Power Structures

Michael A. Whitehead

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Power Structures

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art

In

The School of Art

by

Michael A. Whitehead
B.F.A., Ohio University, 2016
August 2021
This thesis is dedicated to Kayla Twining, my partner in life and dearest friend. Without your ceaseless patience, love, and support none of this would be possible.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to family and friends who contributed to this project.

To Brian and Gwen Whitehead, for love and encouragement.

To Rose Hannah, for being my first, and purest artistic influence.

To my co-exhibitor Diana Abouchacra, for your friendship, positive outlook, and help putting this show together. We did it dude, its over.

To Carlie Salamons, for her assistance in the Sisyphean task of etching and printing a very stubborn lithographic stone.

To Paul Acevedo, Lu Colby, Autumn Johnson, and Dallas Spears
For your collective help in and out of the studio.

To the Chair of my Committee: Leslie Koptcho, for your guidance and persistent faith in me throughout this process.

Finally, to my Committee Members:
Denyce Celantano
Kelli Scott Kelley
Darius Spieth
Johanna Warwick

For your advice and mentorship throughout my graduate career. Thank you all for everything you do.
Table of Contents

Dedication.................................................................................................................ii

Acknowledgements...................................................................................................iii

List of Figures.............................................................................................................v

Abstract....................................................................................................................vi

(Pre) Amble................................................................................................................1

Power Structures.......................................................................................................4

The Prints....................................................................................................................6

The Drawings............................................................................................................11

Conclusion...............................................................................................................15

Bibliography.............................................................................................................33

Vita............................................................................................................................34
List of Figures

Figure 1. Michael Whitehead. Powerhouse Lane. Woodcut…………………………………...18

Figure 2. Michael Whitehead. Steam: Conduits and Connectors. Lithograph…………………19

Figure 3. Michael Whitehead. Steam: Conduits and Connectors (detail)………………………20

Figure 4. Michael Whitehead. Steam: A Staircase, a House, an Open Door. Etching………….21

Figure 5. Michael Whitehead. Steam: A Reflection. Etching…………………………………..22

Figure 6. Michael Whitehead. River Road. Mixed media drawing……………………………..23

Figure 7. Michael Whitehead. Scenic Highway. Mixed media drawing………………………...24

Figure 8. Michael Whitehead. The Mists of St. James. Mixed media drawing…………………25

Figure 9. Michael Whitehead. The Pillars of St. Gabriel. Mixed media drawing……………….26

Figure 10. Michael Whitehead. The Pillars of St. Gabriel (detail)……………………………...27

Figure 11. Michael Whitehead. The Docks of Ascension. Mixed media drawing……………...28

Figure 12. Michael Whitehead. The Docks of Ascension (detail)……………………………...29

Figure 13. Michael Whitehead. Fount of Every Blessing. Charcoal drawing…………………...30

Figure 14. Michael Whitehead. Power Structures (Installation view 1) .............................31

Figure 15. Michael Whitehead. Power Structures (Installation view 2) .............................32

Figure 16. Michael Whitehead. Power Structures (Installation view 3) .............................33
Abstract

*Power Structures* is a series of drawings and prints inspired by my fixation with the intricate utilitarian architecture and dystopian atmosphere of Louisiana’s petrochemical corridor. The architectural forms within this body of work juxtapose components of disparate industrial sites to form ruinous monuments to power and progress. The *Power Structures* are composites of photographs, technical drawings, and memories I have made in my time studying Cancer Alley. I introduce machined aircraft components, gate valves, and various fasteners into the architectural forms of petrochemical plants as elements of misdirection, blurring the line between reality and memory, fact and fabrication.
(Pre)Amble

I moved to Baton Rouge three years ago from southern Ohio. At the time, my artwork focused on the abandoned barn structures of the Appalachian foothills. This was my ancestral home. I knew the landscape and its people. My move to Louisiana would be temporary. I had no intention to ever call it home. I told myself three years would not be enough time to truly understand the Acadiana region. I try to evoke a sense of place in my etchings and drawings, but I had no family, friends, or frame of reference here. I had never farmed this land or even touched it. I could not make honest work about a place I did not know. I would be a transient traveler, passing through Louisiana so briefly that neither party would leave its mark on the other. I was resolved to remain distant from this place and limit my areas of inquiry to the familiar. This is, after all, how strangers interact. Louisiana destroyed that resolve in the space of one afternoon.

