

The Industrial Image: Preserving a Deteriorating Identity

by

Sarah Loch-Test

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Director of Thesis: Ken Bova

Major Department: School of Art and Design

Reclamation is essential in preserving the history and changing identity of America's Rust Belt. This body of work uses photography and historic events as material that can be repurposed. Imagery is preserved when fired into enameled metal surfaces. My jewelry work reflects on events that have and continue to shape the identity of Rust Belt cities.

Photographers have documented industry from the height of manufacturing and into its decline. When no longer used, industrial structures have two fates. If neglected their deterioration negatively impacts attitudes of the surrounding community. Repurposed factories honor the past in a post-industrial era. I cite examples of both situations and use them to illustrate the resiliency of Rust Belt communities.

The Industrial Image: Preserving a Deteriorating Identity

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by

Sarah Loch-Test

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by

Sarah Loch-Test

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF
THESIS:

Ken Bova, MFA

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Kelly Adams, MFA

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Mi-Sook Hur, MFA

COMMITTEE MEMBER:

Tim Lazure, MFA

DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL
OF ART AND DESIGN:

Michael Drought, MFA

DEAN OF THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL:

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | v |
| GLOSSARY | vi |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: INDUSTRY’S INFLUENCE OF LOCAL CULTURE | 3 |
| CHAPTER 2: REPERCUSSIONS OF THE RISE AND FALL OF INDUSTRY | 6 |
| CHAPTER 3: IMAGE OF INDUSTRY | 9 |
| Photographic Depictions in America’s Rust Belt | 9 |
| Ruin Porn: The Consequences of Current Trends | 13 |
| CHAPTER 4: A REPURPOSED IDENTITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF REUSE | 17 |
| Völkingen Hutte (Ironworks) | 18 |
| Carrie Blast Furnace and Alloy Pittsburgh | 22 |
| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION | 25 |
| REFERENCES | 26 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| FIGURE 1: <i>City Greenery</i> (necklace)..... | 4 |
| FIGURE 2: <i>Factory Blues: Chicago</i> (brooch)..... | 5 |
| FIGURE 3: <i>A fire tug fights flames on the Cuyahoga River near downtown Cleveland</i> | 6 |
| FIGURE 4: <i>LBJ Comic Regarding Cuyahoga River</i> | 7 |
| FIGURE 5: <i>Cuyahoga on Fire</i> (brooch)..... | 8 |
| FIGURE 6: Towering smokestacks of the Otis Steel Co..... | 9 |
| FIGURE 7: <i>Salle de Soufflantes</i> (necklace)..... | 10 |
| FIGURE 8: <i>Factory Valleys: Cleveland, OH</i> | 11 |
| FIGURE 9: <i>Decaying Factory</i> (brooch)..... | 12 |
| FIGURE 10: <i>Rouge-Detroit</i> | 13 |
| FIGURE 11: <i>The Former Packard Plant</i> | 15 |
| FIGURE 12: <i>Reclamation</i> (brooch)..... | 16 |
| FIGURE 13: Völklinger Hutte during the Urban Art Biennale..... | 19 |
| FIGURE 14: <i>Paradise</i> (necklace)..... | 20 |
| FIGURE 15: Paradise and Coke Factory, Völklinger Hutte..... | 21 |
| FIGURE 16: Installation in Carrie Furnaces (by Edith Abetya)..... | 22 |
| FIGURE 17: Installation in Carrie Furnaces (by Will Scarlough)..... | 23 |
| FIGURE 18: <i>Industry Sustained</i> (brooch)..... | 24 |

Glossary

Blast furnace A metallurgical furnace used for smelting to produce industrial metals such as steel.

Brownfields An area of land possibly contaminated from industrial or commercial use. Sites must be cleaned up prior to redevelopment.

Carnegie, Andrew Owner of the Carnegie Steel Company based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He bought Edgar Thomson Steel Works in North Braddock, Pennsylvania in 1875, one of the few area mills still in operation. He also owned nearby Homestead Works.

Carrie Furnaces The blast furnaces of Homestead Works, built in 1881 and owned by Andrew Carnegie. Two of the furnaces remain as National Historic Landmarks and have been repurposed to house a steel history museum and art installations.

