

Written by Administrator
Wednesday, 27 October 2010 14:37 -

The last time I visited the space currently occupied by [Form/Space Atelier](#) it was - I'm embarrassed to admit - the DownUnder Nightclub.

Obviously, things have changed.

The ubiquitous burly bouncer has been replaced by a tall angular man in a black top hat, museum founder and curator Paul Pauper. It may just be because of

his choice of accessory, but in appearance and bearing he reminds me of me of Abraham Lincoln.

Paul thinks some of the outsiders who flock to our neighborhood are trying to take advantage of the perceived "skeeziess" of Belltown. He would like Belltown to get the recognition it deserves as a culturally rich art neighborhood, rather than just a place to drink and party on the weekends.

Form/Space Atelier is an example of the richness of the neighborhood's art scene. It's a working gallery space committed to "the three E's": thought provoking Exhibits, Entertainment, and Education for the community through figure drawing sessions, lectures, and multimedia presentations.

The current exhibit at Form/Space is **Steel: A Symphony of Industry**, by artist Dan Hawkins. The show is a combination of photographs, sculptural/original sound, and film.

Dan's photographs of the rusted out corpse of the Bethlehem Steel Mill, in Bethlehem, PA, occupy the main floor of the gallery. They are eerie and quiet. It's hard to imagine the abandoned factory was once the second largest producer of steel in the U.S., provided the U.S. military with steel during WWI and WWII, and supplied the girders for the Golden Gate bridge.

A box, which looks like it could have been appropriated from the abandoned mill, sits on a pedestal in the center of the room. It emits audio and original music from a film being played somewhere below.

From a steel mill to a resort/casino - Seattle Post Intelligencer (blog)

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My husband and I make our way downstairs to a tiny dark room where all eyes are glued to a 20-inch tv. Black and white archival film images, reminiscent of scenes from [Metropolis](#) and [Modern Times](#), flicker across the screen while the artist narrates. We squeeze onto the wraparound couch and learn about the downfall of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

Starting in 1970's, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation began to lose its foothold on the market as foreign steel companies started modernizing their production techniques, which led to cheaper foreign steel. Bethlehem refused to innovate. Because of the company's higher steel prices, Bethlehem lost its lock on large infrastructure projects.

At the same time, operating costs were rising. The unions were negotiating more expensive benefits, higher wages, and restrictive job contracts for Bethlehem workers and the company had to deal with a flux of disability claims.

No longer able to compete in the steel market, the factory was forced to close its doors in 1995. The factory and land remained untouched until 2007, when it was purchased by the Sands Casino. The Bethlehem Sands Casino and Resort was completed on the former site of the factory in 2009

Dan Hawkins told me he is intrigued by areas where the major industry has been displaced, such as in Bethlehem, PA, and the future economy is emerging. He wants to draw attention to the industrial history of our nation, the transition from an industrial economic base to a global economy, because it will give people a sense of awareness of the country we live in and the grand course of our culture and society.

Dan believes history reveals a lot about who we are as a people and how our values have change; and that narrative history tells may differ from the stories we tell ourselves. He also thinks in some ways its unfortunate that people are in such a rush to dismantle the industrial base of the country; factories provide jobs, support towns, and create the building blocks of our country.

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Ironically, when the [Sands Resort and Casino](#) was being built on top of the remains of the Bethlehem Steel Mill, the developers had a hard time finding steel for the project.

Steel: A Symphony of Industry is on display at the Form/Space Atelier through November 13th. Form/Space is located in-between Battery St. and Wall St. on 1st Ave. Hours are Wed-Sun, 12-4PM.

Form more information, visit: www.formspaceatelier.com

If you know of an upcoming event in Belltown or have a topic idea, email me at belltownblogger@gmail.com

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