

Rethinking Pittsburgh's Industrial Legacy

Artists Image Resource

April 16 – May 7, 2011

Leslie Golomb, curator

The industrial legacy did not end with de-industrialization. The contemporary works on display here are informed by the post-industrial environment or the specter of new post-industrial effects as caused by present day large scale industry. Matthew Buchholz reimagines the past against the grain of received histories, and *The Howling Mob Society* reinscribes the landmarks of the 1877 railroad strike onto Pittsburgh's streets. These alternate histories both argue for different interpretations of past events, and draw attention to the constructed character of "standard" histories that omit the long-range consequences, both environmental and social, of industrial capitalism. Patricia Bellan-Gillen and John Ritter recognize that similar opportunities and costs are at stake in the current boom in natural gas drilling. Crystala Armagost, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Nick Satinover, and Bill Yund address the impact of industrial and post-industrial settings on the people who live there: ruined towns, damaged bodies, and economic emptiness. As described in Martin Langford's work, the industrial landscape consumes itself and leaves behind only its material decay. Shawn Gilheeneey's work is an exploration of that decay in abstraction, and Shaun Slifer reminds us in a simple reproducible statement that coal is never clean. And as all of these works ponder the state of things that industry has proscribed, Hannah Reiff's guide for urban farming imagines an alternative.

Besides sharing a focus on the question of industry's effects, these artists' works all engage with printmaking traditions. Throughout history the capacity to produce and circulate information has been a contributing factor to societal change; by creating the possibilities of alternate discourses, whether public or private, the mere presence of these technologies has had a profound impact on social relations. In situations where printmaking has been used to purposefully influence the ways that people think, it has proven to be a persuasive tool.

These works embody an affinity between printmaking's political possibilities and its formal ones. As a means of social engagement, these pieces are expressions of the artists' impulses to affect our understandings of the costs and risks at hand. Most of these works are made with or incorporate traditional print processes, including lithography, etching, silk screen, and letterpress. The formal characteristics of print processes signify the prospect of community and public awareness leading to social change. Subject, style and process converge on an aesthetic position that is simultaneously a political position.

In addition to the contemporary works, five vintage lithographs and one drypoint made in the late 19th and early 20th century are on display. These prints depict the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Homestead Strike, the Johnstown Flood and the Edgar Thompson Works. Created by both national and regional artists, these prints were marketed across the country as part of a nation-building project in which events in Pittsburgh would have held interest elsewhere as well. Notably, both of the strikes were landmarks in labor history and while illustrations of news events such as the strikes and flood would have

been produced and distributed quickly to a national audience, they also would have held special interest for local customers, particularly supporters of the labor movement.

The aim of this exhibit is to draw attention to those legacies that are at risk of being ignored or forgotten. The various perspectives of the included artists not only represent different expressive modes but also reveal the ways in which industry's presence has recently stimulated personal responses. By juxtaposing two groups of work created more than a hundred years apart, *Rethinking Pittsburgh's Industrial Legacy* engages with the persistent claims that industry makes on the quality of the lives of people touched by it, their health and home impacted by its long-term material and psychological effects.

Leo Hsu
Assistant to the Curator

Vintage prints:

Burning of Union Depot During the Railroad Riot, July 21st and 22nd, 1877, Pittsburgh, PA, c. 1887.

Otto Krebs; Pittsburgh
Chromolithograph

The Edgar Thompson Works, Braddock, PA. 1923.

Otto Kuhler
Drypoint

The Great Battle of Homestead. 1892.

Edwin Rowe
Lithograph

The Great Conemaugh Valley Disaster, Flood and Fire at Johnstown, PA, c. 1889.

Kurz & Allison; Chicago
Chromolithograph

Johnstown, PA. 1881.

Philadelphia Publishing House
Tinted Lithograph