Chicago, Illinois The largest Midwest city, located on the southwestern shores of Lake Michigan. Considered the birthplace of the skyscraper, Chicago's diverse industrial base includes machinery, publishing and food processing.

China Paint A ceramic painting/coloring product that is applied in layers on a glazed (enameled) surface.

Cleveland, Ohio A city located on the shores of Lake Erie in northeast Ohio. The steel industry took advantage of Cleveland's location between iron ore deposits in Michigan and Minnesota and coal in Pennsylvania. Although the economy is more reliant on healthcare and service industries, manufacturing still has a presence in Cleveland.

Coke/Coking Plant Coke is a high carbon content fuel used in smelting iron ore in a blast furnace, formed naturally or manufactured. Natural deposits were mined throughout Pennsylvania. Coking plants, like at Völklinger Hutte, heat coal to concentrate the carbon and create coke ideal for steel production.

Detroit, Michigan Nicknamed the Motor City, Detroit suffered major population loss when the auto industry collapsed. Recent city revitalization has occurred, but there are still many neighborhoods that remain distressed.

Enamel The application of or process of applying glass fused to metal in a kiln. There are many techniques including sifting, baisse-taille and plique-a-jour. I use enamel to render imagery and add color and texture to metal surfaces.

Frick, Henry Clay Chairman of Carnegie Steel Company and founder of H. C. Frick & Company coke manufacturing company. Frick was an art patron who donated collections and property to the cities of New York and Pittsburgh.

Iron ore A mineral substance that yields metallic iron when heated with coke, an essential resource for iron and steel industries.

Liquid Enamel An industrial material constituted of glass (enamel) and ceramic media. It can be used as a base or subsequent coat, applied by brushing or dipping. I use it on copper and steel to create a texture similar to peeling paint or a rusty surface. By sifting powdered enamel over liquid I can create a crackled pattern.

Photo Transfer Decals Decals are made by printing black and white images on water-slide decal paper and applied to an enameled surface. The iron oxide from the printer toner fires permanently into the enamel, often resulting in sepia toned images.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Pittsburgh was a leader in steel production and other industries including aluminum, glass and electronics. Education, healthcare, computing and green energy sectors are reinventing the city in a post-industrial age. Steel mills once operated 24-hours a day, causing record levels of air pollution. Clean air and civic revitalization initiatives began before industrial decline.

Plique-a-Jour An enameling technique in which enamel is applied to openings in a metal structure. I use Plique-a-Jour when referencing precious natural resources.

Rust Belt/Bowl The economic region of the United States concentrated in the formerly dominant industrial states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The phrase has become synonymous with industrial decline in heavy manufacturing, namely automobile and steel industries along the Great Lakes.

Völklinger Hutte Located in the town of Völklingen in Saarland, Germany the Ironworks was the first industrial UNESCO World Heritage Site. Iron production in Völklingen dates back to 1873 and many innovations occurred there.

INTRODUCTION

The dramatic rise and decline of manufacturing in the Great Lakes region during the twentieth century defines the identity of cities and inhabitants in the heartland of the United States. Industry has influenced local culture and national reputation while having a tense relationship with the natural environment. As industry's presence has diminished unemployment struggles have risen and vacant facilities have been left vulnerable to encroaching nature and deterioration. An opportunity arises for communities to reclaim their identity by reintegrating industrial remnants into present day life.

Artists find inspiration in industrial sites, depicting or reimagining the identity of these places with their work. Photography was initially used to boast industrial pride to the rest of the nation through magazine publications and New Deal funded projects. It later captured environmental catastrophes, including industry's death and decay. Although the work of contemporary artists including Sharon Massey, Scott Goss and Dan Kuhn, resonate with me, I focus on organizations that have repurposed industrial sites.

Research led me to discover a mirrored situation in factories throughout Western Germany that have been preserved as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. I had the opportunity to visit Völklinger Hutte in Saarland, Germany during the summer of 2015. The photographs from my trip have been used in my work as I consider why this site has been salvaged and how it contrasts to the Rust Belt situation.

