

An aerial photograph of a forest floor, showing a grid of lines overlaid on the terrain. The colors are muted greens and browns, suggesting a dense forest. On the left side, there are four circular markers, possibly representing tree locations or survey points. The text 'LEDELLE MOE DRIFT' is overlaid in a light, sans-serif font.

LEDELLE  
MOE  
DRIFT

1708GALLERY





Collapse IV (first section), 2006. Cornelia and Steve Forster. Limestone, 9 x 13 x 18 feet. Background: Marneuse Collapse, 6 x 10 x 12 feet.

# LEDELLE MOE

DRIFT

JANUARY 12 TO FEBRUARY 24, 2007

## SPOILS OF HISTORY

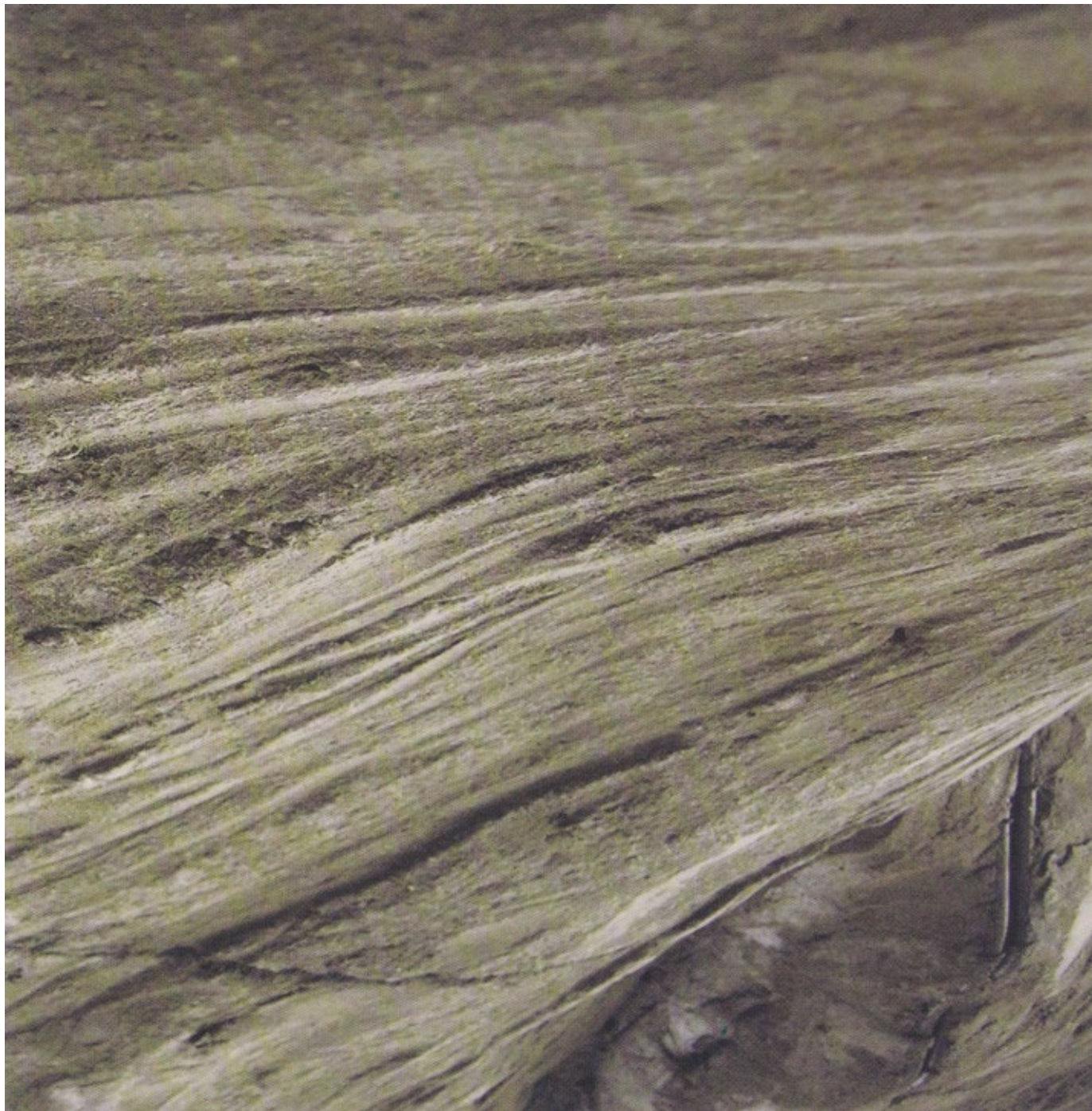
Huge heads, fragments of giant fallen figures, lumpen and inert, lie scattered across the open gallery floor. Seemingly salvaged from some larger context these territorial spoils of some forgotten war, victims of some iconoclastic dispute or merely the remnants of history, of some other place and time, are the constructions of sculptor Ledelle Moe. Moe, a white South African who regularly returns to the land of her birth, has lived through the politics of change in a country dominated by the imposition of apartheid. Experiencing its hubris and witnessing its fall she actively engages the past in order to move forward.

