



The work of artist William Steiger recalls the hyper clean-edged landscape and architectural painting of self-described Precisionist Charles Sheeler, with meticulously articulated edge quality and images of structures that are icons of American life. Mr. Steiger's work here at Holly Johnson meets the echo from Mr. Sheeler's industrial age with feet squarely in this digital one. The execution of Mr. Steiger's paintings is so exacting as to seem artificially rendered, let's say digitally, though they are not; a scrutinizing search of the surface reveals not a single wobbling line or shaky misstep. Where Mr. Sheeler was referring to the precise line of the photograph, Mr. Steiger's paintings imitate the erasure made possible through computer technology — all of his images float over stark white paint, without visual context.

The images that Mr. Steiger highlights in these paintings are of things that in their heyday were considered tremendous feats of engineering — the rollercoaster, for example, or the Ferris wheel. Monumental and physically impressive, these structures come back to life in Mr. Steiger's paintings in an archetypal way: colorful, looming, and wildly complicated. Mr. Steiger paints these images in flat shades of lavender and purple, each canvas a swarm of the triangles and vectors that make up the strength of the machine, revealing the fundamental geometry at the core of these teeming configurations. In other pieces aerial tram cable cars hover above expanses of white, the thin cables they are tethered to stretching off either side of the canvas. Mr. Steiger's use of flat, popping color over bright white in these pieces accentuates the weight of the cars in the air, and their vulnerability to the depth beneath them. A red train caboose is painted a couple of times, first a side view and then one looking at the car head-on. Like all of Mr. Steiger's work here, these cabooses are painted in flat color, dimension and depth made through the laying of one shade of color next to another. Painting in this rigid, methodical way lends the caboose an architectural presence, and the little, hard-working train car is made mighty. The point of view set at the ground looking up into the "face" of the machine makes it seem formidable and stout with resolution.

Because none of William Steiger's subjects has quite passed out of our sight or use, his work is not as much about resurrecting old American images from rusty scrap yards, as it is about keeping them from them. His work makes us nostalgic for these things before they have faded, like an elegy that could ward off death.

— Lucia Simek



William Steiger, *Gondola Wheel*, oil on linen, 40" x 60", 2007-8.