

Scale model work—whether in architectural maquettes, works of art, or model railroad topography—is a familiar form that is both practical and direct, as well as quixotic and visionary. It’s a mode of presentation that offers the viewer the omniscient God’s eye perspective that confers a sense of the big picture and the implications of context. Alternately, through its intricacies and details, a model draws the viewer in through an alluring presence, suggesting a thing that—despite seeing its entirety at a glance—still begs to be discovered. Models apparently show you everything while suggesting hidden dimensions.

For a previous exhibition of his model work at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, Ryder Henry selected the title *Diaspora*, a word that evokes the dispersal of peoples from their homeland. Henry specified his diaspora as a transition zone between earthbound cities and outer space habitations. He never divulged what may have prompted the diaspora, so the viewer is left to speculate from among

a range of possible futures—ecological disaster, overpopulation, war, or some other post-apocalyptic chain of events.

Though, in truth, Henry never indicates that this earth-to-space trajectory springs from disaster at all. We could as readily presume that it was some inchoate and ever-developing desire for possibility that led mankind to slip the surly bonds of the earth to touch something as yet unknowable. His works leave open the notion that the best aspirations are as credible reasons for action as the worst circumstances. You can be filled with dread and flee or you can be filled with wonder and plunge. It is worth mentioning in the scheme of these futurist assemblages that Henry works primarily with recycled materials—not readily apparent, this emphatically embellishes and amplifies their more aspirational thematic undercurrents.

There is an implication here that scenarios utopic/dystopic are not inevitable, but exist within the methods people choose to address their circumstance. Henry’s earthbound building models sometimes exist singularly, sometimes in tightly-clustered cities. With their iconoclastic building styles and construction details, they can

seem to describe a rushed solution to a problem—we’ll stack these floors as much as we can, we’ll add a little bit of green space here and there, we’ll use whatever variable materials are on hand, and we’ll see where that gets us. Though, amid their seeming-slapdashery, other evocations arise—they appear funny, poetic, and utterly functional, built with human needs in mind and expressed with the individual flair that could only come from real people. If they are inconsistent according to dry architectural precepts, they are consistent in their optimism.

These dualities arise from the hand of the artist as well. Zooming in from that omniscient perspective, we can clearly see the immediacy and natural rendering/modelling in the works. Windows that appear the same size and shape are subtly different. Details we would presume to be plumb-bobbed are actually more casually realized. The color schemes of some structures echo the hundred different materials of which they are made. Even the buildings that suggest a standardized appearance have atypical gestures and color schemes. This hand-wrought dimension begins with the smallest of details and, through scaling and repetition, accumulates and

accrues upon itself until it creates a reverberating and dynamic whole.

This visual dynamic springs from Henry’s paintings as well, which depict densely-layered cityscapes and future habitats. In a dystopic vision, such tableaux would evoke paranoia and oppression, a people caught within the megalopolis they have—wittingly or unwittingly—constructed around themselves. In Henry’s paintings, however, there is an everpresent buoyancy. It is unclear whether structures are conforming to an over-arching building code, but they are clearly conforming to an imaginative sense of possibility that would be absent in desperate times. They are often brightly-colored and unusually-shaped—squeezed together in a way that suggests reduced ground space, they still appear affably crowded, like a thousand visions of the future all finding they can exist in a shared space.

Outside the intensity of the urban environment, Henry postulates bricked towers that have far less aesthetic appeal, but infer greater utilitarian functionality, though even the most conventional of these structures still

contain a semblance of that hand-rendered sense of possibility, a human texture within the utterly pragmatic. Once we get to outer space and Henry’s off-world colonies, we confront the hybridization of aesthetics and practicality with the suggestion of efficient ringed structures that also seem, even within their deft uniformity, lovingly built by hand.

Naturally, the sculptures we are viewing are built by hand—lovingly. It’s a real effect of the artist’s hand and how these works are made. It’s also a deeply resonant metaphor of how to function not only in the future, but in the present. The work may superficially suggest a world overcome by dilemmas of overpopulation, war, climate disaster—take your pick. But more deeply and more crucially, Henry’s work suggests a humanist, artistic, and optimistic presence.

There is the strong suggestion that our best impulses not only should, but can, persist.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator





images (front to back)

Antennae Building #3 (detail), 2016
 Antennae Building #2
 Antennae Building #4
 Blast Office #3, 2014
 Brick Towers, 2014

spaceships (left to right)
 Arabic Star Trek, 2012
 Parabolic Ringship #2, 2011
 Compound Ringship, 2012

Antennae Building #3, 2016
 4 Lydia #22, 2016

Sculptures mostly cardboard, packaging, recycled materials.

Paintings are oil on canvas.

There's More To Explore: Up Close And Personal With Ryder Henry
 May 12 to June 30, 2017

b.1974 Oxford, UK, Painter and model-builder based in Pittsburgh PA.
 Focuses on Futuristic landscapes, architecture, and spaceships.
www.ryderhenry.com



THERE'S
 MORE
 TO
 EXPLORE
 :
 UP
 CLOSE
 AND
 PERSONAL
 WITH
 RYDER
 HENRY



HALLWALLS CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER
 341 DELAWARE AVENUE BUFFALO NY 14202 716.854.1694 WWW.HALLWALLS.ORG