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Forget The Wreckage: Museums' Katrina Shows Look At How City Has Moved On

By Neda Ulaby – August 09, 2015



Willie Birch's *Crawfish Dwelling* is made from one of the many crawfish homes that Birch found in his backyard after Katrina. Courtesy of Willie Birch and Arthur Roger Gallery

The same problem bedeviled Russell Lord, curator of photographs at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Lord also decided against including explicit Katrina images in his anniversary show, "Ten Years Gone," partly, he says, because of what they could trigger.

"Psychologists and psychiatrists are kind of preparing for this moment and preparing for an onslaught of those kinds of images and the effect they might have on people in terms of PTSD," he says.

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So Lord went abstract. His show explores themes like time, memory, loss and transformation. One room in the show is filled with little bronze lumps about the size of a fist. They're grimy and filled with holes.

"They're crawfish dwellings," Lord explains. "They create these mounds for survival."

The artist, Willie Birch, is a New Orleans native who grew up kicking over dried crawfish mounds. In his un-air-conditioned studio in New Orleans' 7th Ward, Birch explains that he found more crawfish dwellings in his backyard after Katrina than he'd ever seen before, so he cast them in bronze.

"These are incredible little critters," he says. "So how can I use them? I can use them to make metaphor as a signifier for survival."