

Art in America

NOVEMBER 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Derek Liddington:
*When two objects are
smashed together it
is inevitable that they
become dependent on
each other in order
to be understood by
those not witness to
the violence, 2015,
found brick and
cement; in "Flesh
Marble Leaf &
Twig."*

“FLESH MARBLE LEAF & TWIG”

Seleven

In Athens hundreds of buildings lie abandoned, but rarely unused. Some bear scrawled and stenciled reactions to Greece's economic crisis; others accommodate people made homeless by it. The city's cultural institutions also reflect the restless loyalties of architecture: the Benaki Museum, for example, occupies a grand old Ottoman mansion. Even the Parthenon spent more time as a church and a mosque before being restored to its original pagan form.

Toronto's Seleven gallery was established just last year, in a small Chinatown storefront. (There used to be a sign outside that mimicked the logo of a certain convenience-store chain, but it was removed under legal threat after Skrillex, the electronic musician and DJ, happened to Instagram it.) Members of the artist collective that runs the gallery recently traveled to Greece, and the subsequent exhibition, “Flesh Marble Leaf & Twig,” rubbed Athenian urban space against Toronto's. Works by the duo Stefanos Ziras and Eleni Papadimitriou were shown next to sculptures by Toronto artist Derek Liddington, all of which sought the ephemeral amid the monumental.

Ziras and Papadimitriou covered Seleven's walls with a collage of archival material concerning Athens's gardens, squares and statues. There were a few texts, reproduced in their original Greek, but most of the documents were visual. An early 20th-century photograph of Syntagma Square was unlike any seen in recent news coverage; there wasn't a single person on the parliament building's steps. A monument to politician and poet Alexandros Panagoulis, who was tortured for defying the military junta that ruled Greece in the 1960s

and '70s, appeared at multiple stages of completion. The last image showed it beneath a plastic sheet that resembled both a swirling cape and a prisoner's hood. On a shelf near photos of reconstructed ancient statues—a somber “Hermes resting” and a hesitant-looking wrestler—Ziras and Papadimitriou placed a nondescript chunk of marble. One imagines the artists sifting out bygone moments from the ossuary of Athens's past, the traces that are buried beneath every landmark.

Ziras and Papadimitriou also repurposed a couple of video fragments—one records the genesis of sculptor Costas Varotsos's *Dromeas*, 1994, a 40-foot-tall running figure with uneven planes of glass and iron simulating the blur of rapid movement—but these pieces ended up in awkward parts of the gallery, serving mostly as brief distractions.

Sculptures in Derek Liddington's series “There is no more radical an act than that of working together” (2015) got central perches in each area, and for good reason. Liddington, working in collaboration with other Toronto-based artists (Cheyanne Turions, Chris Heller and Ulysses Castellanos), wrestled air-drying clay into three protean forms. He also displayed a found-brick sculpture in the gallery's courtyard. One of air-drying clay pieces resembles a wave of muscle, its supple lunge seizing up, hardening and cracking. Sooty black graphite has been scattered over it, like dirt on a shallow grave. Another, shown in the courtyard, suggests a frantically assembled fruit basket. When I was there, a spider descended onto the clay and then paused, seemingly joined to it for another moment that would soon be dead.

—Chris Randle