One hazy September Saturday I was out hiking and taking photographs, when I came across an overgrown barn on the verge of collapse. The roof of the structure was covered in ivy which weaved in and out of rusted holes in its weather-beaten tin roof. A silo covered in veinlike patterns of Virginia Creeper, loomed over the barn. The pair sat quietly to the side of my path seemingly resigned to slowly dissolve into the animate landscape. Their pasture was surrounded by brush six feet high. The grasses began to sing and vibrate as I approached. The brush song turned into a menacing buzz as I drew closer. I needed to photograph this barn. It was a piece of home beckoning me. As I pushed brambles aside and stepped off the path, the landscape swallowed me whole.

The ground, grasses, and brush shifted, all at once, embracing and possessing me. Discordant voices sang out in unison as a myriad of winged insects took flight. They weaved in and
out of my field of vision, flying clumsily into my forehead, hair, and eyes. I stumbled into a clearing clutching my camera and finally had an unobscured view of the barn. A massive tree was growing through its center, with each branch protruding from a displaced section of galvanized tin. The mid-day sun cascaded into the space, making a cathedral of a utilitarian shelter. Each of the barn’s support beams were wrapped in smaller trees which, collectively, hoisted the entire structure off its foundation. I realized in that moment that Louisiana was more aggressively alive than anywhere I have ever lived. The vengeful earth was reaching to reclaim the organic components of this barn. The speed of its attack was evident in the gnarled twist of the trees. The pitch of the roofing joists was bowed to the point of cracking. I was sure it would collapse within the next six months. I had to see that.

I took out my phone to drop a pin on my location, and realized I was only 50 yards from River Road (a meandering path along the Mississippi that connects Baton Rouge to New Orleans). How could it be that I accidentally walked all the way to the river? I decided a view from the top of the levy would give me a better perspective on my surroundings. When I emerged from the tree line, I was perplexed to find I had been walking in the only section of contiguous forest for miles. The vegetation was so dense I had not noticed. On my right was a section of small farmhouses and a newly fenced pasture where about forty cows were grazing. On my left was a mass of industrial storage tanks, hissing cooling towers, and the pipe mazes of a natural gas power station. The ten-foot fences of the industrial site seemed to go on for miles. I was fascinated by the juxtaposition of such surreally disparate environments.

I had a sudden desire to know how far the power station went. Being in a new place, I was trying to follow these fleeting impulses, hoping they would result in a creative discovery. I held tight to my camera and jogged back to my car, hoping I would not lose the sun. It took about thirty
minutes. I was panting, my heart was pounding, and my shirt clung to my back. I started my car, stashed the camera, and slowly drove down a gravel access road toward the levy. I reached River Road and turned left.

The power station had some rusted components but overall it was clean, white and stoic. It sat quietly, a respectful distance from the road. There was something beautiful about the repetition of simple form and line in its design. As it passed from my view, more industrial spaces materialized beyond the next tree line. These were much taller and appeared to be inactive. They were in obvious disrepair but there was an understated elegance to their decay. The steel frames and outbuildings were painted in sun faded, chipping shades of grey, teal, and olive green. Their safety railings added bright accents of yellow and red to the muted pallet. After passing them I saw another section of grazing pasture and assumed that was all there was to see. I did not hear the words “Cancer Alley” ascribed to this section of River Road until 2020. This connection to a place I had glimpsed for but a moment, sparked my curiosity and fueled my desire to know more about Acadiana and its people.

