

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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## JILL DOWNEN AT BRUNO DAVID



The galleries of Grand Center, located at the self-described "intersection of art and life," are often longer on potential than delivery. At the moment, however, there are no grounds for complaints. The three major galleries all have strong shows on view.

Jill Downen has been an artist to watch since her appearance in the Contemporary Art Museum's 2004 Great Rivers Biennial. Working with plaster, she intervened in the architecture of the space — walls, floors, cracks in the recently poured concrete — to create an installation that made you look at the architecture with fresh eyes.

During the past five years, Downen has continued to develop her vision. Her new installation is fresh and multireferential. Plaster is still her material of choice, but she is using it to different ends. The individual parts of the installation are more traditionally sculptural, and the space is not annexed as part of the work, but the work remains an installation conceived and executed as a unity.

The installation is presented as a workspace. Inspired by the title "Hard Hat Optional," the gallery compares it to a construction site, but it could just as easily be interpreted as an artist's studio or as

an archaeological site.

It is as an archaeological dig that it most excited my imagination. That stack of plaster blocks, each ending in breast-like forms, looks like a fragment of some colossal fertility goddess. And that form near that looks like a broken nose of a giant warrior, and that other one like a monumental leg are reminiscent of the fragments of the statue of the Emperor Constantine in Rome.

Packing crates, sandbags and wooden scaffolding fill out the space, adding a warm organic color to the plaster's white purity.

Downen also makes plaster works on paper. Her latest series, "Hybrida," strikes me as the most successful to date. The work, white plaster on white paper, mounted without frame to the white wall, is very elegant as white on white on white almost can't help but be.

Image: Jill Downen. "Hard Hat Optional" (Installation view – detail). Photo by Richard Sprengeler. Courtesy of the artist and Bruno David Gallery.

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