

Artist explores utility and value of abandoned factory



By Nate Smelle

Peering out from the Eagle's Nest lookout in Bancroft for the first time one cannot help but wonder about the big white factory standing out above the forest in the distance. Since shutting down in 2003, this rusting landmark—the GP Flakeboard Plant in Bird's Creek—has for the most part sat empty.

Artist Don Wilson has always been intrigued with this structure and its history. In his latest body of work Wilson takes action on this curiosity, making the GP Flakeboard Plant the subject of his photographic explorations.

At the Art Gallery of Bancroft on Friday, Dec. 5, Wilson unveiled his new collection, entitled *Aesthetic Fabrications: Photographs of an Industrial Geography*. His collection of 21 photographs taken at various locations around the vacant plant over a five day period, paint a sad scene of a once vibrant place of employment.

“Here is a space is no longer functioning as it was and has no purpose anymore; other than possibly being scrapped and sold by the pound,” said Wilson.

“I was really exploring the nature of utility and our purpose and the remnants using these things as metaphors for exploring how we value the notion of a plant and all of these superstructures we put up; and then bam...overnight it's closed and no longer has a real purpose.”

After being laid off a couple of times himself, Wilson began thinking about the concept of utility. From this questioning of what it means to be useful, he said he started searching for value in life. It was this line of seeking that led him to the hollowed out factory in Bird's Creek.

Walking around the property Wilson said he could see the traces of the people and their activity on the site that no longer requires their services.

“We're kind of like the machinery,” he said.

“We are useful for a period of time and then we are not. That's a bit of a struggle because we all have a certain view of ourselves as being kind of important. When we are confronted with this kind of thing it gives you that pause, to ask what we are really doing; and to think of deeper ways of how we have constructed society and the directions we take. How have we made it possible that some people become useful while others are not useful, and what is that mean? It's a lot to ask out of a bunch of photographs, but that's what was informing my pursuit of this body of work.”

Wilson's photography of this empty industrial space tells a story that anyone who has been laid off, or lost their job can relate to. *Aesthetic Fabrications: Photographs of an Industrial Geography* will be on display at the AGB until Dec. 27.

Recently Wilson also opened Granite Farm Fotoworks as a pop-up business for the holiday season on Bridge St. W. in Bancroft's theatre district. Sittings with Don are available daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Dec. 13. He also offers on-location portrait sessions throughout the year. For more information on Wilson's work or to make an appointment for a sitting call 613-334-6136.