It took me several semesters of reading Louisiana’s history, researching its industry, meeting its people, and traveling its highways to gain any understanding or appreciation for the Bayou State. In my final year, I can confidently say that I love Louisiana. It is awash with fascinating contradictions that I will never fully comprehend. It is a place so surreal, that only those who live here can fully attest to its reality. In the pages that follow, I will offer some reflections, observations and criticisms based on my wanderings through Louisiana’s beautiful, absurd, and ultimately horrifying industrial landscape.
The work for this project began when I first encountered the massive oil refineries of Cancer Alley. From afar their towering stacks form the skyline of a small city. I was fascinated by their labyrinthine pipework, the precision of their minimalist design, and their looming presence. To me, it seemed each emitted a vibrating note that when joined with others created a low, bone shaking chord. The earth and the air seemed to pulsate with the discordant song of work. The Mississippi brought barges of coal, woodchips, and its own water. The raw elements were drawn through conveyers and bucket elevators into ever burning furnaces to produce pure power. Pure work. Mounds of chipped coal and neon sulfur dust were visible above twenty-foot fences. Crews of laborers scrambled up and down scaffolding, turning valves at precisely timed moments and checking instruments against data on their clipboards. Workers astride bulldozers and bobcats, transferred raw material from one side of the facility to the other. Still more workers loaded and unloaded a fleet of trucks, exchanging raw materials for valuable byproducts. I felt as though a giant metronome was rhythmically tapping, keeping each part of these unfathomable machines moving in time.

*Power Structures* is a series of drawings and prints inspired by my fixation with the intricate utilitarian architecture and dystopian atmosphere of Louisiana’s petrochemical corridor. The architectural forms within this body of work juxtapose components of disparate industrial sites to form ruinous monuments to power and progress. The *Power Structures* are composites of photographs, technical drawings, and memories I have made in my time studying Cancer Alley. I introduce machined aircraft components, gate valves, and various fasteners into the architectural forms of petrochemical plants as elements of misdirection, blurring the line between reality and
memory, fact and fabrication. My Power Structures are rendered with layers of overlapping hatched line and miniscule detail, which invite the viewer closer for an intimate examination of Louisiana’s industrial architecture.

It is nearly impossible to make work about the industrial sectors of the deep south without encountering the striking photographic series Petrochemical America by Richard Misrach. They are seductively grim documentary style photographs of “Cancer Alley”. The narrative Misrach presents is compelling. His photographs tell a story of devastation, environmental catastrophe and human suffering at the hands of industrial behemoths. The authority of Petrochemical America appears indisputable. It is rooted in the implied reality of its medium, the frankness of the framing, and its link the history of industrial documentary photographs in the manner of Walker Evans and Margaret Bourke White.

A mentor introduced me to Richard Misrach’s photographs of Cancer Alley when I expressed interest in learning more about Louisiana’s cultural landscape. My first impressions of Louisiana’s industrial corridor were formed, in part, by my memory of Petrochemical America. I was struck by the power and simplicity of the narrative they presented. I wanted to replicate their dystopian atmosphere in my work. My earliest conceptions of this body of work involved similar compositional sensibilities to emphasize human cost of industry in Cancer Alley by foregrounding emotionally charged imagery like playgrounds and graveyards with the towering forms of flare stacks and oil refineries in the backspace. However, as I drove the length of Cancer Alley making photographs that would inform the world of my drawings and prints, I became more intimate with the places Misrach stood and concluded that he was not looking closely enough. The photographs of Petrochemical America are taken from the periphery of the industrial landscape. The threat and
beauty of Cancer Alley’s petrochemical plants could not be understood from a safe distance, I
wanted my drawings to capture the Power Structures of Cancer Alley from inside their fence line.

My intention for this series is to inspire a cautious appreciation for the beautiful form of an
infinitely expanding, deeply complex industrial landscape, while drawing attention to the dystopian
absurdity of Cancer Alley ever existing in the first place. The massive machines of Louisiana’s
industrial corridor fuel the state’s growth and progress while simultaneously jeopardizing its future
through the environmental and human costs of their labor. Each year Louisiana gains approximately
$73 billion in economic activity from the energy sector and loses an average of 32 square miles of
land to rising water levels. I hope this body of work will inspire viewers to reflect on their
relationship to industry and conduct their own explorations of the Cancer Alley, allowing it to affect
them in the way it has infected me.

