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Instruments of Resurrection at Roots and Culture Contemporary Art Center

Cauleen Smith, Theaster Gates and other artists bring historical figures and other subjects to life in a show curated by Elizabeth Chodos. *By Lauren Weinberg*



Cauleen Smith, still from *Remote Viewing*, 2010.

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It's hard to discuss Cauleen Smith's *Remote Viewing* without blunting its impact. Let's just say that during the short video, something big is pushed into a pit in "Sheridan, Arkansas, circa 1959," then covered up as though it had never existed.

Despite this show's focus on figurative resurrection, Smith reenacts a shocking real-life burial. As she builds tension, cutting from construction equipment digging in the earth to two characters watching the excavation, the San Diego-based artist recalls both the Jim Crow era and the act of remembering. (Viewers probably won't notice another inspiration, 1970s land art, without curator Elizabeth Chodos's explanatory text.)

Remote Viewing is the first piece visitors see and the most dramatic—which renders the rest of "Instruments of Resurrection," consisting of new works by Chicago artists, one long anticlimax. In Theaster Gates's video installation *Dave: A Legendary Black Clay Superhero*, a choir sings texts written by David Drake, a 19th-century American slave who became a master potter. The singers' voices are amplified by speakers that Gates created out of sinks from Kohler, where he was a resident artist. Gates linked Drake and Kohler in fascinating ways in a solo show at the Milwaukee Art Museum last year, but without any context, his video is incomprehensible.

Pieces by Zachary Cahill, Aspen Mays and Mathew Paul Jinks also emphasize concepts over visual appeal. The best is Jinks's artist's book *Trauma Narrative #1*, an interview with a woman who witnessed the Sikh Massacre in New Delhi in 1984. While there's a disconnect between the text and accompanying photos, Jinks—like Smith—brings someone else's memory to life.

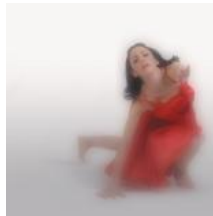
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