The changing presence of industry and how it informs the identity of communities is depicted in my enamel and jewelry work. In referencing history and specific photographic images, photo transfer decals allow me to reproduce an image and fire it into enamel. In other instances shapes are extracted from iconic photographs and used in

a piece of jewelry. While intimate details of factory interiors are combined with their publicly visible exteriors, I also include elements of natural landscape to contrast with industrial scenes. There is value and beauty in the rust that has grown over the industrial heartland; it is preserved in this body of work.

CHAPTER 1

INDUSTRY'S INFLUENCE ON LOCAL CULTURE

The growth of industry has a direct effect on how cities are shaped and where and how people live. People's perspective of and reaction to nature and a pre-industrial world have been shaped by industry. In steel producing cities, like Cleveland, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, industry sprouted along the banks of the lakes and rivers enabling transport of raw materials. This left inland areas for residential and recreational purposes.

The lives of steelworkers and their families were deeply influenced as their neighborhoods developed in close proximity to the furnaces. Steel production in Homewood, Pennsylvania influenced more than just the most mundane activities. The direction of the wind would have determined whether one hung clean laundry on an outside clothesline. Instead of leaving fresh flowers people ritually cleaned the soot that built up on gravestones.

Heavy industry on the waterfront was sharply contrasted with the establishment of parks and nature reserves. Grass-root efforts of 1966 Cleveland east-siders ensured the preservation of Shaker Parklands from being mowed down for a freeway. As downtown expanded eastward in the late 19th century the city designated the area for residents to enjoy diverse natural habitats. Some of the parks dotting Pittsburgh bear the names of their wealthy donors. It is ironic that chairman of Carnegie Steel Company, Henry Clay Frick, had willed his land so Pittsburgh citizens could have a place to escape city and industrial noise.



Figure 1: *City Greenery* (necklace)
Sterling Silver, Copper, Brass, Enamel
2" x 1 3/4", 2015

City Greenery reflects on the sanctioning of land for green space within city limits. Here, I differentiate between natural and manmade influences in the urban landscape by using multiple textures in a piece. The cityscape silhouette is a combination of Chicago, Cleveland and Pittsburgh - Rust Belt cities where land use is a shared concern. Plique-a-jour is a historic technique in which transparent enamel is applied without a metal backing, permitting light to pass through the glass. This technique is used in *City Greenery* to highlight nature's preciousness under a dark and gritty cityscape.

Author Edward McClelland describes how steel mills in Chicago “created their own suns, their own skies, their own weather” (McClelland, p. 93). The sun couldn’t penetrate Pittsburgh skies, making noon as dark as midnight. Clear, blue skies meant the “world was coming to an end” to people who associated smoke darkened skies with the promise of a paycheck. People had come to perceive the natural world as it appeared through an industrial filter.



Figure 2: *Factory Blues: Chicago* (brooch) (Front and back detail)
Bronze, Copper, Enamel, Photo Decal
5 ½” x 3” x 2 ½”, 2016

The enamel in *Factory Blues: Chicago* is a collaged decal image of blast furnaces and iron ore, a natural material used in steel production. Wire structures cross over the enamel like the industrial cranes that lift raw material from river barges. The enamel’s deep blue color and organic shape reference the blurred distinction between nature and industry. Proud of its trains and moving bridges, the pierced back of the brooch was designed from Chicago’s transportation system.

CHAPTER 2 REPERCUSSIONS OF THE RISE AND FALL OF INDUSTRY

At their own environmental expense, Rust Belt cities made the skyscraper era possible. Cleveland suffered a series of environmental foibles that negatively impacted its national image. Many cities built around a central industry had similar fates from factory closures and population loss.

Cleveland's growing pollution was seen as a worthwhile sacrifice for the prosperity industry bestowed on the city. The Cuyahoga River was treated as a sewer by the factories that cluttered its banks and wildlife was exterminated by hot machinery being quenched in the waters. Defying scientific conventions, the river never froze and caught fire on several occasions.