Homi K. Bhabha notes in the *Location of Culture* (1994), that there is a need for an art that deals with history "that does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent", one that "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" (Bhabha 1994:7). 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. 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 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 valorising 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 recognisable 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, lacking delicacy, up close they reveal a myriad 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 the reverse of what is expected – the felt surface is found to be rough, its softness an illusion. Reliant on sight we are led astray. The affront to our senses distances us.

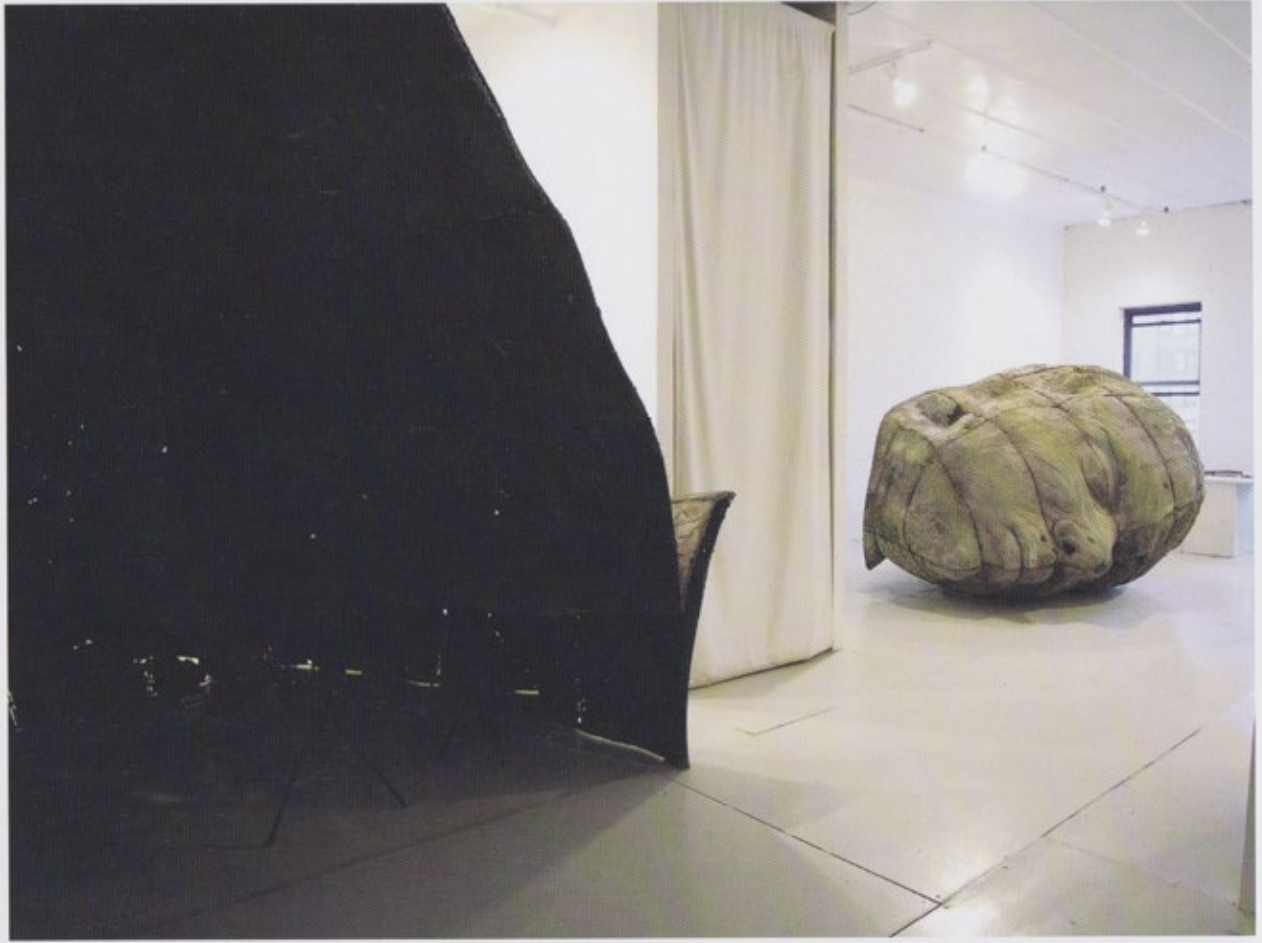
The dance between intimacy and detachment continues throughout Moe's work. The small heads gathered in *Congregation* are so convincing in their evocation of features that they recall the casts of the inhabitants of Pompei who, overcome by volcanic ash, were each wrapped in a shell of dust and sealed 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 artefacts or rocks organically shaped by water or eroded by windblown sand.











Collage IV (restoration), 2006. Concrete and steel.





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Dislocation, displacement and a sense of loss pervade. As viewers our focus vacillates. In the larger pieces we waver between recognising 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" (Eliot 1975: 89). 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 *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..." (Huhn 1996:136). She "operates in a matrixial field, where the feminine is asserted instead of fading away in front of the Other" (Huhn 1996:141). Similarly Moe penetrates the forms of phallic power metamorphosing<sup>1</sup> them into containing spaces. As 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" (ibid). Moe's sculptures are memorials emptied of their traditional significance: their vacated interiors making way for new meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> In metamorphosis – *metra*, like matrix, etymologically refers to the uterus (Huhn 1996:141).

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