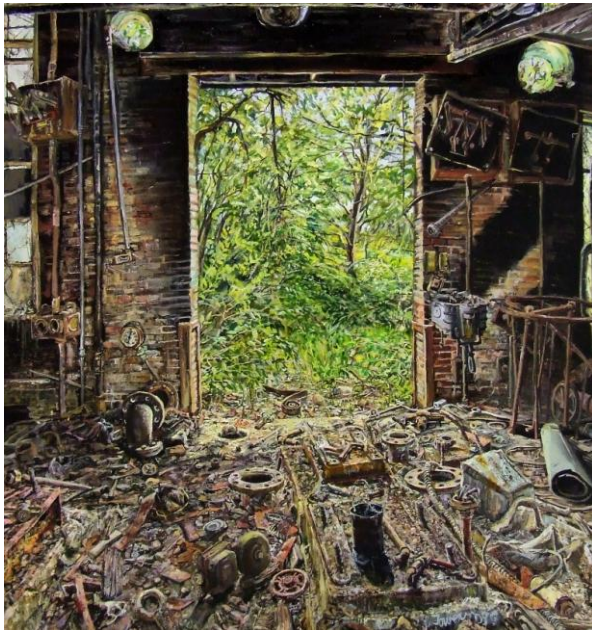


CINDY TOWER

Cindy Tower paints the entrails of industry, the decay of once proud machines as they transform into quasi-organic forms that crumble back into nature, garishly decomposing in a lurid glow of phosphorescent green and orange. These large, dense, tangled paintings compel by their strange order within chaos. The buildings themselves, their skeletal structure arching overhead and visible on the periphery, become stages within which the animated wreckage of machinery enacts its oddly human play of parts, recalling the vanished presences of workers in a return of the social repressed. Stilled into silence by the deindustrialization of the past forty years, they are portentous ruins, awaiting the next stage. What that will bring is unclear. Bulldozed under, or overtaken by nature, these once vital sites of industry exist on the remote margins of a consumer-driven society of ravaging obsolescence. They are—for all their rusted metal detritus and intimations of violence—bathed in nostalgia for the industrial utopias that once inhabited our collective fantasies.



Tower's paintings exude an uncanny sense of déjà vu. We have seen these places before, but in another form, another time, and another place. Pristine, heroic, their crystalline geometries the sign of a bold new era, we remember them from such icons of industrial technology as Charles Sheeler's 1920s photographs of the Ford Plant at River Rouge. Tower's paintings are spectral vestiges of that historical moment when industry and progress were coupled in an unquestioned faith in the American way—the Ford way, but also the Armour way, the General Electric way. This past was once our future, before a service economy and low wage race to the bottom, fueled by the flight of industry to Mexico and Asia, won the day. There is another haunting in these paintings: the workers—men and women—who once tended the floor, who managed the energies of these pipes and pressure gauges, these valves and boilers and cogs. These paintings speak not only of physical disuse, of metamorphosis from culture into nature, but also of social wreckage. They are Piranesian in their ability to project, through ruin, a past fully reconstructed from the remains. But what renders them so very poignant is the impossibility of such a return to former glories. We feel the tension between the vigor of the paint surface, the powerful organizing eye of the artist, and the utter irrelevance of the subject to most of our lives. These are the scenes we once knew—the shop floor, the great infernal blast furnaces, the catwalks, the circular brick towers that announce the factory from a distance. In Tower's hands, they appear strange yet uncannily familiar, our past, but also our future.

—Angela L. Miller

Angela Miller teaches 20th century American arts and visual culture in the Art History and Archaeology Department at Washington University in St. Louis. She has written widely on many facets of American arts. Most recently she was lead author for "American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity" (Prentice-Hall, 2008). This essay is one in a series of the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends. March 2010

Image: *Passage*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 72 x 68 inches

ABOUT THE BRUNO DAVID GALLERY

Bruno David Gallery is St. Louis' leading art gallery specializing in contemporary art and one of the most important places to see art in Saint Louis. The Gallery represents some of the best artists that Saint Louis has to offer, along with artists of national and international reputation. Located in a stunningly renovated industrial building in the Grand Center arts district, directly opposite the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Bruno David Gallery's art program has introduced new contemporary art to local gallery goers, and has been discussed in important art publications including, *Art in America*, *Art Papers*, *ArtNet Magazine*.