

## Creative Loafing Tampa

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VISUAL ARTS

### Janos Enyedi — an industrious body of work

A Sarasota exhibition looks back at the works of late St. Petersburg-based artist Janos Enyedi.

Posted By MEGAN VOELLER on Wed, Apr 30, 2014 at 12:56 PM



**Janos Enyedi, "Elevated Views," 2003. Acrylic and hand-rubbed graphite on illustration board. 30" (h) x 62" (l) x 9.5" (d). Courtesy Diana Enyedi.**

Diana Enyedi recalls a road trip early in her marriage that precipitated one of her husband's distinctive artworks. The couple was driving near Pittsburgh at sunset, on their way to her family home in Ohio. Janos, asleep in the passenger seat, awoke just in time to see the setting sun light up the corrugated façade of an abandoned factory as they drove by.

When they returned home to Washington, D.C., Janos took to his studio to re-create the factory in a form between a sculpture and painting. Today the finished piece — nearly 3 feet tall at the highest point of its sloping roof and more than 5 feet long — hangs on a wall in his former studio in St. Petersburg. Made entirely of hand-folded paper and cut illustration board painted gray, the piece is an intricate homage to the American industrial landscape that can be seen through May 10 in the exhibition *Janos Enyedi: Images of Industry*.

The exhibition at Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art in Sarasota brings Enyedi's work into public view locally for the first time since his death in 2011. Co-curated by Diana Enyedi

and Roy Slade, who served as dean of the Corcoran School of Art and director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington where Enyedi earned a BFA in 1975, the exhibition includes steel sculptures, mostly small in scale, and photographs as well as Enyedi's trademark cut paper and board constructions of industrial architecture and landscapes.

For those who knew Enyedi, the poignant backdrop of his death imparts special significance to the exhibition. Looking to start a new chapter in their lives, the couple moved to St. Petersburg's then fledgling Warehouse Arts District in 2011 after living for two decades in northern Virginia. They bought and renovated a live-work space, staging Janos's art throughout with advice from Slade, a longtime friend. Then, six months after arriving and one day after being mentioned in a *Tampa Bay Times* article about the growing arts district, Enyedi had a heart attack and died at age 63.

For Bob Stackhouse, a St. Petersburg-based artist who was Enyedi's professor at the Corcoran School of Art and one of the people who encouraged him to move to St. Pete, the exhibition is both a celebratory occasion and a wistful one. (Along with Slade, Stackhouse recommended Enyedi's work to Gallup and encouraged the show.) Also citing Theo Wujcik, the Tampa artist and longtime USF professor who died last month, Stackhouse expressed frustration with the posthumous appreciation that comes belatedly to artists outside the small percentage who achieve fame during their lifetimes, and with the uphill battle that surviving spouses face to preserve and promote the artists' work.

"It wouldn't hurt to celebrate these guys when they're alive," Stackhouse says. "It's kind of maddening. Everybody misses the artist when they're gone. Before the work was languishing and in disrepair. Why isn't it important when they're alive and you can talk to them about it?"

The Sarasota exhibition offers what might be a last chance to see a critical mass of Enyedi's works — around 40 pieces — on display together. It features some of his best sculptures and photographs that aren't already held in private or public collections such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Va., and the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, Ga.

Standouts include "Heartland Souvenir," 1998, a three-dimensional painting, Enyedi's term for his wall-mounted sculptural works, in the style of the gray factory piece. Eight feet long and 4 feet tall, "Heartland" is a paean to rust, carefully simulated through acrylic painting on illustration board cut to mimic metal objects including giant gears, bridge trusses, and the façade of a warehouse. All these are arranged, along with a painted landscape, as an industrial diorama of sorts inside a thick frame of diamond-tread steel plate — in fact, also illustration board, hand-cut and colored by Enyedi. The effect is of a dreamlike glimpse into a bygone America.

While the sculptural works show places filtered through Enyedi's memory or imagination, his photographs reveal him as a keen observer of reality. "Port of Virginia," 2005, finds monumental geometry in the spindly black and blue framework of shipping container machinery; the image was part of an extensive project documenting waterborne labor and commerce for the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia. Enyedi undertook a similar project documenting steel factories in Bethlehem, Penn., in 2003, and one at the Port of Odessa in Ukraine in 2008. Throughout such endeavors, his fascination remained grounded in the visual qualities of the landscape rather than in taking sides on political or environmental issues related to industry.

"He was not an apologist or a promoter—it was his muse," Diana Enyedi says. "He wasn't making judgments. He was saying this inspires me to make art."

"His art is accessible to a whole range of people to whom it wouldn't be otherwise because it is familiar to them," she says. "People all over the place, including friends who are real environmentalists, would have 'Janos moments' and send him photographs when they saw something."

Enyedi's practice wasn't without hiccups. He subjected all of his photographs to a Photoshop filter that simulates the texture of watercolor painting, a readymade tweak that artists trained since the advent of digital imaging would generally turn their noses up at.

And his steel sculptures, which are suggestive of abstracted, deconstructed machinery, sometimes feel cluttered with parts. Still, Enyedi made the work he loved, and the work he believed in, in response to a world he clearly also loved.

"Art is the ordinary made into the extraordinary," says Slade. "It's one of the truisms about art, but in Janos's case it was absolutely true."

*Janos Enyedi: Images of Industry* continues through May 10 at Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art, 1288 North Palm Ave, Sarasota, 941-366-2454, [allyngallup.com](http://allyngallup.com). To learn more about Janos Enyedi, visit his Furnace Road Studio website at [furnaceroadstudio.com](http://furnaceroadstudio.com).

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