

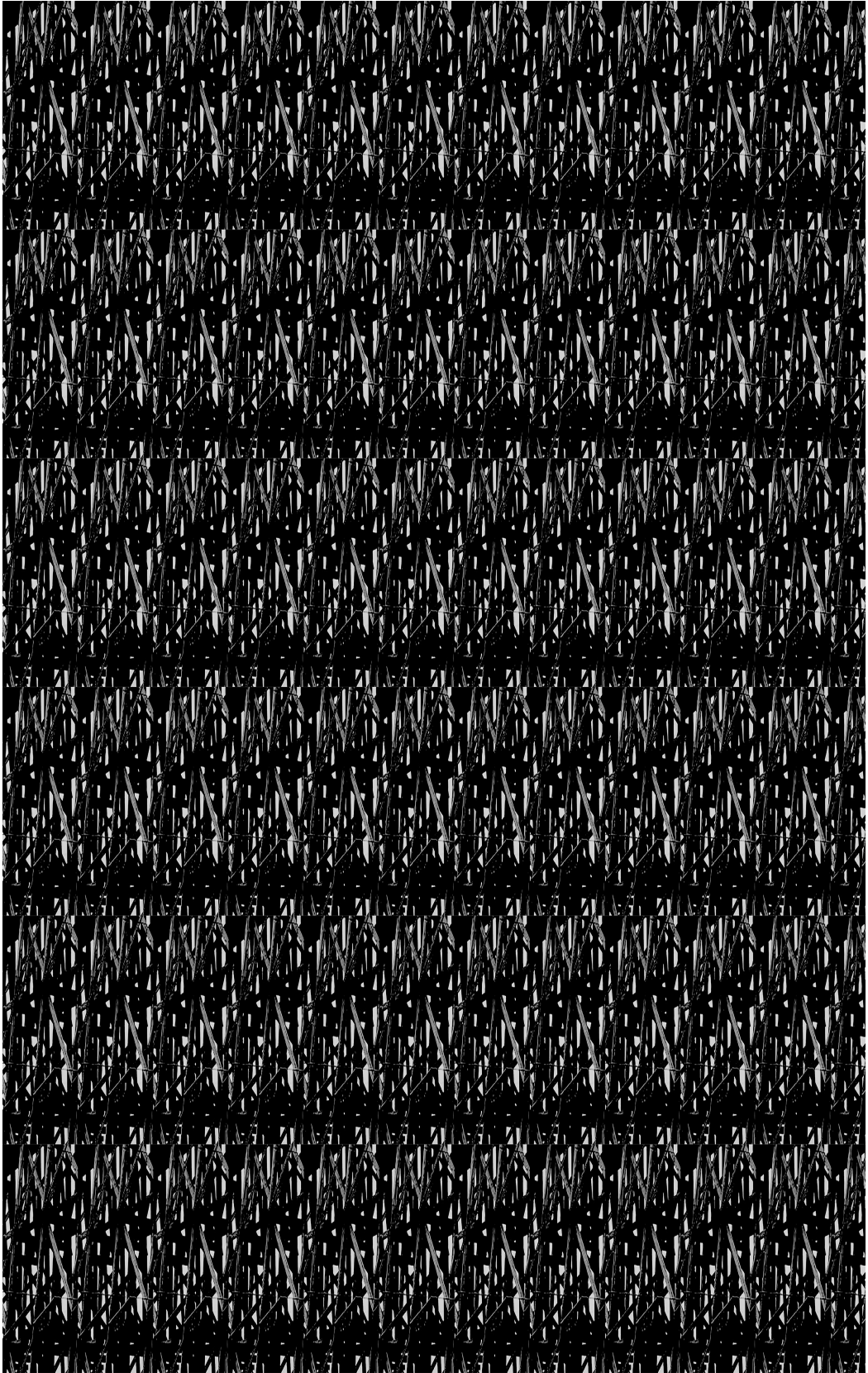


Trestle Support Systems: Entrepreneur of the Multitude

Sheila Dickinson

**A critical essay on the occasion of the exhibition,
Trestle Support Systems/Pete Driessen,
in the Boiler & Blacksmith Shops within the Northern Pacific Railway Yard,
Brainerd, Minnesota**

October 25 – November 4, 2017



**Trestle Support Systems/Pete Driessen
Northern Pacific Rail Yard, Brainerd, MN
Opening Saturday, October 28, 6-9 pm**

Blacksmith Shop: Trestle Installation

Boiler Shop/Process Space: Worker Installation

Sound Composition by Michael Masaru Flora

Critical Essay by Sheila Dickinson

Related Activity:

