

THE
CITY

THE
CREATIVE
PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

This book is about the experience of building an exhibition from the ground up. Something as simple looking as images on a wall is really a complex culmination of research, curation, design and advertisement all tied together with a distinct visual identity.

With the help of the Toledo Museum of Art, two classes of University of Toledo students came together to build an exhibition displayed in the TMA's own Hitchcock Gallery, centered around the theme of "The City".



ART MUSEUM PRACTICES

Art Museum Practices is a course offered through the University of Toledo that provides students with the opportunity to gain real-world experience working and curating in a museum. The AMP class of fall 2015 was given the chance to work directly with the Toledo Museum of Art to put together an exhibition. The TMA provided the class with space in the Hitchcock Gallery and access works on paper pieces that would be featured in the exhibition, while the AMP class was tasked with selecting a theme for the show, and, subsequently, which pieces would be featured. The theme that was chosen for the exhibition was centered around the city, and was aptly titled *The City*. This theme was further sub-categorized into the following groups: Architecture & Renewal, Economics & Society, and A Day in the City. After the content of the show was decided, the students began planning out the curation of the show and set to work writing text about each category and piece that would be featured on the labels.

QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH AMP



Crystal Hand and Alyx Smith with Thor Mednick planning in the Hitchcock Gallery.

What was it like working directly with the TMA and who did you work with?

Getting the insight directly from the TMA staff helped tremendously. We worked with Ed Hill, the assistant curator of works on paper, who graciously gave his time to allow the AMP class to view the works on paper in lieu of just getting a sheet of paper with pictures and accession numbers. He helped us understand more about the curation process and gave us some ideas of what went into label-writing. Paula Reich, the Interpretive Projects and Planning Manager, edited every label our class wrote and helped us understand the elements that go into writing the perfect label. Claude Fixler, the Design Studio Manager, gave us a better understanding of the installation process and gave us input on how we planned out the design of the exhibition. Lastly, we can't forget about our instructor, Thor Mednick, who helped us out every step of the way. We couldn't have asked for better help!

How many images did you have starting out and how did you go about narrowing them down?

We started with 46 prints and narrowed them down to 39, plus the oil painting we asked to use for this exhibition. However, before the exhibition class began our instructor, along with the curatorial assistant for works on paper, went through hundreds of prints and narrowed them down by which prints would fit into the city topic.

Did you have some categories in mind when starting the curation or were they established naturally as you chose individual works?

They fell naturally into categories after we narrowed the pieces down to 40. Initially, we did have six categories which were brought down to three by the second week of the semester.

What was collaborative curation like?

Stressful. You needed to balance everyone's opinions out without forcing too much of your own opinion. Overall, though, the process went much smoother than anticipated because this class worked really well together.

What was it like collaborating with another class in the design process?

It was interesting collaborating with another class. We would have liked to have more collaboration with the NMPD class, for example, the AMP curators having more input on the design process. In the future, perhaps making the NMPD class integrated more into the documentation of the curation process would be great for enhanced learning opportunities.

Now that the exhibition is up, what is your class working on?

We are working on a collaboration project with the museum to generate more foot traffic in the coming months. Now that the exhibition is open and runs through to February, we need to continue to generate new interest in the exhibition, so, we are planning to have film screenings that relate to the exhibition and the topic of the city.

QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH THOR MEDNICK

What is so interesting about the city that it prompted its own exhibit?

Good question. To begin with, the choice of any topic for the AMP exhibition is conditioned by a couple of factors. The show MUST emerge from the TMA print collection – we can't bring in works from elsewhere. Within that condition, what I try to do is select an umbrella topic that is at once narrow enough to be cohesive and broad enough to allow for a variety of categorizations and interpretations. It seemed to me that the city, as a loose category (as we used it in the topics course last semester) allowed for precisely that balance. There is a tremendous variety of art created in or about cities, and the city inflects that art in a wide spectrum of ways. Sometimes it is the context, sometimes it is the subject, sometimes a bit of both. Also, since the emergence of cities they have essentially become important as centers for the development and practice of civilizational markers: financial

systems, legal and political systems, cultural institutional practice, etc. They also transformed the ways in which human society functioned, behaved, and interacted. The range of associations – historic and contemporary, emotional and otherwise – that the city can invoke or can be made to represent is such that it seemed a productive touchstone for a show.

