

UPCOMING EDITOR'S PICK EVENTS



ARTS ENTERTAINMENT > VISUAL ARTS

'Desire Paths' charts a course for creativity at Dallas' Sweet Pass Sculpture Park

Feminist art collective Material Girls keeps alive the spirit of a fallen member.



"Desire Paths," an exhibition by the art collective Material Girls, is now on view at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park. It consists of six distinct benches designed by members of the group and inspired by ancient technologies. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)





By [Danielle Avram](#)

11:27 AM on Jul 7, 2021 CDT

Friendship is a powerful thing.

Every group of friends has its center: the person around whom everyone orbits, the one who keeps spirits high and energy flowing. For the feminist art collective Material Girls, that center was Devra Frelander, a sculptor, printmaker and video artist who died in 2019 following a bike accident.

In the wake of Frelander's death, the other members — Cameron Cameron, Claire Lachow, Gracelee Lawrence, Rachael Starbuck and Hilliary Gabryel, who are scattered among New York City, Los Angeles and Austin — had to figure out a way to operate as a collective of five, while keeping alive the spirit of the sixth member.

Postponed a year because of the pandemic, their latest exhibition, "Desire Paths," is now on view at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park, an open-air space in Trinity Groves run by Dallas-based artists Tamara Johnson and Trey Burns.

"Desire Paths' is the first exhibition we conceived and realized without Devra," the collective wrote in an email exchange. "In a lot of ways, it was a process of forging new pathways for us as a group. Making this show, especially through the pandemic, was a process of rediscovering how to work together without her. Every step required more



Material Girls members Rachael Starbuck (from left), Cameron Cameron, Hilliary Gabryel, Claire Lachow and Gracelee Lawrence gathered at Sweet Pass

deliberation, more communication and more patience.”

Sculpture Park in May. (Nan Coulter / Special Contributor)

The installation takes its name and conceptual premise from the idea of desire paths, which are unofficial footpaths created by repeated foot traffic that circumvent planned or paved routes. Such paths can be the bane of a landscape architect's practice, or a logical means of allowing for the natural flow of bodies through space.

The exhibition consists of six distinct benches, each inspired by ancient technologies, such as sundials, sails and dew collectors, that are activated by the elements of sun, wind, earth and water.

The benches are scattered throughout the park, connected via a meandering pathway of brightly colored rope. Next to each is a mirrored marker engraved with the corresponding artist's insignia. Viewers can either follow the suggested path or create their own, using the benches as places for meditation or conversation.

The collective collaborated on Freeland's memorial bench, which is inspired by "aether," a mystical fifth element that is said to fill the space beyond earth. It's fittingly located at the end of the path, a point at which you can either look back on the rest of the park or look forward and imagine what lies beyond.



The works in the "Desire Paths" exhibition are inspired by ancient technologies, such as sundials, that are activated by the elements of sun, wind, earth and water. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

Accompanying the show is a self-published zine, which loosely guides viewers through the conceptual underpinnings of the exhibition. Each artist is given her own spread and the insignias used in the show demarcate the individual entries. Interspersed throughout are quotes that ground the works and imagery. While there are several standouts, my favorite comes from American writer Rebecca Solnit:

“The body of the beloved is a landscape, but landscape is also a body; each is traveled in terms of the other, and thus the world is knit together, with those constellating lines of imagination.”

The landscapes of our lives are composed of our families and friends. The environmental landscapes we inhabit together, in turn, become a part of us. A house is not a home until it is inhabited. A place isn't easily navigable until it's repeatedly traveled by one person after another. A group of friends isn't a collective until each person finds their point in the constellation, working together to guide each other through the unknown.

Details

“Material Girls: Desire Paths” runs through July 31 at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park, 402 Fabrication St., Dallas. Hours are listed on the website or available by appointment. Free. For more information, visit

sweetpasssculpturepark.com.



[Danielle Avram](#), Special Contributor. Danielle Avram is a Dallas-based arts writer and curator.

[✉ artslife@dallasnews.com](mailto:artslife@dallasnews.com)