

McQuaid, Cate
"Cole's cheeky recycled-materials art prompts contemplation."
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Cole's cheeky recycled-materials art prompts contemplation



The Cadillac Eldorado, first designed as a concept car in 1952 to celebrate the company's 50th anniversary, was a luxury convertible more than 18 feet long that got less than 12 miles per gallon. It probably took a prime spot on the showroom floor of Peter Fuller's Cadillac dealership at 808 Commonwealth Ave., now home to Boston University's 808 Gallery. Auto dealerships were prominent along that stretch of Commonwealth Avenue, known as Auto Row in the first half of the 20th century.

In "Willie Cole: AQUAHALLIC," an artist known for conjuring incisive and humorous social commentary from mundane objects pays tribute to the site's history. Cole has built an early generation Eldorado out of tossed-off plastic water bottles. It takes the regal, slouching posture of a magnificent lion beneath two of Cole's chandeliers, also crafted from water bottles.

The show is the first of what Lynne Cooney, artistic director of the BU Art Galleries, says will be a series of site-sensitive exhibitions by individual artists. The gallery is cavernous, which presents time and budgetary challenges for such projects. Indeed, the space nearly swallows this installation — Cole could have made half a dozen Caddies for the site.

Still, the artwork is charming and cheeky. The jaunty plastic Eldorado sports tail fins and a wraparound windshield, and it sags a bit in the middle, as if too big for its own good. The chandeliers twinkle in the gallery lights. Opulent but humble, transparent yet blemished, they all look like cartoon versions of reality. Making them from cheap, recycled plastic, Cole has reframed traditional symbols of exorbitance (very few Eldorados sold their first model year; they were too pricey), yet water bottles stand for their own kind of knee-jerk consumerism. He aptly equates guzzling gas with guzzling water, gently calling out our apparent disregard for the impact of either on the environment.

Alexander and Bonin

But he doesn't scold. In one chandelier, the bottles all point upward. In the other they point down, and Cole has filled the latter with small images of a Buddha-like idol in a contemplative lotus posture. Like the works themselves, the figure does not berate us, but invites us to reflect, and then, perhaps, to take responsibility. Memoir made of objects

Tory Fair's installation, "Heap," at Proof Gallery bears a resemblance to Cole's installation at 808. Both feature a site-specific piece and two corollary works. Both tangle with history and the way objects and materials reverberate through time.

"Heap" can be viewed as a kind of memoir, but one that engages with traditional sculptural questions of space and the body. Fair has cast personally meaningful objects in foam, concrete, and rubber, all black and gritty: her work boots, her grandmother's camera, waffles from her son's breakfast. She amasses them in one sarcophagus-shaped pile in the center of the small gallery. It's as if she has taken stuff and translated it into *stuff-ness*, the dark and broody essence of stuff.

For the artist, who composed the piece strategically making associations from one form to the next, it's embedded with intimate significance. For the viewer, the meaning — like the objects themselves — is second-generation. Many objects repeat, like refrains in a poem, most frequently an obelisk-shaped crystal. These small towers are just as black and murky as every other component of the piece, but sprout from waffles and baskets and camera lenses like a prolific flower — or more likely, a mushroom — blooming amid the compost. Projected light sprinkles over the heap, giving this coal pile the unlikely glitter-effect of a diamond.

Fair's work has always been about bodily experience, whether that's of memory or space. "Flower Hugger 1," and "Flower Hugger 2," cast from her own embrace and coated with voluptuous flower petals, hardly appear snuggly. As with "Heap," these look like something you'd want to don latex gloves to touch. The imprint of a body is even more personal than those of cherished objects. Fair delights here in exploring and giving form to shadow material, as dark and forbidding as it is freighted with love.

Abandonment, building, growth.

Eleanor Steinadler's clever photographs of construction sites at Galatea Fine Art often view lumbering machines as heroic beasts. In "Summer, South Boston, #8" for instance, many cranes raise their blue and orange lantern jaws into the sky, like a group of gazelles cocking their heads at a sudden noise. In a series she shot of an abandoned construction site, her noble protagonists appear more forlorn. In "Abandoned Construction, Truro MA, #3" three trucks turn away from us; two lean into each other and the third leans away, and we know none of them should be leaning at all. Construction denotes transition to something new; Steinadler's images of this ghost site, then, take on a particular poignancy, pictures of deserted dreams.

Also at Galatea are Marjorie Kaye's winsome sculptures made from painted, stacked discs of wood in strange, Seussian shapes. "Conduit for Heaven and Earth," swivels like an elephant's trunk. "Energy Transmission" rises straight to a hot red, but its edges still make it wiggly. These works investigate how bare-bones accumulation speaks of building and growth — an unlikely counterpoint to Steinadler's photos.