What moods of the city did you want the exhibition to portray?

This is where it becomes a bit tricky for me to answer, because the question was never what I wanted to see – that was up to the students. Nevertheless, the question is extremely relevant – it was in large part because of the city's capacity for representing the entire spectrum of mood that I thought it would be a good choice. It is – or at least can be – deeply evocative, no matter one's attitude toward it; I figured that would give the curators a lot of psychological potential to work with.

When working with the students was it more free reign or something that you helped guide?

It was extremely satisfactory for me to see the process, because the farther along they got, the less guidance they needed. At the beginning, I was quietly intervening with practical advice, but it did not take long for us to get to the point where they could see an impracticality coming and address it before it emerged. If there was one part of the process with which they did need some help, it was with label writing – understandable, since they hadn't done it before. I had them complete their labels a few days before they were due to be submitted to Paula so I could go over them and give some language and content coaching. Mostly, they needed guidance on wording and on efficiency. Occasionally, they needed a bit more clarity for themselves regarding the points they wanted to emphasize about a particular work and how to formulate language that did so in a cohesive and efficient manner.

When picking artworks from the 19th and 20th century, do you draw parallels between their social issues and contemporary issues?

Again, this was beyond my purview, but I did, when discussing the city with them as a general concept, try to shape my explanations in comments in such a way that they could see this topic as a living one – that is, a subject whose problems are not solved. I think they certainly understood that the problems and questions they identified in earlier works – industrialization, economic development, etc. – continue to be relevant today.



NEW MEDIA DESIGN PRACTICES

Students enrolled in the University of Toledo's course New Media Design Practices Intensive were able to work in conjunction with the Toledo Museum of Art and the Art Museum Practices class to create the graphic design that would be used to represent and advertise The City exhibition. The NMDP students not only collaborated amongst one another to develop designs, but they also worked with the TMA designers and AMP class to ensure that their designs were representative of the show and fell within the TMA guidelines. The NMDP students spent a majority of the semester developing a poster for the exhibition that could be modified to suit various forms of print and digital media in order to spread the word about the exhibition. Additionally, the NMDP class worked on taking the text the AMP class wrote to format for informational labels that would appear alongside pieces in the gallery.

QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH NMDP

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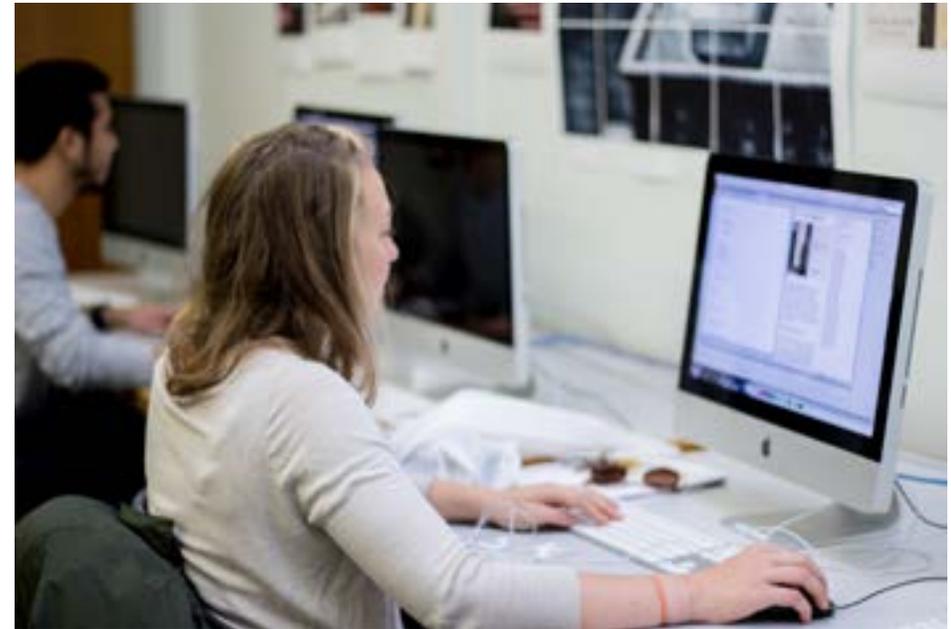
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Mark Why and Shelly Trivisonno designing layouts for The City advertisements.

