

SHIFTING GEARS

*a solo exhibition featuring
selections from the Industrial Series by*

ROBYN HORN

MARCH 2-31, 2018

curated by RACHEL GOLDEN



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“Each sculpture of *Industrial Series* is a work of many layers of time, telling the story of the artist, the story of the wood and metal objects, and presenting a new story, all its own—”

Of the unofficially codified elements of art – line, shape, color, light – time is that element which evades us, subtle and undetected, requiring the most intimate of readings to reveal this main character, quietly present for those who are patient to look. Time is the intangible element, visible only after a story reveals its passing.

Becoming acquainted with a work of art takes time, and a willing audience—an audience who, once introduced, might stay a long while, quietly listening, politely interjecting a few cordial questions, knowing fully that the pursuit of this relationship will begin only after the two part ways.

The same is true of an artist, moving toward a new body of work. The desire emerges to work with something new—a material, a concept, a process—but the answer of how is not clear. The artist acknowledges the effervescence of something stirring, but decidedly turns away, returning to what now feels like old work, leaving the new to simmer. It cannot be forced; it's never under those circumstances when good work is created, certainly not great work. How long until it reduces down? Never mind that, back to work. Days, months, maybe even years pass, and the artist works, begrudgingly aware that waiting is part of the process. Then one day, on a schedule all its own, the simmer reaches a slow, rolling boil. Now it's time. Now, begin.

So it is with the pine wood and mixed metal sculptures of *Industrial Series*, the most recent body of work by artist Robyn Horn. In this new body of work, the artist incorporates found metal objects for the first time, some of which have been amidst her own studio for most of her working life. “I have worked with metal, but never before using a cast or machined piece in any of my work,” Horn said. “I had wanted to, but couldn't ever figure out how to do it successfully.”

Each sculpture of *Industrial Series* is a work of many layers of time, telling the story of the artist, the story of the wood and metal objects, and presenting a new story, all its own—but that's between the sculpture and the viewer.

Rachel Golden

Curator

Rachel Golden holds an M.A. in Art (Art History) from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. She maintains the care of a private collection based in Little Rock, Arkansas, and works as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and an adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland University College. In 2017, she opened Acanthus Fine Art Advisory, serving the needs of both collectors and artists.

Cover image: *Industrial Series* No. 16 “Pulley,” 2016. Pine, Acrylics and Steel, 17 x 9 x 9 inches

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Industrial Series No. 2 "Lag Screw" confronts the viewer with a singular, protruding lag screw bent back against the splintered surface of the wood. The screw is so large, with a rusted head and oversized washer, it seems to belong to building on a monumental scale, forged in the Bronze Age. This is not the hardware of mere mortals. Defenses raised, the obvious, though perhaps irreverent, question presents itself, uttered with a reasonable amount of intimidation: What is this?



*Industrial Series No. 2 "Lag Screw," 2016.
Pine and Steel, 17 x 14 x 9 inches*

Wood in this seemingly unfinished state beckons contact. The surfaces are raw in some places, flaking with paint in others, layered with a history of grease and grime, and materials unrecognizable. The wood is gouged, marred, and dented. The passing of time is evident, but in conflicting contrast, fresh cuts reveal recent activity. Consistent with a hallmark of Horn's work, it is unclear whether the base of the sculpture, the block that appears to be freshly cut, is separate from the aged block in front where the screw protrudes. The materials provoke question, and the process, too, is a mystery.

This is precisely Horn's goal for the finished effect of her sculptures: to achieve some level of illusion of material, of method, or both, which forces the viewer to question how the work is made, and from what material. "I don't want to go to the extent that the viewer can't figure it out," Horn said, "but the illusion also creates the sense of motion. Otherwise it would just be static."



Robyn Horn at the bandsaw.

In *Industrial Series*, in particular, Horn forces a third question on the viewer: In addition to *What is this*, and *How is this made*, comes the question, *What was this*? So the viewer must move backward in time, to the life of the material before the sculptures.

The wood material for *Industrial Series* came from a supply Horn had in her warehouse for about fifteen years. From a demolished building in North Little Rock, Arkansas, Robyn and John Horn had salvaged a quarry of wood beams, largely because they had the space to store them, and they had the equipment to move them. "At that point, we were acquiring any type of wood material, thinking it might be of use down the road," Horn said.

The beams were made of pine, a less than desirable material for wood sculpture. The resin and sap typical of pine makes carving difficult, and pine cannot withstand outdoor environments, precluding their use for large-scale outdoor sculpture. At nearly 14-feet long, with a width and depth just short of one square foot, each beam varied in character. Nails, screws, metal plates, and other glittering remnants of metal littered the surface of some. All appeared to have been painted white at one time, with evidence of other paint and color streaked here and there. Unfazed by the type of wood, Horn was attracted especially to the surfaces of the beams:

"I liked the surface from the beginning. I didn't know how I would use them, but they had potential. John is always encouraging me to take stuff like that in case it comes in handy."

