

# BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

## *Broad Street Review*

July 9, 2011

Five young artists capture the staccato urban beat and constant motion that all city dwellers experience but seldom confront.

"Urbanism: Reimagining the Lived Environment." Through September 4, 2011 in the Fisher Brooks Gallery of the Samuel M. V. Hamilton Building, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Broad and Cherry Streets, Philadelphia. (215) 972-7600 or [www.pafa.org](http://www.pafa.org).



Bandler Browning's *Plenty of Eyes*

### The city we inhabit (but never saw)

ANNE R. FABBRI

"Urbanism" challenges every pre-conceived idea of what you might expect to see at the Pennsylvania Academy. This isn't some spin-off from Abstract Expressionism— you view that upstairs in the Hamilton Building. In this gallery we can get a glimpse of the art being created by young artists: five in this exhibition, but representative of others clustered in Philadelphia and elsewhere, in the sense that they're making art that might not fit your definition, but *get over it*. This is today's art, and it's as relevant as Andy Warhol was in decades past. The exhibition, organized by Julian Robson, the Academy's curator of contemporary art, captures the staccato urban beat and constant motion that all city dwellers experience but seldom confront.

Ben Peterson's large-scale drawings of architecture in flux remind us of the underlying vulnerability of all urban landscapes. I first thought of California and its earthquake-prone areas, and yes, Peterson lived there before moving to Philadelphia. But his visions of underground tunnels, sewers, pipelines and everything else that lies beneath what we consider terra firma apply to all modern cities. *City on a Hill* seems all too realistic, and *Ship's Wake* indicates how humans can adapt: apartments in smoke stacks, greenery in lifeboats, and bodies, dormant or dead, on the sun deck.

#### Visual cacophony

Arden Bandler Browning's large-scale paintings on Tyvek, just pinned to the wall, create the urban ambiance of constant motion, with everything in view but nothing in its entirety. Yes, you can see portions of buildings, streets and signs of human existence, but where is the identifying detail? Stand in front of *Vanishing Point* and follow that dynamic thrust, right out to the watery horizon. All four of Browning's paintings are dated 2011, an impressive dedication. The visual cacophony is overwhelming.

Amy Walsh incites the voyeur in everyone with her site-specific installation of five peepholes with views of urban sites in construction or destruction, a tacit homage to Marcel Duchamp or to urban curiosity when passing by a construction site. Mixed media, cardboard and wood create scenes momentarily devoid of people. For anyone who has lived in a city, these broken windows, boarded openings, abandoned residences and stalled construction projects are familiar sights.

#### Useless debris

The brothers Steven and Billy Dufala have gone beyond Philadelphia to comment on the culture in general. *Entropy*— electrical conduits and junction boxes— defines their space. If, like me, you need a definition, entropy

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means a turning toward and/or a thermodynamic measure of the amount of energy unavailable for useful work in a system undergoing change.

Then the Dufalas have created *Heap*, a large, site-specific drawing in graphite depicting a cluster of old machines, pipes, conduits and other now useless debris. Overwhelming their space is the *Twenty Yard Dumpster Coffin*, produced during their artist-in-residence program at Revolution Recovery, a construction waste recycling facility in North Philadelphia. With its tufted interior of satiny-looking plastic and fake gold decoration, the Dufalas demonstrate the false rituals involved in our current funereal rituals. We mask reality with tacky platitudes. If any exhibition can change our consciousness of reality, this is it. What previously appeared stable and strong in the city environment becomes tentative. Five young artists can open your eyes.