

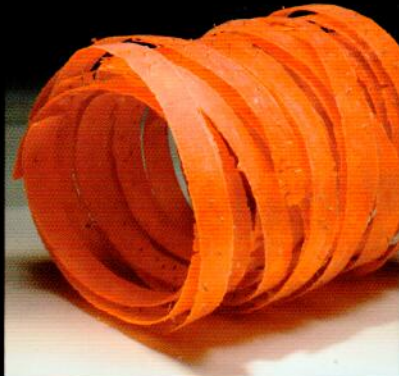
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TODD GORDON

Finding visual poetry in urban industry

Todd Gordon's recent move to Sweden didn't just present him with new industrial spaces to capture in his detailed oil landscapes—he says the light is different than he's ever experienced. Winter affords only five hours of daylight, while sunlight stretches past midnight in the summer. As a painter who creates all his work on location, capturing every steel beam, metal fold and dot in the concrete with his brushstrokes, the move challenged Gordon to adapt his painting process to the environment.

"When I first got here, there was immediate frustration of, how can I be in this place where there's no light?" Gordon, 44, says, reflecting on the move brought about by his wife's career. "After weeks of feeling badly about that, I decided to embrace it and look at it as a challenge. It's great. Not being able to see what I'm looking at is a whole other approach to painting, to get out of my comfort zone and invent more and paint what I can't see."

Gordon's recent work includes panoramic landscapes and cityscapes, painted everywhere from Amish country in northeastern Ohio, near his rural hometown of Delaware; to the streets of New York City, his most recent prior residence. His



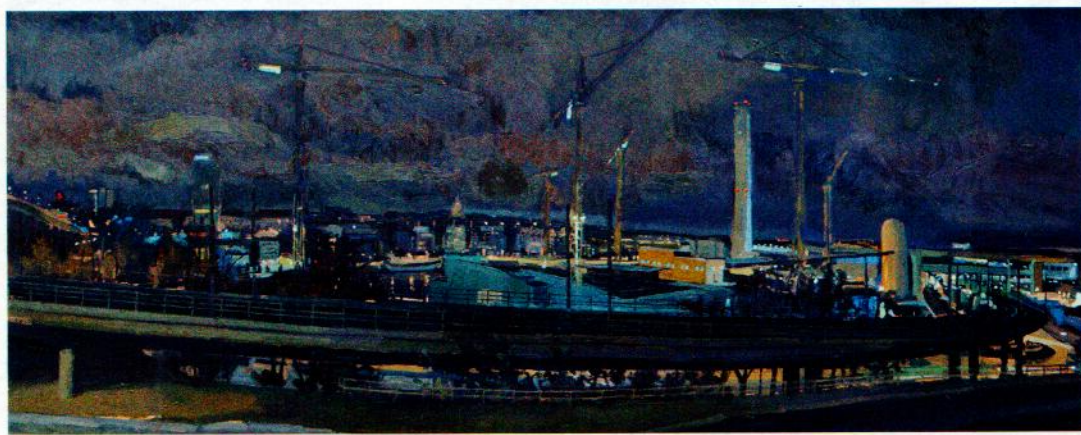
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- 1
Todd Gordon painting on location.
- 2
Leviathan, oil on canvas, 26 x 84"
- 3
Fortum Biomass Steam Plant Construction Site, oil on canvas, 28 x 51"
- 4
Hammarby Night, oil on linen, 21 x 55"

collection at George Billis Gallery, 15 paintings and 20 gouache drawings, includes urban scenes of New York and Stockholm, depicting neglected backyards, graffiti-covered buildings and trash-littered intersections.

Hammarby Night, a dark Stockholm cityscape featuring the glow of industrial buildings, a curved road in the foreground and linear elements via cranes, is one piece Gordon painted in the evening, wearing a spelunking headlight to illuminate his color palette and canvas. Viewers will see shapes they won't be able to make out, which stays true to what Gordon saw as he painted.

Gordon's locations aren't conventionally beautiful, his cityscapes often depicting grit, construction and urban takeover of natural land. Gordon, who began his career as a figure painter, says he's drawn to painting on location now because he enjoys being immersed in his subject. In places people might not see "visual poetry," Gordon finds a kind of romanticism he strives to capture in his work.

For art historian and professor Justin Wolff, Gordon's paintings indeed give viewers much to discover.

"Todd's work appeals to me on aesthetic and philosophical levels," Wolff says. "While Todd is a very talented painter, for him, painting and perception are more than just skills—they are ways of being in the world that affirm for viewers our obligation to make our own experiences meaningful. I admire how Todd's paintings are both majestic—and intimate, alert to 'in-between spaces,' the locales, surfaces and facades we often overlook."

Gordon's intensive process begins with him examining compositional elements and taking measurements in his mind's eye, before creating sketches to figure out surface scale. Many of his locations, such as the one depicted in *Fortum Biomass Steam Plant Construction Site*, are ever-changing, which means his paintings are in flux, too.

"It's really about engaging with the landscape," Gordon says. "The more I'm in it, the more I see. It's not about capturing a moment. I don't think my paintings look like snapshots. With how detailed they are, the paintings have an inherent sense of time hopefully built into them." ●

