



**POST-ACROPOLIS METROPOLIS:
SIFTING THROUGH THE
INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE**

**A study of the American
Midwest rustbelt by six
photographers**

**Michael Allen
Joseph Heathcott
John Montre
Claire Nowak-Boyd
Robert Powers
Toby Weiss**

**For information on the
availability of this exhibit,
contact Joseph Heathcott at
jheathcott@gmail.com**

POST-ACROPOLIS METROPOLIS: SIFTING THROUGH THE INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE

This exhibit brings together the work of six photographers whose output explores the cultural landscape of the American Midwest in the post-industrial age, as embodied in the story of metropolitan St. Louis.

Cultural landscapes emerge at the intersection of materials and ideologies. They reveal our deeply conflicted views of the relationship between beauty, utility, and value. Our conflicted views shape the landscapes we inhabit. In turn, these landscapes shape us.

The metropolitan landscape examined here is one of rivers and rail, farm and factory, brick and steel, flat expanses and gradual rises--and the constantly changing relationships between them. It is a landscape that reveals both the tremendous dynamism of the factory age, as well as the stark realities of industrial decline.

The 30 images selected for this exhibit showcase the faded glories and lived realities of metropolitan St. Louis. The first half of the twentieth century saw a period of rapid industrialization. This explosive period left behind a tremendous architectural legacy.

But the second half of the twentieth century saw a period of massive capital and human flight. The scale and ferocity of a once mighty industrial power is readily apparent in the factories, shops, and homes; the extent of decline is measured in the ruins.

These photographers help us to begin to make sense of the terrific assemblage of things left behind. What stories will we tell of our industrial past? Who will tell them, and where do they begin? How can we carve a new city out of the old?

But the artists in this exhibit do not paint a simple or clear picture of landscape transformations. They neither bemoan a lost age nor fetishize its ruins. Their work resists fixed views and rejects narrative closure. Rather, their work scours the post-industrial metropolis for clues about its future.

As the photographers sift through the debris, they are looking to uncover the hidden gems of creativity and resilience in the daily life of a declining metropolis. Theirs is a labor of love, an embrace of the city as it begins the long task of reinventing itself for the twenty-first century.

SAMPLE PHOTOGRAPHS:



Michael Allen
Baden Block (2008)



Joseph Heathcott
Obsolete Cylinders (2004)



John Montre
Reclamation Site (2006)



Claire Novak-Boyd
Hair Care (2006)



Robert Powers
Excess Containment (2008)



Toby Weiss
Rendez-Vous (2005)

EXHIBITION CONTRIBUTORS

CURATOR

Joseph Heathcott

Joseph Heathcott is a writer, curator, photographer, and educator living in New York, where he teaches at The New School. His work considers the role of art, design, and place making as everyday civic practices in the contemporary metropolis. He is also a compulsive peripatetic, a jazz fanatic, an amateur archivist, and a collector of records, post cards, old radios, books, and found objects. His work has appeared in many formats, including exhibits, magazines, juried art shows, and journals of opinion.

ARTISTS

Michael Allen

Michael R. Allen is an architectural historian who serves as director of the Preservation Research Office, a consulting firm based in St. Louis. In addition to writing the popular blog *Ecology of Absence*, Allen has written about architecture, history and cultural theory for numerous publications. Since 2007, Allen has been a contributor on architecture and preservation issues to St. Louis Public Radio, local affiliate of National Public Radio. Allen's photographs have appeared in *Architectural Record* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, as well as in several local exhibitions. He is a graduate of the Union Institute and University.

My photography examines the odd interaction of social and ecological forces that lead people to build, abandon and reclaim buildings and structures. I photograph buildings in all conditions, from impeccably maintained to fire-damaged. The preservationist impulse in me draws me back to the damaged buildings that might otherwise pass quietly without documentation. I return to vacant and decaying buildings to capture the elements that make them unique, as well as to highlight the irony of their disuse in a wealthy society.

John Montre

John Montre, a reference librarian at Pius XII Memorial Library, worked as a photojournalist for 15 years. He has a Master's degree from Saint Louis University in Urban Affairs, a Master's degree in Library Science, and a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Missouri. Montre produces photographs with a wide range of equipment, from high end SLR cameras to the built-in camera on his cell phone. His motto is that the best camera is the one that is with you.

The city calls out with an ache as its buildings die of neglect. But even as they die, they radiate a serene, palpable sense of history and beauty. The architecture is rich but fleeting; a building may be here today and gone tomorrow. I feel the need to capture this moment of the city's life before it vanishes.

Claire Nowak-Boyd

Claire Nowak-Boyd is an artist who has worked in retail stores, libraries, and other odd jobs in Chicago and St. Louis. Long a car-less wonder she finally obtained her driver's license at age 25. Her likes include the Dewy Decimal System, cats, and gin. She moved to Detroit in 2009 and launched a new blog titled *Curious Feet*. The move was "on purpose," she said, "because Detroit needed another unemployed person!" She looks forward to singlehandedly turning around decades of pain and distrust with the sheer force of her naïve hope.

Living in Detroit is about developing a new skill set around knowing where to get things. It is here, if you know where to look. Honestly, it's a pretty fun skill set to develop, since it involves exploring the city, visiting independent businesses, and asking people questions about their city. Most of all, though, I'm planning to get out and take some nice, slow, thinky walks around Detroit. I love my car and I love the way it has transformed the entire atlas into a sea of near-immediate possibilities, but there is nothing quite like the unfiltered, direct experience of sun-on-skin and shoe-on-pavement when you're getting to know a new place.

Robert Powers

Rob Powers is a writer and architect who grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta and Shreveport. He has also lived in St. Louis, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Chicago. He studied architecture at Washington University and the University of Wisconsin. It was the century-old campus of Washington University that first captured his imagination and led to a lifelong interest in architecture, preservation, and urban design. In 2001 he founded Built St. Louis, now one of the longest-running blogs covering the built environment. He continues to document cities around the country.

I love exploring cities. But I hate unnecessary demolition. I also hate commercial radio, waiting for red lights, dropping stuff, creationism, and computer malfunctions. There is nothing finer in this world than cruising around town on a beautiful summer Saturday morning, checking out neighborhoods while listening to piles of bluegrass music.

Toby Weiss

Toby Weiss is a native St. Louis photographer, writer, design-build marketer and singer. Since all of these pursuits take place in buildings in neighborhoods in cities, she maintains an eternal fascination and love for the built environment. Mid-century modern architecture preservation is her consuming preoccupation. Her base camp is TobyWeiss.com, and she operates a popular blog titled BELT (Built Environment in Layman's Terms).

I have no degrees of any sort; I am autodidactic rather than academic. I am just trying to make sense of and record the world around me. You don't need an architecture degree to know the built environment because we live in it every day. So I capture buildings and spaces in a language everyone can understand.