So off they went to the Horn's warehouse, placed on pallet racks to be stored for a purpose not yet known. Fifteen years in waiting, added to the life of the beams before that, added to the life of the tree from first growth—a time so distant it can no longer be measured.



Meanwhile at work, the artist had amassed a collection of discarded metal parts, taken from a disassembled Linotype, other printing presses, and printing-related machines, all belonging to her husband.

The objects collected and disassembled were indistinguishable from one another; removed entirely from the context of the machines from which they came. "After I ran out of really good parts from John's [presses], I decided that the best way to find metal parts that would work would be to take something apart...I started looking for metal pieces at junk yards and antique fairs, but it was hard to know what to get when I didn't know what I was going to do with it yet." Horn found a hand-cranked adding machine at a local antique shop, and purchased it for the sole motive of taking it apart. She purchased an old typewriter for the same purpose.

To any other eye, this is meaningless material. In fact, some of the metal pieces Horn has used were found broken and buried under a layer of mud in a scrap yard. But it was this pile of broken, dismembered metal parts that would move the great sculptor to a new phase of her work, ready but for the right material to house the metal objects.

"I'm not sure how it finally came to me...I had been thinking about incorporating metal parts with the sculptures. John mentioned the beams in passing one day, and it hit me that this would be the way to combine the two materials."

Industrial Series "all stemmed from wanting to use the metal parts," Horn said. "The rough, flaking paint on the surfaces of the beams gave that industrial look of something that was used in some way. It just felt like they went with the rusted metal pieces."

View from above -
Industrial Series No. 35 "Gear," 2017.



Working quickly and directly, without any sketches to show from the project, the artist moved from one block of pine to the next, until she eventually ran out of beams. "I don't think I've ever had so much fun in all my life," Horn said.

Each block of pine measures roughly 19 inches in length, just a half-inch shy of the clearance of the artist's bandsaw, which she used to cut each beam into sections. The hesitation to sculpt in pine was immediately eradicated with the first cut. The interior of the wood proved to be very hard and dry, which is a good thing when working with pine.

The tight, concentric rings evident in the top surface of works like *Industrial Series No. 35 "Gear,"* link the sculpture directly with its original source. Rings such as these indicate that, in the earliest years of the tree's life, little growth occurred from one year to the next. The tight structure of the rings indicate slow growth. The tree took its time. The tree was *allowed* to take its time.



Industrial Series No. 35 "Gear," 2017.
Pine and Steel, 21 x 16 1/2 x 12 inches

The result is a solid core, and it's from this core that the beams were made. This material is called Heart Pine, the non-living center of the pine tree, where the wood is hardest, strongest, and develops the golden red color that can be seen in the raw areas of each sculpture.

The golden red of Heart Pine is perhaps most apparent in the rough surface of *Industrial Series No. 25 "Blueprint,"* a work incorporating the rare addition of hand-drawn elements along one side, while the front of the work serves as a cut-away diagram of the inside of the tree. A heavy metal nail assaults the center of the pine, possibly original to the beam, or possibly an intentional contribution by the artist. This ambiguity of what is new, what is old, what served a prior purpose, what belonged to the beam is all part of the illusion and the interplay the artist wishes to create.

Two smaller metal objects are affixed centrally to what appears to be the only area of the front surface still intact, with remnants of paint and a smoother texture setting it off from the bright red rawness of the natural wood. These metal objects are less discernable, fastened with screws and partially driven nails. There is no point of reference, no recognizable function, but their role in this sculpture is more representational than abstract—a narrative not yet told.

Horn comments on the ambiguity of the metal materials:

I was looking for metal parts that were indistinguishable from something that could be recognized by the viewer. I didn't want farm implements, or hinges, or things where the use could be determined. I wanted unusually shaped, rusted things. The adding machine was purchased with disassembling it in mind. I knew there would be lots of weird, unusual parts inside and I was right. There were better parts in the adding machine than in the typewriter I took apart. And if you use something like the [typewriter] keys with a letter on them, people know what that is and I didn't want that.

In some cases, the metal objects of the sculptures are, in fact, recognizable, at least to a certain degree. The gear in *Industrial Series No. 30 "In Gear,"* for example, is readily identifiable, though what purpose the gear previously served, and from what type of machine it came is entirely ambiguous. In other works, the metal objects are used in purely abstract ways, so much so that any relationship to another, pre-existing object seems unnecessary to the analysis or appreciation of the work.



Industrial Series No. 25 "Blueprint," 2017.
Pine, Steel and Graphite, 18 x 9 1/2 x 9 inches



Industrial Series No. 30 "In Gear," 2017.
Pine, Steel and Acrylics, 18 x 9 x 11 inches



Industrial Series No. 9 "Pierced," 2016, Pine and Steel, 18 x 11 x 9 1/4 inches

Industrial Series No. 9 "Pierced" demonstrates many of the formal qualities consistent throughout Horn's work. The use of a metal circle bisected by a length of flat metal emphasizes the linear and geometric qualities for which Horn is known. The lines are severe, simplified and entirely about form, further punctuated by the clean diagonal cuts made across the wood, resembling the way in which Horn has "pierced" wood sculptures in previous work.

