

The SS Torhamvan (the name is an abbreviation of the place names along its original route between Toronto, Hamilton and Vancouver) ran aground in 1926 just off Cold East Point in Ferryland, Newfoundland, where it was left to decay. What remains now is scattered debris. Prominent among the remains are two corroded, iron-clad boilers sitting adjacent to each other on the edge of the shoreline. Against the open seascape, the boilers seem like a monument, precisely placed to mourn the loss of a ship in its prime, commemorating the forces of a growing economy by showcasing the remnants of its technological prowess.

Donald Lawrence's *Torhamvan/Ferryland* is an ambitious reproduction of this accidental monument. Working from a collection of Polaroids taken during a site visit, the artist has reconstructed the huge forms of the decaying boilers, creating a tableau that appears to be the real wreckage transported into the gallery. Starting with the actual dimensions of one of the boilers, and applying one-point of perspective to make an illusionary scene, Lawrence effectively captures the monumental scale of the boilers in their dramatic setting on the rugged and untamed shores of Newfoundland. Precise calculations combined with some rudimentary theatrical devices (rounding the corners of the room and lighting effects) expand the space of the gallery, creating a false horizon that obscures distance and truncates the viewer. But there is only a small threshold from which to view this effect.

The illusion is destabilized as soon as the viewer enters the tableau. The ideal perspective point is static, and once the viewer passes the threshold, Lawrence's reproduction starts showing its seams: the boilers are just wood frames covered by sheets of shaped and painted canvas, the walls move in and the artificial lighting casts irregular shadows. The spectacle gives way to the material form and technical devices.

The suspension of disbelief required to engage Lawrence's depiction mirrors the tropes of commemoration, which is reflected in the very reading of the original forms as monuments. Lawrence's illusion is tenuous, threatened by a simple shift in the viewer's position. In a similar manner, the romantic image of the eroded debris is as easily transformed from industrial ingenuity into industrial waste. The ship's design was based on 19th century technology, far from representative of the latest in industrial advancements. If anything, the Torhamvan, a routine cargo ship, represents failure more than success, its wreckage emblematic of carelessness and a lack of control. Was the ship abandoned because it couldn't be rescued or was it left because it wasn't worth the effort? The ship was nothing special, there is nothing historically significant about it beyond its demise, which in itself was nothing spectacular, it just foundered, and was left to rot.

There are few early images documenting the stranded ship as a whole, but it is captured in the background of a photograph of a small group of well dressed women. Whether a happen-



stance landmark on their tour of the shores of Newfoundland, or as their primary destination, the wreckage of the *Torhamvan* is worthy of a tourist photo. The jovial quality of the snapshot alludes to the shipwreck as a spectacle, but its gnarled and weather-beaten remains memorialize the ship. The fragments contradict the otherwise romantic and abandoned look of the shipwreck as they become a more tangible record of its history.

Maybe that's how *Torhamvan/Ferryland* works, as something between spectacle and record. With simple theatrics Lawrence stages a dramatic scene, but when the the tableau no longer appears in normal proportions the illusion becomes an abstract procedure, giving way to another sense of wonder at the labyrinth of wood of each massive frame and at the extraordinary feat with which the frames are covered in painted canvas, making a direct connection to the artist. The whole of the scene transforms into its parts: hundreds of pieces of found wood are pieced together with hundreds of broken chopsticks; the viewpoint multiplies; and the construction can be entered from both back and front. Ultimately, Lawrence creates an opposition between illusion and material form, pivoting on the moment of transference, which shifts from a static scene to a moving viewer and hinges on the individual perception of time.

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