

GRANT MOONEY

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Sculpture
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“calcis,” Grant Mooney’s current exhibition (on view through December 8, 2024), features sculptures that challenge our assumptions about materiality by exploring the enmeshment of the organic and industrial. The soft, creamy white limestone wash that coats Temps (all works 2024), a site-specific installation of temporary walls, provides a fitting introduction, responding to the mammoth limestone blocks of Wesleyan’s Center for the Arts (designed in the 1970s by Kevin Roche/John Dinkeloo and Associates). Composed of mineral forms of calcium carbonate, limestone is organic in nature, with common industrial applications in construction and agriculture. These seemingly oppositional material origins and aims quite literally solidify in Mooney’s propositions for architecture, as the limewash becomes both opaque substrate overtop the moveable walls and a porous film calcifying the white cube.

Instead of enveloping viewers within a transformative immersivity, Mooney’s sculptures, sited within entryway, hallway, and gallery spaces, work upon and with their respective spaces, inviting us into an “attunement” of space (albeit one that requires keen attention). While his work in the 2024 Whitney Biennial relied more on direct material relations of steel, bronze, cuttlebone, and aluminum, the presentation here configures individualized and discrete works in subtle material conversation with the space itself.

Deisal c. i,ii features two distinct compositions consisting of rotary motors, steel, glass, polyurethane, and iron. Instead of functioning as whirling engines emblematic of the 20th century’s increased mechanization, they rest atop still pools of water, which gesture toward the aqueous form of calcium carbonate—a supplement for freshwater bodies to create ideal living conditions. The sculpture becomes a hosting hub to cultivate organic energy, rather than an industrial converter of fuel to motion.

In wall works such as *cation c. (x)* and *cation c. (xi)*, an electroplated steel shell frames a silver interior plate that folds in on itself as if charged by an invisible pinch. Drawing on Mooney’s background as a jeweler,

these pieces recall cuttlebone jewelry casting techniques in which the imprint of the cephalopod's carbonite shell is used for a mold. The steel shells circumscribe but do not contain the interior plates, which project off the surface. Seen against the matte limestone walls, these works—which allude to the formation of metallic elements upon the loss of an electron, leaving a positive charge—bisect the meeting of the blocks with a slight gleam, reading as architecture's off-kilter kin, and a kind of enigmatic diagram. *Partials i, (Gain c.)*, placed directly on the floor in the center of the gallery, forms a bronze horn emerging from its plaster (calcium carbonate) cast. With a flared form to distribute sound, the instrument projects multivocalities into the space at pitches that feel affectively resonant but inaudible.

In each instance, Mooney counters potentially extractive industrial materials with sculptural strategies emphasizing organic matter. The ability to interpret the works as “site-responsive to what is proximal,” as Mooney puts it, speaks to the deft curatorial framing of Benjamin Chaffee working in collaboration with the artist. Here, the alchemical becomes a way to grapple with subtle shifts and turns in materiality, tracing interconnections that recognize entanglements within a larger natural ecosystem and extractive modern industrial infrastructures. “calcis” operates as anti-spectacle, the chemical shifts in the works demanding ever slower, atomized temporalities, and as a result, attention spans open to a reciprocal orientation.

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