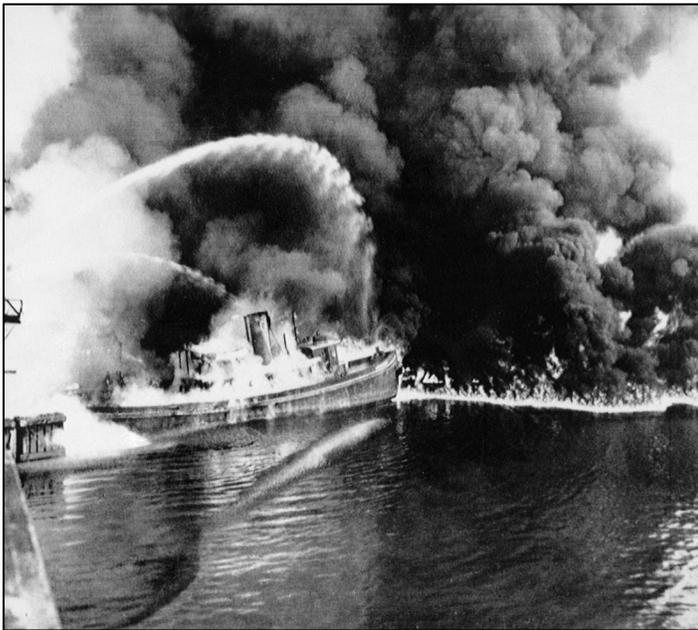


Figure 3: *A fire tug fights flames on the Cuyahoga River near downtown Cleveland on June 25, 1952.* (Special Collections, Cleveland State University Library)

The last fire occurred at an opportune moment in 1969 causing it to be the focus of a *Time Magazine* feature on the growing environmental movement. *Time* used an infamous photograph of a ship engulfed in flames taken during a larger fire in 1952

(Figure 3); no photographs from the '69 fire are known to exist. The '69 publication helped fuel the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, which pressured cities to clean up their soil and water. The Clean Water Act of 1972 helped fund the clean up of the Cuyahoga River but didn't remove Cleveland from jokes and political cartoons like Figure 4 by illustrator Bill Roberts.

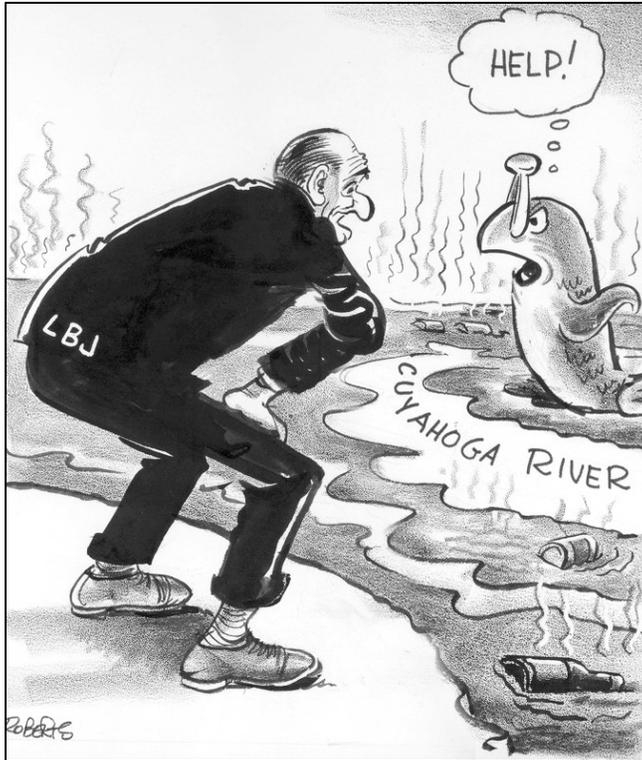


Figure 4: *LBJ Comic Regarding Cuyahoga River*
Bill Roberts, 1964
(Middle Bury College)



Figure 5: *Cuyahoga on Fire* (brooch)
Sterling Silver, Copper, Bronze, Enamel
3 ½" x 2 ½", 2016

I drew the overall shape of *Cuyahoga on Fire* from the infamous photograph of the 1952 fire. By layering multiple colors of enamel in the pique-a-jour pieces an iridescent effect was created, like water on fire. The lower enamel depicts the path of the crooked river through the city.

