



Sammy Lee's "Baoli" (foreground) with "Mop" | II, III on the wall behind. / Libby Garon, courtesy of Walker Fine Art

Michael Warren and Walker Fine Art Display Artistic Code Makers

MICHAEL PAGLIA | FEBRUARY 5, 2020 | 7:59AM



Lines, shapes and symbols all convey narratives in strong shows at two Denver galleries.



At Walker Fine Art, gallery director Bobbi Walker and her crew, headed up by Libby Garon, have taken six artists, all of whom use the written word in some way, and put them together in *Synesthetic Ciphers*, a large and impressive group show.



It starts off with a bang: a monumental installation by Sammy Lee in the double-height atrium space right inside the front doors. A Colorado-based artist born in Korea, Lee has filled much of the floor with the architectonic construction "Baoli," which looks something like an elegantly composed children's playhouse but is actually based on the shape of a traditional Indian step-well. Several elements have been pushed together into a constructivist arrangement: There are rectangular cabinets and enclosures; a two-part staircase with landing, its steps reversing direction halfway up; and a loft stage topped with an arch. Made of plywood, the surfaces are beautiful, with the grain showing through the different tones of the staining used to finish the panels.

Though it passes for a sculpture, this accumulation of components is actually a stage set for a piece for three dancers that was choreographed by Lee, working with Kate Speer and Joowon Song. Beyond the construction is a set of three cast-paper reliefs that spell out "MOP" in calligraphy. Lee rubbed paper over deconstructed and reassembled signs to make the symbol that, seen upside down, forms the word "Poom." While the word "mop" does not exist in the Korean language, the word "poom" does, and it carries multiple, commonly known meanings. The dancers act out some of them in their performance, which you can see in a video by Drummond West. Lee is definitely a rising presence on the scene, and the Denver Art Museum has acquired the cast-paper work for its permanent collection.