The Prints

Print is an industrial medium, a collaboration between artist and machine. The petrochemical
plants and power stations of Cancer Alley employ precise mechanical and chemical processes to
transform the base elements of water, fire, earth and air into pure potential energy, pure work.
Similarly, printmakers employ mechanical and alchemical processes to transform metal, wood, and
stone matrixes into reproducible works of art. The printed works within this show explore the
Power Structures of Cancer Alley through graphic, abstracted compositions which emphasize the
balance of line and form in industrial spaces. The varying traditional mediums of my printed works
offer diverse qualities of texture and surface. The wood, stone, and metal speak of industry through
their materiality as well as their imagery.
As I researched the petrochemical plants and power stations of Cancer Alley, I learned to read the symbolic language of industrial architecture. It started when I read *Steam: Its Generation and Use*, an engineering textbook which describes and illustrates the systems of power production in exacting detail. I learned the names and functions of previously unknown forms, and how they connected to serve the greater function of the entire network. Where I once saw a beautiful network of pipes, I now recognized the interior and exterior walls of a boiler. The infamous concave forms of concrete cooling towers, so often associated with the nuclear fallout of Three-Mile Island, are innocent repositories for purified water. As I learned about the petrochemical plants and power stations of Cancer Alley, I began to recognize the infrastructure that connects them to all of us.

Power Structures are woven into the landscape of Louisiana through 50,000 miles of interconnected pipeline\(^1\). The printed works in this series are drawn from composite photographs of industrial structures I encounter each day as I walk to my studio on LSU’s Baton Rouge campus. The forms and functions of Cancer Alley’s architecture are echoed throughout all of industry. Through a thorough comparison between the drawings and prints, the viewer will recognize parallels between the power structures of Louisiana’s petrochemical corridor and the industrial spaces they encounter every day.

The prints of “Power Structures” can be viewed as a contemporary reexamination of the industrial motifs and cubist compositional sensibilities found in the “Precisionist” movement of the 1920s and 30s. Charles Sheeler, a precisionist painter/photographer is chief among my influences. His paintings were derived from composites of his industrial photographs. Sheeler’s Power

Structures were rendered with clean precision; their surfaces were pristine, revealing no traces of wear or of the artist’s hand. The precisionists worked in the mechanical age, when industry was a new symbol of power, prosperity and progress.

Nearly one hundred years have passed since the industrial boom that inspired the Precisionist movement. Total consumption of electrical power and petrochemical products has tripled since the 1950s. As the energy sector has expanded, so too has our scientific awareness of the industry’s impact on the environment. The prosperous, egalitarian society promised by WPA depictions of industry has come at a cost. Louisiana is one of the most vulnerable environments to the effects of industry-driven climate change. Since 1932 Louisiana has lost approximately 1,800 square miles of land along its coast and within the Atchafalaya river basin due to flooding. For me, it feels necessary to resurrect the aesthetic and ideology of precisionism with a contemporary perspective on Industry’s place within our collective culture.

The direct influence of Charles Sheeler on my approach to this body of work is most visible in the compositional structure of the woodcut entitled *Powerhouse Lane* (fig 1) which depicts the composite forms of a pressurized steam header system under a protective roof. The strong diagonal thrust of a ford plant’s conveyer systems in Sheeler’s photograph *Criss-Crossed Conveyers* (1927) split the frame into four geometric segments while obstructing the viewer from entry into the space. The X-shaped obstruction of Sheeler’s conveyers inspired the crisscrossed positioning of this Power House’s steel supports, which bar the viewer from entry into the image. Dynamic forms of diagonal and vertical braces dissect the composition of *Powerhouse Lane* into balanced geometricized segments. The high-contrast, graphic quality of relief printing is employed to further split the composition.

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between light and shadow. As an homage to Sheeler’s impact on this body of work, I subtly carved the smokestacks and conveyers of his photograph into the worn surface of a metal condenser in the lower left quadrant.

The imposing size of Powerhouse Lane is intended to confront the viewer with the scale of the industrial spaces within the Power Structures series. Of the traditional hand printmaking mediums, woodcut’s mark-making is best suited for efficiently producing large-scale graphic images. I was drawn to the challenge of meticulously translating the textures of brick, rust, and worn metal into the language of relief. Precisionists like Sheeler subverted their medium by removing all hints of the artist’s hand from the surface of their paintings. In Powerhouse Lane, each gauge mark is a record of my hand on the surface of the block. Rather than subverting the medium of relief printing, I chose a manner of mark which connects to the history of woodcut. The directional hatching and voluminous cloud forms of Powerhouse Lane are an homage to the illustrative style of Dürer’s Apocalypse suite. The mark-making of the Apocalypse is employed throughout the Power Structures series, specifically in the roiling pillars of vapor that rise from the Cancer Alley’s exhaust stacks to fill the sky. They linger there, awaiting the arrival of their horsemen.