Initially horrifying for the city of Cleveland, the burning river has become a defining moment. Cleveland is in on the joke by commemorating the event with their annual Burning River Fest and a local beer of the same name. The burning river is one example of an industrial city embracing its history as part of its identity.

CHAPTER 3 IMAGE OF INDUSTRY

Photographic Depictions in America's Rust Belt

Photographers have documented industrial sites and their changing identity throughout the past century. The purpose of this photography shifts context from advertisement to social awareness, to an obsession with ruin and destruction. Prior to World War II businessmen carefully curated the identity of their steel and car towns by contracting photographers to shape public attitudes. After industrial decline, identity became something forced upon places from camera wielding outsiders. The human relationship with machinery is witnessed as it transitions from factory workers, to the unemployed, to those who are the left-behind as caretakers of derelict edifices.

Having found beauty in the cold aesthetics of factories Great Depression era, artists presented industry as an object of national and economic pride. In 1927 Margaret

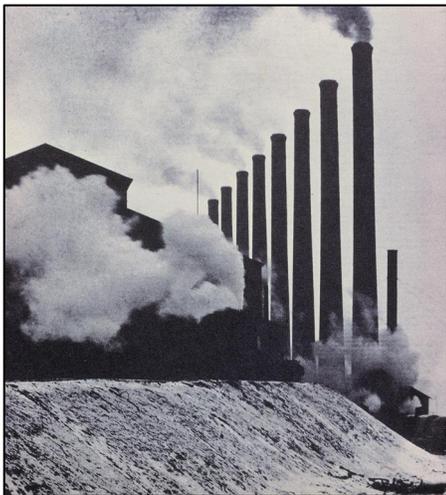


Figure 6: *Towering smokestacks of the Otis Steel Co., Cleveland, Ohio*
Margaret Bourke-White, c. 1925
(University of California, San Diego)

Bourke-White's images of Cleveland's Otis Steel

Company was published in *The Story of Steel*, a booklet for stockholders (Fig. 6). The same year

Charles Sheller portrayed the Ford plant at River

Rouge, Michigan as a monumental force. Used for

advertising, Sheeler's images are void of human

presence despite being taken at the height of

production of the Model A Ford. This detachment

from the harsh, everyday realities of factory work

emphasized the subject's aesthetic qualities. Social and environmental commentary was

not yet critical to these images.



Figure 7: *Salle de Soufflantes (Blowing Engine Hall)* (necklace)
Copper, Brass, Enamel, Photo Decal
2 ½" x 2 ½", 2015

“*Salle de Soufflantes*” necklace features a decal cropped from a photograph taken in the blowing engine hall of Germany’s Völklinger Hutte. By using a portion of my original photograph, the ambiguity of the facility and location is emphasized. The image has repeating shapes and is monochromatic, characteristics of many photographs whose purpose was to celebrate industry. Handmade bolts contrast with the image of machinery.

As regional industry declined photographers could no longer ignore social and environmental contexts. In 1979, two years before the terms ‘Rust Belt’ and ‘Rust Bowl’ were coined, the director of the Akron Museum of Art recruited photographer Lee Friedlander to document the American industrial region (Fig. 8). The artist narrowed his

focus to Ohio and Pennsylvania, where steel mills and tire plants were beginning to struggle with maintaining production. A few years later, photographer David Plowden found Chicago's flat terrain to be the perfect stage for an urban industrial environment.

In the wake of The Clean Water Act and establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency earlier in the decade, Friedlander called attention to the environment with his images. Though Friedlander photographed *Factory Valleys* through all four seasons, the land appears inhospitable and depleted. Instead of selling the virtues of industry Friedlander captured the reality of his experience.

Plowden published his compilation of Chicago images, *Industrial Landscapes*, in 1985. Like other cities, Chicago was facing a decline in industry.

