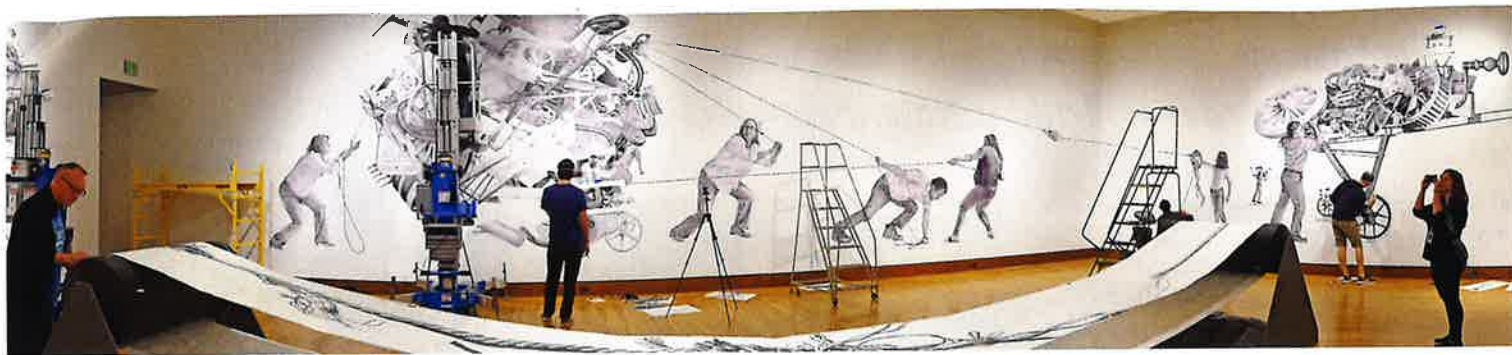


MICHELLE ALDREDGE



Above: Ethan Murrow, *Hauling* (installation view), on view at the Currier Museum of Art, September 15, 2018–April 2019. Photo: Michelle Aldredge.

Industry in a Post-Industrial Era: Ethan Murrow's *Hauling*

Everything about Ethan Murrow's new show, *Hauling*, is immense—its scale and scope, the number of people required to create it and its artistic ambition. The project has taken two-and-a-half years of research, preparation and drawing and has involved 20 collaborators including actors, creative assistants and Currier curator Samantha Cataldo.

Using the industrial history of Manchester, NH, as his touchstone, Murrow merges fact and fiction into whimsical, multilayered pieces that explore the themes of labor and collaboration. The result is a tightly conceived installation consisting of three 15-foot-tall murals, two 4-x-4-foot pencil drawings and a kinetic sculpture called *Underpinnings*, which includes a 52-foot-long, moving scroll drawing.

Murrow began by exploring the Currier's collection and researching the history of Manchester, which has produced everything from cigars and pants to engines and Velcro. His two pencil drawings reference Manchester's Amoskeag Mills, which became the largest cotton textile plant in the world. *Ledgers of Hine* is a visual conversation with Lewis Hine's famous photo of child laborers at Amoskeag, while *Manipulating Data* pays tribute to female mill workers. It portrays three women maneuvering fantastically sized punch cards, which were used in mechanical looms to weave patterns (an important step in the development of computers).

The highlight of the show, however, is Murrow's murals. A critical part of his process was a staged photo shoot with locals, who pushed, pulled and heaved theatrical props. Peterborough artist Rachele Beaudoin, who appears in two drawings, was pregnant with her son Beau at the time, which adds a brilliant

dimension to the concept of "hauling."

Murrow and an assistant also compiled an image archive of about 900 tools, such as spools of thread, handsaws, cooking pots, candlesticks and a local Abenaki fishing basket and net. Murrow then merged the tools and actor photos into collages. "The resulting jumble of archaeological forms represents not only layers of history," Murrow explains, "but also the ways in which objects, as well as history, can literally weigh us down."

As if fighting against that weight, Murrow scrambles up and down ladders, drawing intensely and conversing enthusiastically with his team. Over three weeks, museum visitors watched Murrow and six paid assistants transform his digital collages into massive drawings on 100-foot walls.

The absurdly enlarged hand tools depicted in the murals disrupt our sense of scale and force us to question the oversized importance we bestow on labor in our society. "I'm interested in uncovering American values surrounding work," Murrow explains, "such as the belief that work will elevate you and make you better—the way we glamorize being the most tired or the most overworked."

Despite using 900 "permanent" Sharpie markers, the murals will be painted over when the show closes—much like New England's indigenous past was wiped out by colonial farmers, that agrarian history was erased by the rise of industry, and factories were obliterated by the rise of technology and globalization.

Growing up in Vermont cutting firewood and tending sheep and goats, Murrow developed a strong work ethic and ties to the New England landscape. The parallels between his process and subject are unmistakable. Murrow's

project celebrates drawing as manual labor, while embracing the artist's cultural role as a freelance worker who must constantly juggle the time and tools required to do five jobs at once. *Hauling* also references itinerant New England muralists like Rufus Porter, graffiti artists, Mexican muralists, roving WPA artists, Renaissance masters like Michelangelo and all the assistants who helped execute these projects.

It is remarkable to see the handwork of seven different artists merge. "Each day, we spend hours up close to the wall, making tiny marks," explains assistant Natalia Slattery. "Sometimes, I'm not entirely sure what I'm drawing at all, I'm just following the lights and darks on a photograph. The magical moment comes when you step back...each person's hand come[s] together into a cohesive whole, as the hands who used the tools we are drawing have done for hundreds of years."

"It connects...big ideas about history back to people," continues assistant Ariana Lee. "An intricate drawing [and] figures pushing and pulling these devices remind us that behind each everyday object, each economic development, and each place is the work of people struggling[.]"

Michelle Aldredge is a writer, designer, and founder of the arts blog, Gwarlingo. She has been named a "Top 100 Artist, Innovator, Creative" by *Origin magazine*. She is also co-author of *Mirror Mirrored: A Contemporary Artists' Edition of 25 Grimm's Tales*.

Ethan Murrow: *Hauling*
Currier Museum of Art
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Through April, 2019