

Torhamvan/Ferryland

CAG, Vancouver, 2005 –2006
Donald Lawrence



Scotch Boilers I and II Coldeast Point, Ferryland, 2002
Cyanotypes from 4"x5" pinhole negatives

Torhamvan/Ferryland, a solo exhibition at Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery (CAG), presents what the Gallery's curator Jenifer Pappararo has characterized as "something between spectacle and documentary".

With respect to its "documentary" aspects, the installation records the present-day site of the 1926 shipwreck of the S.S. *Torhamvan* at Ferryland, Newfoundland. Two of the ship's Scotch boilers, dramatic remnants of late nineteenth century industrial and maritime culture, rest on the rocks of Coldeast Point amongst numerous other pieces of debris that lie about the site, mostly covered at high tide. The boilers, other wreckage, and the site as a whole have been the subject of numerous drawings, Polaroids and pinhole photographs. Such material, from on-site field work, constitutes preparatory material for the CAG installation, which, upon entering the gallery, presents a full-scale representation of the delapidated shell of one of these marine boilers.

The "spectacle" fills the gallery, as the second boiler and rocky landscape extends in diminishing three-dimensional perspective from the façade of the front boiler – the entire installation enveloped in a dim blue light. The installation presents an illusion of sorts to viewers entering the space – something akin to "perspectives" occasionally built into Baroque architecture – but an illusion that is transitory, lasting only a moment prior to the viewer's awareness of the physical nature of the installation's constructions. The manner in which the illusion breaks – a moment of both pleasure and loss – in some sense recalls the wreck of the *Torhamvan* that for two or more decades (any definitive account is elusive) rested on Coldeast point before deteriorating to its present state. Upon entering the gallery space the theatrical illusion of the Scotch boilers gives way to a recognition of the very physical nature of the constructions. The boilers, as well as the rocks, are formed by an intricate skeletal framework pieced together from recycled lumber, each piece carefully scarfed or otherwise joined to the next, and all the pieces pegged together. The framework components are each fitted with coverings sewn from salvaged tents and

tarps, each carefully fitted, sewn and coloured in such a way as to present an illusion from the singular vantage point of the gallery's entrance. As a viewer moves through the gallery and behind the structures the skeletal frames become evident which, together with the canvas coverings, lend the structures an appearance less of a controlled illusion and something more of ad-hoc architectural spaces.

Two research assistants, Shima Iuchi and Randi Obenauer worked on this project, with Randi Obenauer being primarily responsible for creating the canvas coverings



Torhamvan/Ferryland, construction view and installation view, Contemporary Art Gallery, 2005