

The Urban Landscape: A Tale of Grandeur and Abandonment

The Urban Landscape: A Tale of Grandeur and Abandonment highlights sixteen contemporary Ohio artists who find inspiration in the cities around them. Artists have always turned to their surroundings for inspiration. Throughout history this has manifested itself into paintings of figures, landscapes, and still lives. Sometimes this inspiration is enough for a final artwork; sometimes it is practice for a larger commission. In today's world, the idea of landscape evokes different images depending on the viewer. Is it the bucolic landscape of farms and countryside, or is it the gritty, urban landscape that makes up our cities?

Urban landscapes have always held a fascination for me, largely because artists have depicted it for generations. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, artists focused on urban imagery because it was a new phenomenon. Some artists, like the Impressionists, wanted to paint new leisure activities available to the upper echelons of society, and to celebrate the city and the excitement it offered. Other artists focused on the marginalized and the poor, calling attention to the negative effects of industrialization and the rapid growth it caused.

Fast forward to today: the idea of an urban landscape is no longer new, but rather has evolved over the past 100 years. In the 1920s and 1930s most American cities experienced rapid decentralization as people were encouraged by the federal government to build new houses, which was cheaper and easier to do away from the congested inner city core. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the improved and expanded Interstate highway system improved accessibility to land outside the city while at the same time making it easier to commute into the city for work and entertainment. The idea of the strip mall or shopping center within suburban neighborhoods also encouraged less travel to the city.

However, people have always lived in our metropolitan areas and cities. In fact, two-thirds of Ohio's largest metropolitan areas experienced an increase in population density between 1980 and 2000. Today, Ohio seems to be redefining what urban means. It is not just the inner city, but the metropolitan areas surrounding that inner city that make up our urban landscape. Our urban landscape is continuing to change and our cities continue to reinvent the ways in which we live, work and play.

This exhibition looks at the city from a variety of artists' perspectives, all of whom find inspiration in their urban surroundings. Some images are large and vibrant, showing the hustle and bustle of a city and all it has to offer while others have an undercurrent of abandonment and isolation. A few artists work on a small scale, providing a more intimate experience with the city, whether it be defined by the wires above our heads to the small alleyways we encounter when we walk within the urban landscape. It is my hope that as you walk through the exhibit you will find more than one urban experience that resonates with you.

Christine Fowler Shearer
Curator