

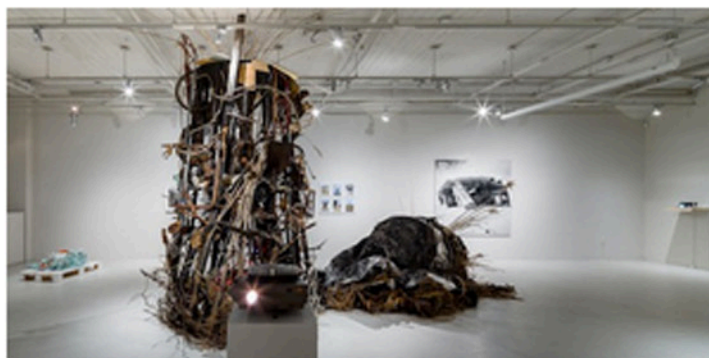
From the Ruins...

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Since the future was invented as a rational concept in time, relieved of its superstitious portents and omens during the Enlightenment, ruins have been relegated to picturesque monuments of the past in the present. Ruins came to represent a second-order past, not to be dwelt upon too long in a modernist lurch toward utopic ends. Ironically, given its ideal of progress, the fragmentary nature of modern existence continues to swing perpetually from the shock of the new to the dread of possible end and back again. Its ruins are not stable representations of the past but a constantly recycled aggregate of ideals, constructions, habitats, and tools that indict the present with its historical and potential future demise.

Curated by Jane Ursula Harris, *From the Ruins...* does an exceptional job of keeping the meaning and materiality of ruins in aesthetic flux, turning up all sorts of social and political meanings, almost as afterthoughts, from the heady landfill of our recent past's ambitions. Abigail DeVille's "Haarlem Tower of Babel" (2012)



From the Ruins... (2015). Installation. Photo by Rafael Gamo.

anchors the exhibit with its heavily encrusted height and width. DeVille has articulated three wooden frames with cast off and often rusted-through machines like bicycle parts, along with domestic items such as crockery, and even old vinyl records and their album covers. All of these are woven skillfully and composed in discrete tones of red, orange, and yellow, and accented with the organic element of swamp reeds. The work's overall effect is one of an irruption of specific memory into a dim yet autumnal present. Julie Schenkelberg's sculpture, "Hearsay" (2013), at first seems similar to DeVille's in that it too re-assembles recycled materials into a tower-like form; "Hearsay" is peppered with what looks like shotgun blasts of tiny holes and slashed with cutting tools like saws and knives in erratic flurries. A contingent, squatted home comes to mind, as does the specter of domestic violence.

Of a similar mien are the two black-and-white photographs of ruined housing, “Home on Braddock Ave” (2007) and “U.P.M.C. Braddock Hospital and Holland Avenue Parking Lot” (2011), by LaToya Ruby Frazier. These ruins hit home in a very real way for the artist since they represent buildings in her hometown situated in rustbelt Pennsylvania. While tragic in their documentary vérité, the photographs are beautifully realized in their elegiac

tone, frontal aspect, and strategic cropping which serves to isolate and personify these particular buildings in a way that urban blight as a municipal concept might never be able to do. Michael Ashkin’s series of six inkjet-printed photographs taken in the Mojave Desert expands upon the notion of the architectural ruin as index of human contingency. One image appears to be an ad hoc monument/marker to someone’s land stake. Topped by what looks to be a small Danish flag, it is reminiscent of those dire monuments that early explorers left in their pursuit of the world’s desolate poles. Another image is of the bow of a sporty boat forlornly severed from its body and any source of water. Ashkin’s images represent the outermost limits in which ruins may be discovered and that their discovery offers no great consolation of familiarity, since their abject desert context tends to obviate their use as nostalgic referents.



From the Ruins... (2015). Installation shot. (left) Julie Schenkelberg, *Hearsay*, 2013; assorted materials, 89 x 58 x 92"; (right) William Eggleston *Untitled*, c. 1972; dye transfer print, 14 1/2 x 21 3/4". Photo by Rafael Gamo.

The moldering archive of the past is everywhere underfoot in *From The Ruins....* It shakily grounds a more present anxiety about our collective society's future significance. Harris maintains this psychological tension in her choices of works throughout the show. Artists like Luther Price and Christian Holstad contribute to the angsty mix. Price presents a devolutionary slide show, "Light Fracture" (2013), of found images that are decayed, stained with inks, and sometimes inhabited by insect carcasses. Holstad deploys synthetic materials to craft surreal objects such as his soft-sculpture shopping cart,

"The Road To Hell Is Paved (Walgreens)" (2009), but also displays similar materials as readymade critique of consumer waste, as in "Flotsam Adrift" (2012-13). Jennifer and Kevin McCoy present a diminutive diorama, "Next To The Parking Lot" (2012), which includes a small video display like a roadside billboard that hides a ballistic missile, modeling a kind of Mad Max roadside scenario. A large photograph of a washed-out WWII bunker, "Biville" (2006), represents the artist twins Jane and Louise Wilson's continued interest in the architecture of military institutions. Canted on its side, this once formidable fortification sinks cracked and graffiti-tagged into the sand it was once meant to defend. Like Paul Virilio's similar investigation of bunker architecture as cultural index, the Wilsons present this site as predictive of the ultimate ending of all martial ambition and the defensive hubris of patriarchy.



Jane & Louise Wilson, *Biville* (2006). Black-and-white photograph mounted on aluminum with diasec; 71 × 71". Courtesy of 303 Gallery.

One of the least dramatic images in the show, William Eggleston's photograph of a domestic oven interior, *Untitled* (c. 1972), slyly refers to what might be a suicide's last perspective or, extrapolated, the final dull whimper of a civilization preoccupied with getting the most bang for its consumer buck without thinking about how carefully it has planned its own obsolescence. While *From The Ruins...* might sometimes imply similar ends, the show's real strength is in keeping these types of ends open and revived for discussion.