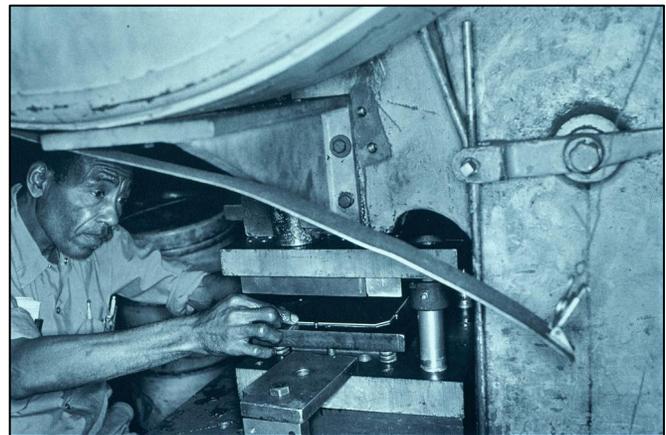


Figure 8: *Factory Valleys: Cleveland, OH.*
Lee Friedlander, 1979-1980
(University of California, San Diego)

Aware that the face of industry was changing, Plowden captured everything - eerie terrains of concrete, still smoking blast furnaces, empty locker room interiors, stoic workers at the assembly line, abandoned steel mills and train tracks that are half hidden by weeds and grass. Nostalgia is evident in blurred images of assembly line workers, a lone vending machine, and piles of worker's safety shields.

Reality of decline had not sunk in yet despite the work of photographers like Plowden and Friedlander. In the mid 80's industry was still pictured as "intensely dramatic places choked with smokestacks, steel mills and railroad yards, a world seething

with obvious productivity, and sweat and grime” (Plowden p. ix-x). The images of a post-industrial Rust Belt replicate the conventions used by earlier photographers. Compositions of repetitive machinery and vast interiors reappear but now with a decayed veneer.

Decaying Factory shows contrasting views of factory scenes placing the piece between industrial productivity and collapse. A line of smokestacks in bright red stands out against a gritty, faded interior with frayed edges.



Figure 9: *Decaying Factory* (brooch)
Copper, Steel, Liquid Enamel, Bronze, Photo Decals
3 ½" x 1 ½", 2016

Ruin Porn: The Consequences of Current Trends

‘Ruin Porn’ is a current photography trend in documenting decaying man-made structures that are too expensive to maintain, repurpose, or demolish. Most locations exploited in Ruin Porn are urban or industrial scenes of the Mid-West and Appalachian regions. Like the work of New Deal era photography, these images rely on industrial architecture to create structure and pattern within the photograph frame. These revisited elements are now ornamented with peeling paint, graffiti, roots cracking through concrete, and piles of discarded material. Ruin porn exposes an embarrassing side of local identity along with the communities’ ambivalence or inability to correct it. Photographers in this genre, some of whom act as sociologists with a camera, are seduced by the chaos of regrowth against decaying organization.



Figure 10: *Rouge-Detroit*, 2013
Andrew Moore

Detroit Disassembled was a 2010 exhibition of artist Andrew Moore’s photography. Moore’s *Rouge-Detroit* (Fig. 10) is an interior of a Ford factory, similar in

composition to a Sheeler photograph but long deserted. Author David Giffels described the images as “hyper real and entirely familiar to those of us who exist in cities that continue to struggle back up from a collapse” (Giffels p. 235).

Ruin Porn is criticized for sensationalizing urban and industrial decay without offering an explanation or solution. The lack of any human figure within the camera frame is a problem for Ruin Porn critics. Portraying the down-and-out residents of these forgotten places would shock viewers, distracting from the romanticism of decay. In turn, accusations of Ruin Porn can be used to “evade responsibility for a city’s shabbiness by scolding outsiders for noticing it” (McClelland p.257).

Bridging the gap between earlier photographers and Ruin Porn is work that approaches ruin photography within a social or environmental context. *Modern Ruins* by Shaun O’Boyle documents the industrial history of the region. He considers the larger context of his subject matter by including neglected houses and ravished hillsides. Geoff Manaugh’s “Introduction” to *Modern Ruins* explains the fascination with ruin photography. As a population we have “become so unconcerned with our own long-term well being that we can now watch ourselves being destroyed - and even enjoy that sight as a spectacle,” (Manaugh p.ix) evidenced in the sheer amount and frequency of ruin photography.