Steam: Conduits and Connectors (fig 2), is a window into the bowels of an ill maintained industrial feedwater system. It is located a mere 100 ft from LSU’s Art and Design building. The water circuit of a power station is designed to purify and preheat intake water before it reaches the boiler, preventing corrosion both inside and outside of the pipe system. Steam is the lifeblood of the energy sector. From Baton Rouge to New Orleans the Mississippi’s levy is pierced by the intake pipes of Cancer Alley’s petrochemical plants and power stations. The conduits draw river water through purifying facilities and into the intricate pipework of a boiler. Fossil fuels are burned in an adjoining furnace which heats and pressurizes the water until each molecule of moisture is removed.
The highly pressurized dry steam is then run through multifaceted turbines while any wastewater is condensed, repurified, and heated again. Every plant along Cancer Alley, has its own dedicated power station and electrical grid. Petrochemical facilities require massive exhaust stacks and cooling towers to release waste hydrocarbons and excess steam into the atmosphere. These highly filtered vapors form whipping trails of opaque white that can be seen for miles.

The foregrounded pipes in *Steam: Conduits and Connectors* bare the marks of prolonged exposure to Louisiana’s aggressive tropical climate (fig 3). The visceral, organic textures of rusted metal and flaking paint are rendered with exacting detail, emphasizing the machine’s vulnerability to the ravages of time and nature. Within the composition, the maze of corroding pipes overlap and intersect, gradually drawing the viewer’s eye deeper into the frame. The conduits weave through their geometricized support structure to create an ultimately claustrophobic space. While the precisionists idealized the untarnished forms of their geometricized industrial landscapes, my *Power Structures* bear marks from decades of weather, wear and work. For me, there is an elegance in the decay of utilitarian structures and machines. I wish for my work to reference the beauty of usefulness and work.

*Steam: A Staircase, A House, An Open Door* (fig 4 and 5) is an etching diptych created from a single plate. The image combines the brick housing of a power station’s twin turbines with the steel supports, transformers, and rusted insulator rings of an electrical transmission system. The composition depicts the final stage of electrical power production, despite the turbine’s being hidden from view. The composition emphasizes the interplay between the repeating diagonal forms of steel beams and staircases and the horizontal pattern of precisely rendered brickwork. The staircase structure forms the shape of a small house, subtly indicating the connection between these industrial spaces and the larger communities they serve. The structures of *Steam: A Staircase, A House, An Open*
Door are slightly overgrown with vines which echo the forms of the power lines in the composition. The vines reach up to connect this power structure to the earth while the power lines reach out of the frame, connecting this image to other immense Power Structures within this body of work.

The Drawings

Every age manifests itself by some external evidence. In a period, such as ours when only a comparatively few individuals seem to be given to religion, some form other than the Gothic cathedral must be found. Industry concerns the greatest numbers—it may be true, as has been said, that our factories are our substitute for religious expression.”

— Charles Sheeler

Our collective relationship with industry is fraught with various political and environmental concerns. Constant exposure to low levels of benzene, formaldehyde, naphthalene, and other air toxics emitted by Cancer Alley’s plastics plants, increase the likelihood of contracting cancer or respiratory illness by 16-32% compared to the national average3. Maligned citizens and plant workers, whose homes are nestled in the shadows of Cancer Alley’s towering exhaust stacks, have organized and demanded government action in the form of increased environmental regulation, and health care reform. Unfortunately, the only stable ground in the ever-shifting political landscape of Louisiana is held by the energy sector. In many ways, Louisiana is a feudal state of industry. Despite the ebbs and flows of political will, the machines of Cancer Alley remain. Built by our ancestors and improved by the innovations of subsequent generations, the Power Structures of Louisiana’s Industrial network toil on in the name of power and progress. As citizens of the United States, industry may

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very well be our religion. The meta-narrative of self-reliance, the grind, the hustle, and the American dream are deeply engrained into our cultural mythos. It is a blessing and a curse.