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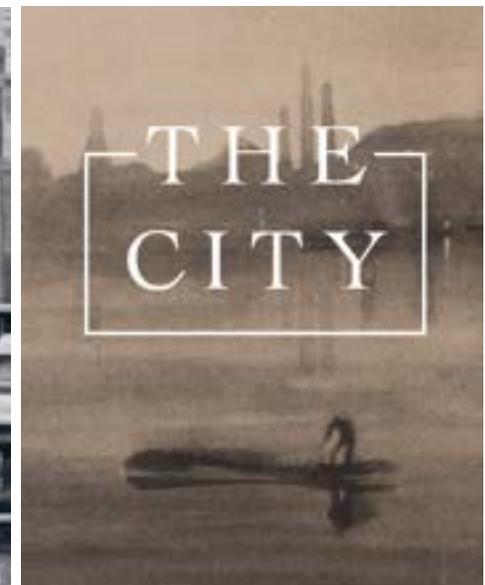
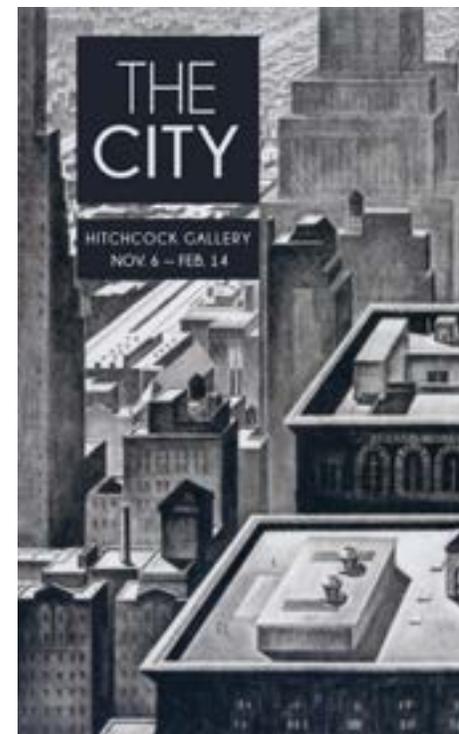
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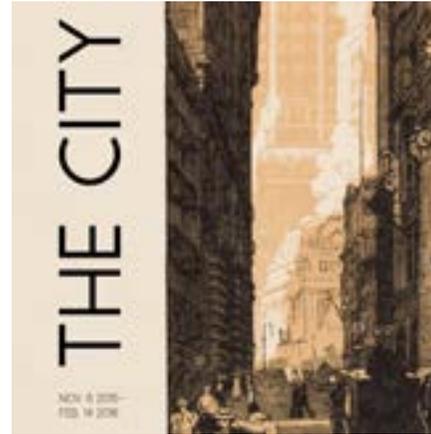
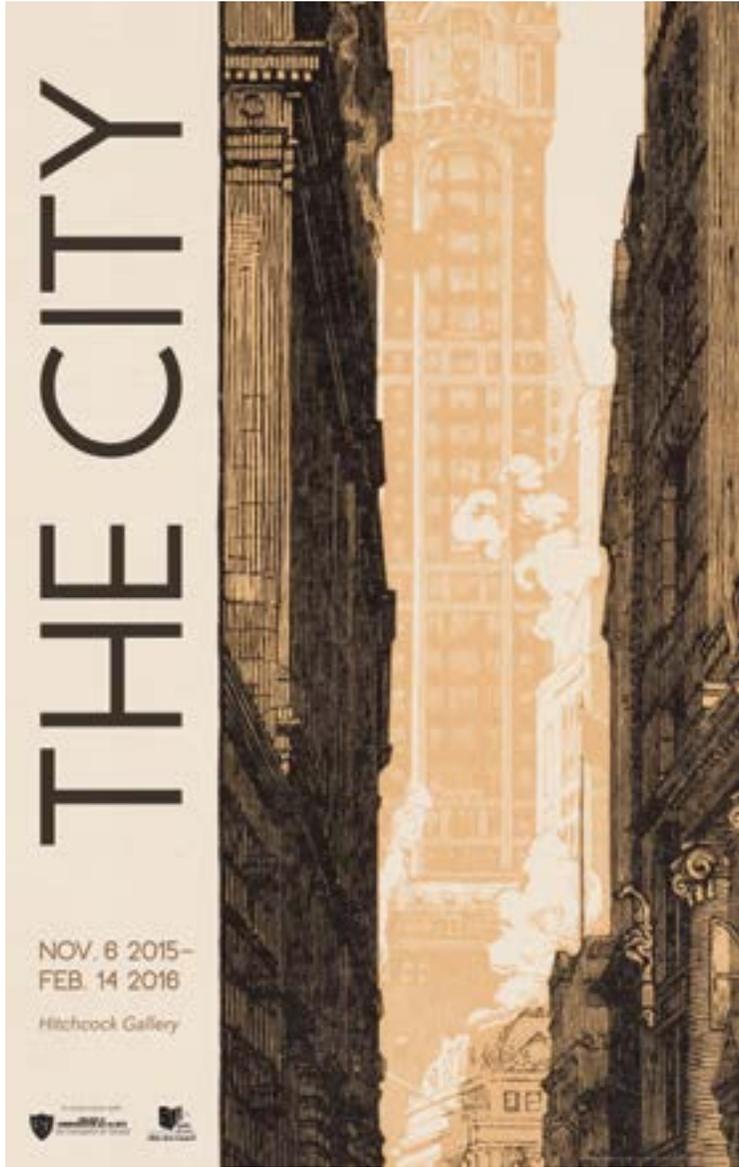
Chelsea Thompson and Jesse Heider working on designs for an online portfolio.