Combining photography and experience as a sociologist, Chilean-born Rust Belt outsider, Camilo José Vergara’s 1999 *American Ruins* compiles his research from around the United States. Detroit, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois play major roles in *American Ruins*, with other Rust Belt towns making appearances. His work records “urban decay with a combined sense of respect, loss, and admiration for its peculiar beauty” (Vergara

p. 11). Vergara gives value to ruins as strong symbols essential to understanding America. The United States, whose reputation often includes adjectives like progressive, resilient and innovative, is also the world leader in abandoned and degraded buildings.



Figure 11: *The Former Packard Plant: 1991 and 2012*
Camillo José Vergara

Vergara's photographs show the evolution of buildings like the old Packard Plant. The plant cuts through the center of an east side Detroit neighborhood with empty lots of grass as most of its immediate neighbors (Fig. 11). Packard never recovered from shifts in production during World War II and the site was abandoned, only to be visited by metal scrappers and rave parties. Inside are piles of discarded items, outside skies are blue and weeds grow from rooftops.

Vergara vividly describes a 'Utopic Ruin' setting in which the old Packard Plant is colonized. He suggests turning most of downtown Detroit into an Urban Ruins park, a combination of museum for rusty remnants and nature preserve.

Since industrial decline, photographs coming from the Rust Belt give nature and the environment a significant presence. Beyond the attraction to industrial decay is hope for revitalization. I use nature to symbolize the region's resiliency. *Reclamation* shows a building interior yielding to time and nature. The sgraffito technique was used to draw through unfired liquid enamel, simulating peeling paint and crumbling bricks - common features in Ruin Porn. Semi-transparent wildflowers were painted over the crumbling wall background. The flower is a variety of mustard seed used to extract toxins from



brownfields (former industrial sites), representing a positive future.

Constructed from bronze wire, the brooch back mimics broken beams inside these forgotten places.

Figure 12: *Reclamation* (brooch)
(Front and back detail)
Copper, Bronze, Liquid Enamel, China Paint
3" x 1 ¼" x ½", 2016

CHAPTER 4

A REPURPOSED IDENTITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF REUSE

The Rust Belt is characterized by a compulsion to salvage and reuse. Therefore it is appropriate that reuse be practiced on a massive scale by converting the use of existing industrial structures.

In contrast to the plight of the Packard Plant, there are several examples of repurposed industrial structures throughout the Rust Belt and its European counterpart. Although many of the steel mills have cooled and production lines stopped, industry continues to shape the identity of a place. As hope of factory doors reopening dissipates, neglected industrial structures propagate a negative sense of identity. Communities face a challenge of what to do with these buildings and plots of land so as not to ignore their history.

Reuse of industrial buildings is crucial because demolition is often too expensive. Land is not fit for agriculture or residential purposes unless extensive soil remediation is undertaken. Pittsburgh factories and sites throughout Germany exemplify successful transformation and integration of the post-industrial landscape into a new era.

Völklinger Hutte (Ironworks)

America's Rust Belt is surpassed by its counter part, the Ruhrgebiet region of western Germany, in repurposing industrial complexes. German coal mines and steel mills suffered closures in the 1960's and 70's with the added drama from World War II. Maintenance had already been complicated by bombings, changes in occupying forces, and war effort production. German communities whose identities were shaped by the industrial landscape faced the challenge of how to repurpose industrial structures.

After complete closure in the 1980's portions of Völklinger Hutte were immediately deemed historical monuments. The Ironworks' presence in Völklingen's skyline was so definitive to the town that residents refused to part with it. Comprehensive measures were taken to repurpose the site and retain its rich history. Important features like the sintering plant and blast furnace are accessible from walkways. Visitors are able to explore while viewing art and learning about the history of Völklinger Hutte.



