

# HYPERALLERGIC

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GALLERIES

## A Tribute to the Rust Belt, Carefully Crafted from Domestic Decay

by Allison Meier on [October 21, 2015](#)



*Julie Schenkelberg, "Swan Song" (detail) (2015), reclaimed lath, wood, marble, iron, paper, vintage furniture, dishware, figurines, natural debris, crushed reclaimed metal, light fixtures, vintage wedding dresses, bathtub, wallpaper, plaster, paint; installed at Asya Geisberg Gallery (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)*

For 10 weeks in a disused church basement somewhere in the Midwest, Julie Schenkelberg built a turbulent installation of broken furniture, found objects, and housing rubble anointed with blue and gold paint. It now fills Asya Geisberg Gallery for Embodied Energies, the Brooklyn-based artist's third solo show with the Chelsea gallery, inspired by the corroding of her Rust Belt hometown of Cleveland.



*"Blue Lady", 2015, tinted plaster, gold paint, found flower print in frame, porcelain knobs from vintage electrical wiring, steel wool, metal roofing, knives, steel wire, resin, blue cast plaster maiden head, drilled holes and router scraping, 32" x 2" x 25".*

The main piece in Embodied Energies is the large-scale installation "Swan Song," which takes up most of the gallery. In the piece, paint is pushed through wood lath boards, an armoire is topped with a cascade of fabric weighted with paint, shattered dishware sits in heaps, and a door is marred with what look like bullet holes, although the violence of it and the cause of the destruction remain unclear. It's not all ruins, however, and even in the relatively compact installation there are quiet moments to discover, like an illuminated lamp that lures viewers around a corner, past a wall holding various pieces of disassembled chairs, to a mirror embedded in a wall with just enough room for one person at a time to gaze. On the other side, a chair perches above the havoc with paint dripping off it like icing, while a trunk is neatly packed nearby with heirloom objects and lace.

The Rust Belt's lost heyday of industry and prosperity may have inspired Schenkelberg's domestic-themed collapse, but "Swan Song" could reflect any place that's fallen on hard times — a lack of specificity that makes it feel stronger on aesthetics than personal meaning. On Schenkelberg's site she has photographs of installations she's made that consume whole spaces, like a 2014 Slavic Village vacant house project in Cleveland, a work at the Grand Rapids Morton Hotel with SiTE:LAB for Art Prize 2014, and an ongoing installation at the Mattress Factory Museum of Contemporary Art in Pittsburgh. These are stunning in the way their individual objects build, like dabs of paint on a canvas, into wholes of ordered chaos that completely inhabit their spaces. Yet in Embodied Energies, she demonstrates that she's not reliant on spectacle, with two small works containing a subdued balance between form and fragility installed separately on the gallery walls. It's likely everyone who visits the exhibition will take away a different memory of an object or moment discovered. Even in the smaller works, these fragments add up to a greater whole of something lost, found, and rebuilt.







*Julie Schenkelberg, "Swan Song" (detail) (2015).*



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