THE PROCESS

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HITCHCOCK GALLERY November 6 - February 14



GALLERY

The setup of a gallery, with its placement of works and information accompanying it, is integral to its success. Curation can be used as a fabulous method to lead the viewer through the physical space as well as an emotional and intellectual space. The order pieces are placed creates relationships between the works that otherwise may not have been realized. In this way, the curator has as much power as the artist in getting across a point - it's all dependent on framing.

THANK YOU

For all the help with making this exhibition possible, we would like to thank:

Ed Hill, Curatorial Assistant

Lori Mott, Exhibitions Manager

Paula Reich, Interpretive Projects and Managing Editor

Claude Fixler, Design Studio Manager/3D Designer

Scott Boberg, Manager of Programs and Audience Engagement

Carolyn Putney, Former Chief Curator, TMA



New Media Design Practices:

Anna Bui, Breana Cousino, Emily Frank, Nikka Geiermann, Jesse Heider, Katelynn Meyer, Mike Miller, Blake Ody, Emily Rose, Abbey Ruppel, Chelsea Thompson, Shelly Trivisonno, Mark Why



Art Museum Practices:

Jenna Barkley, Lida Ervin, Kaitlynn Grey, Crystal Hand, Danielle Hedger, Joanne Joys, Molly LaBadie, Brandy Save, Alyxandria Smith