Oct. 28: Buses leave Soap Factory/MSP 2 pm

Northern Pacific Rail Yard Tours 4 & 5 pm

After Party: Roundhouse Brewery 9-10 pm

**Oct. 29: Artist Dialogue & Tour with the artist, sound artist Michael Masaru Flora,
and art critic/curator Sheila Dickinson 1 pm**

Shows Runs: October 25 – November 4, 2017

**Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Sunday - 11- 6 pm and By Appointment at
pete@petedriessen.com. Closed Monday October 30th.**

Address: 1511 Northern Pacific Road, Brainerd, MN USA 56401

Info: www.soapfactory.org info@soapfactory.org www.npc1871.com

Image: Pete Driessen © 2017. Untitled/Trestle - Detail. Modified digital image. Size varies w/context.
Courtesy the artist.

Pete Driessen is a fiscal year 2017 recipient of an Artist Initiative Grant from the MN State Arts Board. This activity is funded in part by the MN State Legislature from the State's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund with money from the vote of the creative people of MN on November 4, 2008.

This project is generously sponsored by Minnesota State Arts Board, The Soap Factory, NP Event Space, Northern Pacific Center, Driessen Water, TuckUnder Projects, Simpson StrongTie, Prairie Bay, Roundhouse Brewery, Discount Post & Pole, Progressive Property Management, Crow Wing County Historical Society & Museum, Brainerd Com. Ed., Music General, Quality Forklift, Insty Prints, and many individuals.



Trestle Support Systems/Entrepreneur of the Multitude

The word that comes to mind is monumental, with the massive scale of both the Northern Pacific Railroad Complex (NP) and of Pete Driessen's immense sculptural installation, Trestle Support Systems (TSS) within it. The site and this artistic project are monumental in scope, awe inspiring in sheer vastness. Take this word down to its core and Driessen's TSS creates, in fact, a monument. As a testimony to a former time of industrial might of the region, TSS acts as monument not only to industrial history but specifically to the workers who powered industry. TSS becomes a monument to their work building the support structures of industry and community, for the region and for generations to come.

TSS consists of two sculptural installations both constructed out of raw untreated wood. The Trestle Workers installation consists of 35 larger than life workers that completely fill the old Boiler Room, a space vast in scale and height. Each worker is exactly the same, made from railroad tie-sized red pine timbers that have been adjoined on the back with a methodical, abstract looking formation of steel plates. They stand in seven rows of five, the amount of a platoon without a leader, here the workers band together, common in work and cause. Trestle is installed two buildings over in the much larger Blacksmith Shop and consists of a series of trestle like sculptural forms reaching 16 feet high and repeating in staccato rhythm for the sectional length of the building (60 yards) down the straight path of the rail line that runs through the center of the building. With stunning vaulted ceilings and the low crescendoed rumblings of an accompanying sound installation by Michael Masaru Flora, the trestle forms create a majestic moment that reveals the sensation a worker may have felt high up on a trestle, building a bridge with rudimentary tools.

In favor of the common, Driessen employs both the common material of the wooden beam in combination with the common and basic form of the trestle support system as his aesthetic agents. What do these two components, the material of wooden beam and the support form of the trestle tell us about this artistic installation? Rough sawn red pine used in TSS is common to Northern Minnesota forests. Without chemical treatment it reveals knots, splits, twists and crooks and much more lightweight than traditional wood of railroad ties. The workers, who labored for days, months and years with this natural material, have morphed in TSS into the material of their tireless labor.

One in the same, the worker and the wood, grown together, are now monumental in scale, towering over the viewer in stature, in multitude and in formation of a collective army or forest of human determination. The trestle form, like the worker, is likewise repeated, putting the viewer's focus on the trestle's elemental design. Basic in logic and form, the trestle places wood and steel joiners together in such a way that it can be then repeated and further joined, taking many parts to create a whole that could carry a train over a river. Together they hold steady for the safe passage of a weight much greater than each part alone can hold.

The result is an aliveness that these two elemental components, the wood and the trestle infuse into the art. Like minimalist sculptors before, such as Carl Andre who laid rectangular bricks in a line in the gallery, Driessen strips away the non-essential clutter in order for the psychological presence of the rail tie, a 6"x6"x8' wooden beam to dominate. The aliveness of the trestle form is held in the metal components that fasten and hold the wood together; the spacers, caps, braces and sills. Also found in the trestle sculpture's wings, which shift their heavy burdened beings into graceful otherness. Then, let us not forget a third alive component, the one that makes this whole project possible and that is the epic spaces of the NP site itself. Beyond our small human scale, it holds the ambition of an era gone by, giving the artist and entrepreneur the space to imagine, hope and build something unintended by the original builders. A building's dream from when it once sat dilapidated and unused it now moves into active renewal and regeneration.

