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Material Witnesses at Grizzly Grizzly

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While most of us wilt in the July heat, Austin, Texas-based artist Jeff Williams' solo show at Grizzly Grizzly comes to life. In *There is Not Anything which Returns to Nothing*, rough materials pit themselves against their organic adversaries. Lemon juice takes an acid bite out of metal, water dissolves cement. Bio matter blooms new fur by the hour and the small gallery space has the pleasantly fetid reek of a hothouse. In each piece, building materials are given over to the inevitable—albeit here accelerated—passage of time.

Upon entering the Chinatown gallery, a rapid dripping sound draws our attention to the far right-hand corner of the room. Comprised of a recycled cellulose and cement adobe brick under a mechanical drip, “Erosion Fountain” is the only kinetic piece in the show and also the most proprietary. As the water drips onto the brick, its spray mists beyond the limits of the sculpture to create a damp ring that fans out from the corner. The bulk of the water dribbles over the brick, draining into a 5-gallon bucket complete with a submersible pump, which sucks up the liquid to start the cycle anew. The rhythm is hypnotic, although the action of the drip/pump distracts slightly from its purpose—the erosion of the brick itself.

While “Erosion Fountain” might be an immediate attention-grabber, it is Williams' silent sculptures that pull the most precise punch. Blocking our entry into the rear half of the gallery stretches “Concrete Compression,” a plank of cast composite concrete anchored by a gallery pillar on either end. Prodded in the center by a zealously pumped hydraulic jack, its concrete surface bears hairline fractures traced in red marker. Just beyond this barrier sits a small, symmetrical sculpture. In “Rebar Corrosion,” four Plexiglas canisters rest atop a perfectly sized concrete plinth, their colored liquid contents alternately highlighting or obscuring the rebar poles at their core. The solution is cloudy, with sediment settling on the bottom and different oxidation reactions foaming or crystallizing at the top. Inside each earth-toned case, the rebar is variously assaulted by lemon juice (piss yellow), saltwater (rusty orange), vinegar (molasses-brown), and tap water (sickly green).

The effect produced in both “Concrete Compression” and “Rebar Corrosion” is subtle, gradual and then alarming: You wonder when the provoked concrete might call it a day and snap in an angry ‘pop,’ or wonder which toxic liquids are sealed behind a Plexi barrier no thicker than a user’s manual from Ikea. If you shy away from these objects out of anxiety, then you’re bound to get closer than ever a second later thanks to morbid curiosity.

Amidst all this dripping and cracking, one thing is not like the others. The photograph hanging on the right-hand wall presents a sterile sculpture of architectural samples traditionally used in model-making. At first, the photo has the effect of a before-and-after shot—a needless reminder that at one time, all the decaying materials



in the gallery were once new. But, gradually, it grows more complex. Though vaguely familiar, we realize that the materials in the photograph are not the same as the objects in the gallery. In practice, Williams builds these models, photographs them and then disassembles them. Because they never outlive their photo shoot, these models serve as a temporal impossibility, a reminder that only photography can hold time at bay. In real life, everything is always already breaking down.

While water, pressure, gravity, saline and alkaline wear against common construction materials, the effect of the show is greater than an exercise of simple subtraction. As the title suggests, *There is Not Anything which Returns to Nothing* seems less about diminishment than transfiguration. The crackling concrete belies surprising flexibility; the rusted rebar glows darkly in its salt water bath. Prodded by Williams' sculptures, we become acutely aware of our own bodies in thrall to time.

Through July 30. Grizzly Grizzly, 319 N. 11th St., Second Floor. grizzlygrizzly.com

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