The drawings of the *Power Structures* series are mixed media architectural fantasies or nightmares which compile diverse machine components from throughout Cancer Alley’s industrial landscape. The direct mark-making and nearly infinite variability of the drawing medium allowed me to capture the grand scale, roiling atmosphere, and vibrant colors of Louisiana’s industrial corridor. I am compelled by the idea of discovering elements of the sublime and the surreal in the grotesque utilitarian forms of petrochemical plants and power stations.

For me, the coal blackened and rusted industrial sites of Cancer Alley become foreboding cathedrals when Louisiana’s vibrant evening sunlight cascades through the veils of vapor which emit from their gas turbine exhaust-stack steeples. I find a profound, disquieting, beauty in these grotesque monuments to American labor, and power. The composite architectural forms of my *Power Structures* are rendered with the reverence that Piranesi paid to his architectural fantasies of Roman ruins. My goal in constructing these drawings was to combine dense hatching, precise miniscule detail, sweeping gestural line and warm tonal washes, which echo the grand, dramatic aesthetic of Piranesi’s drawings.

Over the past year, I have made bi-weekly pilgrimages from one side of Louisiana’s industrial corridor to the other. Unlike the industrial spaces photographed by Charles Sheeler in the 1930s, the petrochemical plants of Cancer Alley are largely inaccessible. Their high fences are emblazoned with “No Trespassing” and “Private Security” signs, which further obstruct the view of any prying eyes. On a few occasions, while I was parked along access roads to photograph, I was stopped and interviewed by police who informed me it was illegal to trespass and take images without expressed permission from the plants. I learned it was possible to obtain permission to photograph the plants,
from their respective public affairs departments but due to the Covid 19 shutdown, I was rebuffed
or ignored with each request. I decided that if I wanted to explore the inner workings of Cancer
Alley’s *Power Structures*, I would have to do so in the imagined world of my drawings.

During the limitless free time created by the Covid-19 pandemic, I was able to increase the
frequency of my pilgrimages. On each trip I found new, secluded vantage points to make
photographs or sketches which I collaged into the final forms of the *Power Structures* series. I made
careful measurements as I drew to ensure that the perspective and proportions were accurate,
lending these impossible industrial spaces an air plausibility. Through juxtaposing mechanical and
structural elements taken from plastic plants, petroleum refineries, and power stations, I assembled
new monstrous forms which describe the absurd interconnected nature of Cancer Alley’s industry.

The drawings of the *Power Structures* are meant to immerse the viewer in the liminal space of
Cancer Alley’s industrial tracts. Petrochemical plants and oil refineries are in constant motion,
constantly expanding, new facilities seem to appear every day. The lines which create the forms of
my *Power Structures* oscillate between the solidity of dense hatching and the ephemerality of thin
gestural lines. This variation creates the impression that the spaces are being constructed before the
viewers eyes. The structures extend beyond the horizontal frame of the page, implying a myriad of
connections to a larger industrial landscape and between the other drawings of the power structures
series. Backspaces within the drawings are rendered with miniscule, exacting detail, inviting the
viewer closer for a more intimate exploration of the drawings. Creating this series of drawings
allowed me to visually explore the secluded, inaccessible, sectors of Cancer Alley that are
intentionally hidden by warning sign laden fences and tree lines.
The limited range of tonal washes and chemical hues which are applied to select areas of the compositions, are inspired by the absurd color palette of Cancer Alley’s dystopian landscape. The drawings emphasize the rich terracotta of rust bursting through layers of teal, yellow, and green paint: a common theme in the weather worn structures of Louisiana’s petrochemical and power plants. The most vibrant and discordant colors are reminiscent of old engineering periodicals, petrochemical company logos, and the no-trespassing signs which litter the roadsides and fence lines of River Road. The roiling cloud forms, and hazy atmosphere of the petrochemical corridor are rendered in shades of brown and grey that are infected with small traces of the chemical acidic greens, sulfurous yellows and rusty reds directly beneath them.