In this moment in time the NP site sits somewhere in between, in a liminal space that straddles a past of industry (then dereliction) and the present (then future) of entrepreneurship. In our contemporary lexicon, the entrepreneur appears as sole agent acting for singular gain, ideologically opposed to the structures inherent in TSS of collective labor, collaborative work and the repetitive form of the 35 train workers. Michal Hardt encourages a different reading wherein "entrepreneurship fundamentally means creating new forms of social... and productive cooperation from below. That is a kind of entrepreneurship of the multitude."¹ In the intersection between a rich historical space of NP and the imaginative space of the artist in TSS, this new entrepreneurial endeavor of NP and Driessen reminds economic and social leaders of

¹ Michael Hardt, "Managing Up," *Artforum* (October 2017). Web.

Northern renewal that the core of this site are the united workers. Driessen describes them as “collaborating workers: collectively creating, producing, distributing, empowering, and exchanging.” Could this describe a radical entrepreneur?

We stand in this history of larger-than-life components of community, collective labor, tightly knit worker units functioning in harmony, putting many parts together to construct a whole. Has this fabric of coming together to build something, that then through the process of working unites us, has this quality of working together been lost? Is this what TSS reclaims, within this space, monumentalizing the ability to work together, to find unity in what collectively binds us rather than what differences divide us?

Sheila Dickinson

Dr. Sheila Dickinson is a regional critic for Arforum's Critics' Picks, ArtNews and Hyperallergic and has published her art writing in a wide range of local and international publications. She is currently the Curator of Art and Public Programs at the Rochester Art Center.



NP Blacksmith Shop/Exhibition Space:

1. Trestle

2017

Rough Sawn Red Pine, Metal Hardware: Simpson Strong Ties & Hex Screws, Lag screws, Eyelets.

Trestle Base: Appx. 10 ft (H) x11ft (W)x 1.5 ft (D)

Trestle Wings: Appx. 16 ft (H) x18ft (W) x 1.5 ft (D)

Trestle Overall Length: Appx. 180 ft or 60 yards.

Tunnel Height: 6 ft.

Width of RR Track: 5 ft.

NP Boiler Shop/Process Space:

2. Trestle Workers:

2017

Rough Sawn Red Pine, Metal Hardware: Simpson Strong Ties & Hex Screws, Lag Screws, Eyelets, Rebar, Steel Rebar Wire, Colored Craft Sticks.

Worker Base: Appx. 8ft (H) x 3ft (W) x 1.5 ft (D)

Worker Formation: Appx. 8 ft x 60 ft x 35 ft

Width of track: 5 ft.

Boiler Shop/Office/Wall:

3. Untitled Trestle Drawing – (Framed)

2017

12x9 inches.

Oil Stick, oil pastel, pencil, graphite on black paper

4. Untitled Trestle Drawing – (Framed)

2017

9x6 inches.

Oil Stick, oil pastel, pencil, graphite on black paper

5. Trestle Support Systems Poster – (Framed)

2017

24x36 inches.

Ink on Engineer paper

Signed Limited Ed. Print #1/100. Signed/dated by the artist in Thin Black Sharpie Marker

Collection of the artist.

6. **Untitled Trestle Model - Single (Framed)**

2017

14x15.5 inches.

Coffee Stir Sticks/Wood Glue

7. **Untitled Trestle Model - Alignment of 3 - (Framed)**

2017

6x15 inches.

Colored Craft Sticks/Wood Glue

8. **Untitled Trestle Pattern - (Various Wall Alignments)**

2017

36x38 inches.

Ink on Engineer paper

Unsigned Limited Ed. Print of 20

Boiler Shop/Office Desk/Table:

9. **Untitled Trestle Model – (Desk Table)**

2017

12.5x14x46 inches.

Coffee Stir Sticks/Wood Glue

10. **Untitled Trestle Model – (Desk Table)**

2017

5x5x30 inches.

Colored Craft Sticks/Wood Glue

11. **Untitled Trestle Worker Model-Large/Small w/Logo – (Desk Table)**

2017

Size Varies.

Pine Wood/Balsa Wood/Colored Craft Sticks/Wood Glue

12. **Untitled Trestle Worker Model-Medium - Groupings Vary - (Desk Table)**

2017

Size Varies.

Pine Wood/Balsa Wood/Wood Glue

13. **Research Media - (Shelves)**

2017 Size & Materials Vary. Assorted components from site, research and residency.