Figure 13: Völklinger Hutte during the Urban Art Biennale, 2015

I had the opportunity to visit Völklinger Hutte, the first of many industrial centers in western Germany to earn the distinction of UNESCO World Heritage site. These places now serve as museums, music venues and galleries to the public. During my visit Völklinger Hutte was hosting the Urban Art Biennale 2015. Dynamic figures and bright colors contrasted with the rusty steel mill. The photo, Figure 13, shows a cartoonish character with iconic smokestacks in the distance. Völklinger Hutte got my attention as a more productive use of a defunct facility than one only visited by looters and ravers. It is satisfying to know that nature and industrial relics have found harmony. The extensive repurposing of Germany's nonoperational industrial buildings is an interesting model that organizations in the US might borrow.



Figure 14: *Paradise* (necklace) (Front and back detail)
Copper, Pre-enameled Steel, Enamel, China Paint, Photo Decals
2" x 3", 2015

In *Paradise*, an image taken of the Vöklinger Ironworks coke plant was altered for the decal on the front of the necklace. China paints were used to exaggerate the colors of plants growing amongst the rusty metal structure. The backside has signage from the Ironworks' interior, obscured by the corrugated pattern of the metal.

The Paradise garden at Völklinger Hutte is an accidental nature reserve in an industrial setting - something of Camilo José Vergara's dreams. A lack of human activity for twenty-five years allowed nature to run wild around the coke plant. Visitors are now invited to explore a 33,000 square meter garden that reinvents industrial culture.



Figure 15: Paradise and Coke Factory, Völklinger Hutte, 2015

Carrie Blast Furnace and Alloy Pittsburgh

Southeast of downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Carrie Blast Furnace is a reminder of the community's steel producing past. Although Pittsburgh has entered a new era of technology, the industrial history of the region endures as a source of local pride. Remaining structures still define the landscape and are preserved as national landmarks, but their function must evolve with Pittsburgh in order to remain relevant to the city.



Figure 16: Installation in Carrie Furnaces for Alloy Pittsburgh
Edith Abetya, 2013
(Photographed by Heather Tabacchi)

The artist collective, Alloy Pittsburgh, practices reuse on a grand scale by installing temporary site-based artwork in the Carrie Furnaces. The project revealed “how art can engage in a meaningful way with the world of industry” (Shriner p.10) while celebrating the history and exploring possible futures of industrial sites.

Installations by Edith Abetya and Will Scarlough demonstrate the range of work done by Alloy artists in 2013. Abetya captured human presence, history and the passing of time in her installation of clothing woven into metal structures (Fig. 16). The colorful plastic balls Scarlough placed throughout signify the site's resiliency (Fig. 17).



Figure 17: Installation in Carrie Furnaces for Alloy Pittsburgh
Will Scarlough, 2013
(Treadingart.com)

Lacking preserved structures like Carrie Furnaces, Detroit artists use abandoned properties to respond to extensive urban blight. Discarded items are transformed into outdoor installations that address economic divide and homelessness. Many projects also offer hope for Detroit's future. For *Flower House* florists filled a dilapidated house with living plants to bring beauty to residents and spur conversations about sustainability.



Figure 18: *Industry Sustained* (brooch) (Front and back detail)
Copper, Steel, Liquid Enamel, China Paint, Photo Decal
2" x 3", 2016

Like the projects described *Industry Sustained* suggests regrowth and reuse through the paired imagery. A decal of industrial chimneys was applied to salvaged steel. It is visually less important than the wildflowers painted around it. Compared to *Reclamation* (Fig. 12), nature appears more robust in this piece.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

My work forms a narrative yet to be completed. Though still evolving, the locations discussed are impacted by old and new industries. The United States continues to grapple with nostalgia for the height of the manufacturing era, making relevant lessons of reclamation of place and identity. Contributions from organizations and artists will be valuable in the future. I look forward to seeing new creative activity come out of the industrial heartland.

Rusted metal was not used in this series of work. The industrial heartland has experienced enough rust. My chosen materials of copper, steel and enamel are a more respectful way of paying homage to the region.

The human relationship to nature is still of interest to me - how we use, abuse and reconcile with it where we live and work. Natural elements played a large part in this body of work because of the tension between environment and industry in the Rust Belt. Harmonious co-existence is ultimately temporary and I will continue to explore this idea in my studio.

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