrial materials produce. Working with metal pipes, wire mesh, and poured concrete, Moe sculpts pieces that, although contemporary, project an ancient identity. Due to their massive size, you must fully inspect the works, walking around them, passing between, and peering inside to embark on both an archaeological quest and an introspective, ideological journey. You begin to wonder, *How did they get here, and why?*

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Moe's "Memorial (Collapse)," completed in 2000, offers insight into the evolution of her artistic process over the course of the past eight years. "Memorial," a stand-in for one of the original sculptures in the exhibition (the second figure in the "Erosion" pair), depicts an enormous disembodied head, resting on its side on the gallery floor like a destroyed relic from an ancient temple. By "frosting," as Moe so perfectly describes it, the sculpture with cement



LEDELLE MOE'S
"EROSION."

layer by layer, she allows the many facets of its construction to be revealed. While the eyes and nose are still completely covered by cement facade, the areas at the crown of the head expose "Memorial's" inner workings. Here Moe harnesses the power of time, creating works that, although relatively new, appear weathered and worn away by the natural and man-made events of history.

Her "Erosion" was originally conceived and exhibited as a sculptural installation in two parts, but Moe's recent honor as the recipient of the Kreeger Museum Artist Award necessitated that one half of the piece be moved to the Washington, D.C., museum prior to the end of *Matter's* six-week run. Where "Memorial" offered a clearly identifiable object—a head—"Erosion" is an amorphous figure more closely tied to mood than to identity. Similarly to the construction process, the long overturned sculpture reveals itself in multiple layers. From each angle, you form separate, often conflicting ideas to answer your own questions about not only the origin but the classification of the object: From certain viewpoints it is an overturned figure of an angel, from others a rock formation, and from others still a cavernous abyss. Yet, while the work was originally inspired by Moe's study of 19th-century death monuments, some of which she found in the nearby Green Mount Cemetery, "Erosion" conforms to none. Just as the passage of time forces matter to continually shift and transform, "Erosion," though concrete, changes before our very eyes.

While the viewing experience of "Erosion" and "Memorial" is quiet and contemplative, Gainer's "Drawn," from 2007, is slowly building and anxiety-ridden. At first, Gainer's long row of digital prints, depicting sweet ceramic animal figurines, lulls you into a false state of calm, only briefly interrupted by a small but indecipherable video screen. But as you continue onward, "Drawn" reveals a much darker tone.

The photographs are followed by an installation of ceramic and bronze pieces on tall, narrow white podiums. You quickly realize that the broken fragments before you are parts of the figurines you smiled at on the wall behind you. Then, confronted by Gainer's large video projection, a continuous loop with the repetitive sound of a toy car crashing into a wall, you begin to understand how the objects met their untimely and presumably violent end. The sound of the crash reverberates throughout Area 405's lofty space, heightening the unreasonable but fretful feeling "Drawn" so effectively evokes. After all of this, looking back at the figurines, posed portrait style against solid backdrops, is akin to looking at a picture of someone who has died. They are no longer what they were, and consequently you feel powerless.

Here, tapping into associations of childhood and innocence, Gainer shows with a palpable violence another familiar way in which time changes matter. Objects break, innocence is lost, and eventually, one way or another, we all meet the same inevitable end. ★