Like all sculpture formed in the traditional sense of sculpture in the round, *Industrial Series No. 9 "Pierced"* requires viewing from all angles. At the top of the work, the tightly bound rings of the Heart Pine demonstrate a circular motif echoed in the strong presence of the metal ring at front. Moving around the sculpture, the shape of the metal circle extends as a negative space from the cylindrical hollowing out of the wood to fit tightly with the outermost diameter of the metal circle.

The front surface of the work is a contrast of texture between the layered surface of the beam and the fresh life of the wood underneath. Stylistically, this work evokes the Russian Constructivist influences evident in other work by the artist—a strong stylistic theme even within this series.

A summative statement of the components of this new body of work, *Industrial Series No. 9 "Pierced"* confirms that while, at least in this series, the artist is shifting gears, the artist is, without question, Robyn Horn.

ROBYN HORN EXHIBIT LIST

SCULPTURES



1. *Industrial Series No. 21 "Collared,"* 2017.
Pine, Acrylics and Steel, 19 x 12 x 9 inches

2. *Industrial Series No. 2 "Lag Screw,"* 2016.
Pine and Steel, 17 x 14 x 9 inches

3. *Industrial Series No. 35 "Gear,"* 2017.
Pine and Steel, 21 x 9 x 9 inches

4. *Industrial Series No. 16 "Pulley,"* 2017.
Pine and Steel, 17 x 16 1/2 x 12 inches

5. *Industrial Series No. 25 "Blueprint,"* 2017.
Pine, Steel and Graphite, 18 x 9 1/2 x 9 inches

6. *Industrial Series No. 30 "In Gear,"* 2017.
Pine, Steel and Acrylics, 18 x 9 x 11 inches

7. *Industrial Series No. 9 "Pierced,"* 2016.
Pine and Steel, 18 x 11 x 9 1/4 inches

8. *Industrial Series No. 37 "Molding,"* 2018.
Maple and Steel, 18 dia. x 8 inches

9. *Industrial Series No. 6 "Latched,"* 2016.
Pine and Steel, 18 x 11 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches

10. *Industrial Series No. 23 "Split Millstone,"* 2017.
Pine, Acrylics and Steel, 17 1/2 dia. x 9 inches

11. *Industrial Series No. 17 "Two Bolts,"* 2016.
Pine, Acrylics and Steel, 18 x 9 x 9 inches

RELIQUARIES

12. *Reliquary No. 17 "Carefully Measured,"* 2017.
Poplar, Pine, Acrylics, Measuring Stick and Sewing
Machine Plate, 20 x 13 x 3 3/8 inches

13. *Reliquary No. 5 "Constructive,"* 2017.
Cypress, Acrylics and Steel, 19 1/2 x 13 x 2 1/4

14. *Reliquary No. 11 "Time Gauge,"* 2017.
Pine Beam, and Steel Adding Machine Parts, 12 3/4 x
18 3/4 x 5 inches

15. *Reliquary No. 10 "It All Adds Up,"* 2017.
Cypress, Acrylics and Steel, 16 x 12 1/2 x 3 inches

16. *Reliquary No. 19 "Repetition,"* 2017.
Poplar, Acrylics, Adding Machine Parts, 20 1/2 x 14
3/8 x 3 inches

17. *Reliquary No. 12 "Engage the Mechanism,"* 2017.
Cypress, Acrylics and Adding Machine Parts, 16 x 11
3/4 x 3 inches

18. *Reliquary No. 13 "Four Springs,"* 2017.
Cypress, Acrylics, and Adding Machine Parts, 17 3/4
x 12 x 3 5/8



PAINTINGS

19. *In Deep*, 2013.

Acrylics, Rust and Charcoal on Canvas, 36 x 36 inches

20. *C&P Gears*, 2016.

Acrylics, Rust and Charcoal on Canvas, 36 x 36 inches

21. *Adagio (slowly, at ease)*, 2015.

Acrylics, Rust and Charcoal on Canvas, 36 x 48 inches

22. *Yellow Streak with Triangles*, 2011.

Acrylics, Rust and Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 inches

23. *The Red Line*, 2017.

Acrylics and Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 inches

24. *Gray & Red Blocks*, 2015.

Acrylics and Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 inches

25. *Something/Anything, Rusted Panel Series*, 2015.

Acrylics and Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 inches

26. *Stones Slipping*, 2012.

Acrylics, Rust, Charcoal, and Wire on Wood Panel, 24 x 48 inches

WORKS ON PAPER

27. *#292 Wood Series*, 2008.

Acrylics on Fabriano Paper, 28 x 20 inches

28. *#295 Industrial Series*, 2008.

Acrylics on Fabriano Paper, 20 x 26 inches

29. *#296 Industrial Series*, 2008.

Acrylics on Arches Paper, 23 x 30 inches

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