The hours of work spent rendering and constructing these imagined Power Structures allowed me to meditate on my wanderings in Cancer Alley. I immersed myself in the world of the machines and isolated myself from everything external to the exercise of making the work. At times I felt as though I lived there, in Cancer Alley among the towering stacks and hissing networks of pipes. My hope is for the viewer of these images to immerse themselves in the absurd world of these imagined industrial landscapes and emerge compelled to visit Cancer Alley for themselves, to breath in the acrid carbon-laden air and taste the oil in the water. I believe that investigating and understanding the importance of Louisiana’s industrial sites is a necessary step in understanding the political and economic Power Structures of the state.
Conclusion

My time in Louisiana is drawing to a close. When I reflect on the years I have spent wandering through this absurd and surreal landscape, I find myself inspired to seek out similar industrial spaces throughout the United States. Each state must have an equivalent to Cancer Alley’s petrochemical plants and power stations nestled in amongst their networks of highways and pipelines. These decaying cathedrals to American labor, power and progress can be found along every major body of water toiling and churning away in defiance of the ravages of time.

In the wake of the Power Structures project, I am left with further questions about the state of industry in America. Is it growing, decaying, or does it exist in some liminal state? Like nature, are our industrial landscapes in a permanent state of flux, with the technological Darwinism of profit margins motivating their destruction or expansion? What does this mean for the natural landscape? What are the human costs of other industrial sectors? Do the same horrifying and sublime forms of Cancer Alley exist in other places? Of course, they do. Do they exist with the same surreal, absurd relationships to their surrounding landscape? I assume so, but I am desperate to find out.

The abandoned steel mills of the “Rust Belt” and automotive assembly plants of the mid-west are slowly being converted into wedding venues, restaurants and artists’ lofts. Still, there are nuclear power stations, refineries, papermills, and petrochemical plants being built or expanded every year. The body of work and research developed as part of the Power Structures project will continue, incorporating industrial architecture from each state I visit. Each new drawing or print within the series will be informed by its predecessors forming a more complete, neo-precisionist vision of power production in the United States. The petrochemical plants and power stations of
Louisiana’s industrial corridor are in constant furious motion. The entirety of Cancer Alley emits a low, bone rattling chord which drifts upriver or out to sea, joining the discordant song of work from every Power Structure on this continent, North to South and East to West. Together, they draw the rich natural resources of our collective landscape into themselves and alchemically transform them into power, poison and profit.
Figure 1. Michael Whitehead, *Powerhouse Lane*, 2021
Figure 2. Michael Whitehead, *Steam: Conduits and Connectors*, 2021
Figure 3. Michael Whitehead, *Steam: Conduits and Connectors* (detail), 2021
Figure 4. Michael Whitehead, *Steam: A Staircase, A House, An Open Door*, 2021
Figure 5. Michael Whitehead, *Steam: A Reflection*, 2021
Figure 6. Michael Whitehead, *River Road*, 2020
Figure 7. Michael Whitehead, *Scenic Highway*, 2021
Figure 8. Michael Whitehead, *The Mists of St. James*, 2021
Figure 9. Michael Whitehead, *The Pillars of St. Gabriel*, 2021
Figure 10. Michael Whitehead, *The Pillars of St. Gabriel* (detail), 2021
Figure 11. Michael Whitehead, *The Docks of Ascension*, 2021
Figure 12. Michael Whitehead, *The Docks of Ascension* (detail), 2021
Figure 13. Michael Whitehead, *Fount of Every Blessing*, 2020
Figure 14. Michael Whitehead, *Power Structures* (installation view 1), 2021
Figure 15. Michael Whitehead, *Power Structures* (installation view 2), 2021
Figure 16. Michael Whitehead, *Power Structures* (installation view 3), 2021
Bibliography


Vita

Michael Whitehead is a printmaker and artist from rural Ohio. He received his B.F.A. in printmaking from Ohio University in 2016. While studying at O.U. Michael developed a close connection to the farmers and agricultural landscape of the Appalachian foothills. His experiences farming his grandfather’s land in his youth allowed him to connect with people whose communities were slowly deteriorating due to the disappearance of the coal industry in south eastern Ohio. During this time, Michael developed a fascination with utilitarian architecture and using drawing to discover the sublime elements of decaying wood, metal, and brickwork. In 2018 Michael relocated to Louisiana and began a body of work which responded to the industrial corridor which runs through Baton Rouge along the Mississippi. His work, in whatever visual form it takes, is a response to the animate landscape which immediately surrounds him. Currently Michael is an M.F.A. candidate at Louisiana State University with plans to graduate in the summer of 2021.