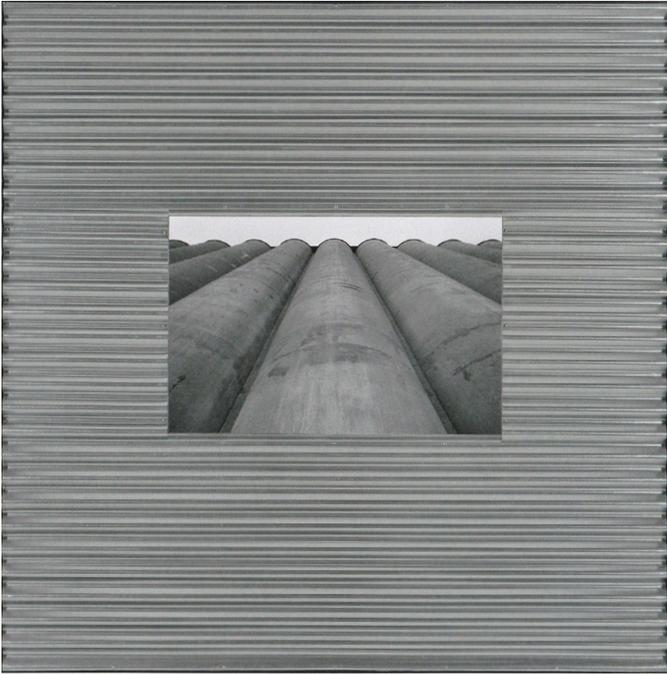


STRUCTURES, REMAINS
Gordon Anderson

August 7 - 23, 2014

Opening Reception: Thursday August 7, 7:00 - 9:30 pm



Gordon Anderson, *Malting Plant 5*, 2000. Photograph and corrugated steel.



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Structures:

Industrial architecture generates a reaction in people. For some it can be the negative connotations of pollution, or alternately, that their conception of beauty diverges from the massive, hulking and often stark features that make up the skylines, coasts and urban cores of industrial centres. Having grown up in Hamilton it was fitting to have to write a first year university paper on Charles Dickens' bleak descriptions of such sites featured in the classic, *Hard Times*. Dickens' Coketown is a dark and gloomy place; images of serpents of smoke, savagery, and madness are evoked as a direct commentary on the effects of the industrial revolution on the landscape of his native country. While reading these descriptions, and later writing about them, I couldn't help but feel like I was at home. As a child we often drove to Niagara to visit my grandparents and when returning to Hamilton the familiar sight of rusted smokestacks, countless steel and brick structures, and the fifty-foot flames spewing from the towering pipes of the steel mills, was the only sign I needed to recognize that I was home. In the past these seemingly harsh images were a welcomed sight. They symbolized jobs, prosperity, and most importantly, growth after a period of loss and a harsh economic downturn.

Gordon Anderson captures this reality in his work. Not just the grimy, soot covered industrial wastelands many associate with Hamilton and other factory towns, but also the aesthetic beauty of these areas. Many industrial structures are complex and intricate; feats of engineering and skilled work combined. To Anderson they are incredible sights of functionality that often seem to make no sense, like the twisting pipes and tubes of a refinery that seem almost comical in nature, a jumbled mess of steel that at first glance may appear to have no clear purpose. Anderson revels in this uncertainty. These structures, which he considers to be "real sculpture" are mechanical in nature and presume no meaning to those who view them. They have no intended emotional impact, this is left to the viewer to interpret. They simply exist, with no conscious sensitivity applied to their outward appearance. The rawness of this aesthetic gives it realness, a rugged appeal. Even people who find it ugly can still appreciate it on a technical level, identifying its functionality as the site of work and production.

In *Ohio 1* and *Ohio 2* (1996-97) Gordon captures two scenes all too familiar to residents of an industrial area—the somber colours, the juxtaposition of stagnant smokestacks beside towering structures of skeletal steel, and the movement of train cars below. However, there is an elegance to these rigid structures that allows light to flow through them; a movement to the winding tracks and curved pipes; a freedom in its undefined nature. These buildings just exist. They take on a life of their own, and though their stark and cold presence, there is a warmth in the colours Anderson chooses to paint them in.

Colour choice is important to Anderson, as highlighted in *Stelco* (1998), a large painting depicting the profile of this industrial site as seen from the harbour. The colours are deliberately spring-like, putting a whimsical touch on what could be



Installation View, 2009. Christopher Cutts Gallery

traditionally viewed as a dreary landscape. The notion of spring as a time for fertility, growth, and reproduction is not lost on the subject matter; this is a place where things are created.

Malting Plant 5 (2000), a photograph framed in corrugated steel, illustrates two common materials used in Anderson's subjects and also the correlation between them. The ripples of steel are mimicked in the shape of the malting plant. Shadows in the photograph are permanent, but on the steel surrounding it they move with the light, lending fluidity to the image. Conjuring waves, this gives an organic feel to an otherwise manmade object.

The dichotomy between industrial and aesthetic presence is echoed in both *Hamilton 3* (2002) and *Hamilton 6* (2003). Both images evoke battleships with their sinister collection of pipes and protrusions, but these factories produce the most fragile of products, glass. This conflicting relationship is also mimicked in the bold use of black and white.

At first glance *Indians* (2007) may seem unrelated, but the construction of the stadium shows many similar features to the subjects of Anderson's other works on display. The support pillars resemble smokestacks and the rows of seats are much like the sweeping railway tracks in *Ohio 1 & 2*. The stadium is concrete, metal, and plastic—the materials of industry—its existence predicated on pure functionality. Compared to the other work in the exhibition, its aesthetic appeal is highlighted. Yet, there is still a desolate and empty air about this photograph.

Inspired by Canadian painters of the WWI era, Anderson considered their work to be one of his earliest childhood influences, for words meant little to him in comparison to images. Coming from a long line of military men, Anderson's work is a testament to their legacy. It aims to show the connection between the plight of war and the rise of industry. In essence, how these men's sacrifices made our prosperity possible. This is one explanation for Anderson's love of these structures. He doesn't see them as dirty, polluting structures; he sees them as monuments to the past as he preserves their beauty for the future.

Ian Walker

Gordon Anderson graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1989 and for the past fifteen years has exhibited in Toronto, Chicago and Frankfurt, Germany. Christopher Cutts Gallery has represented Anderson since 1998.

Ian Walker is a Hamilton native, amateur local historian and lover of art. He has a deep connection to the industrial history and architecture of the city. He studied Classics at McMaster University. He enjoys good food, good coffee, and is probably out right now enjoying Hamilton by bicycle.

HAMILTON ARTISTS INC

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