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CITY

THE  
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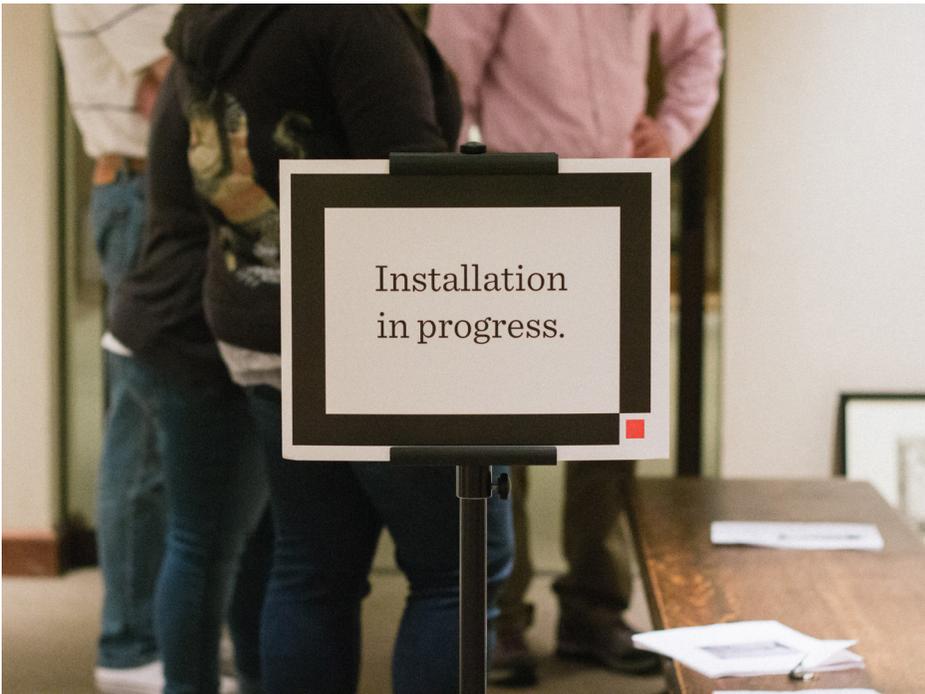
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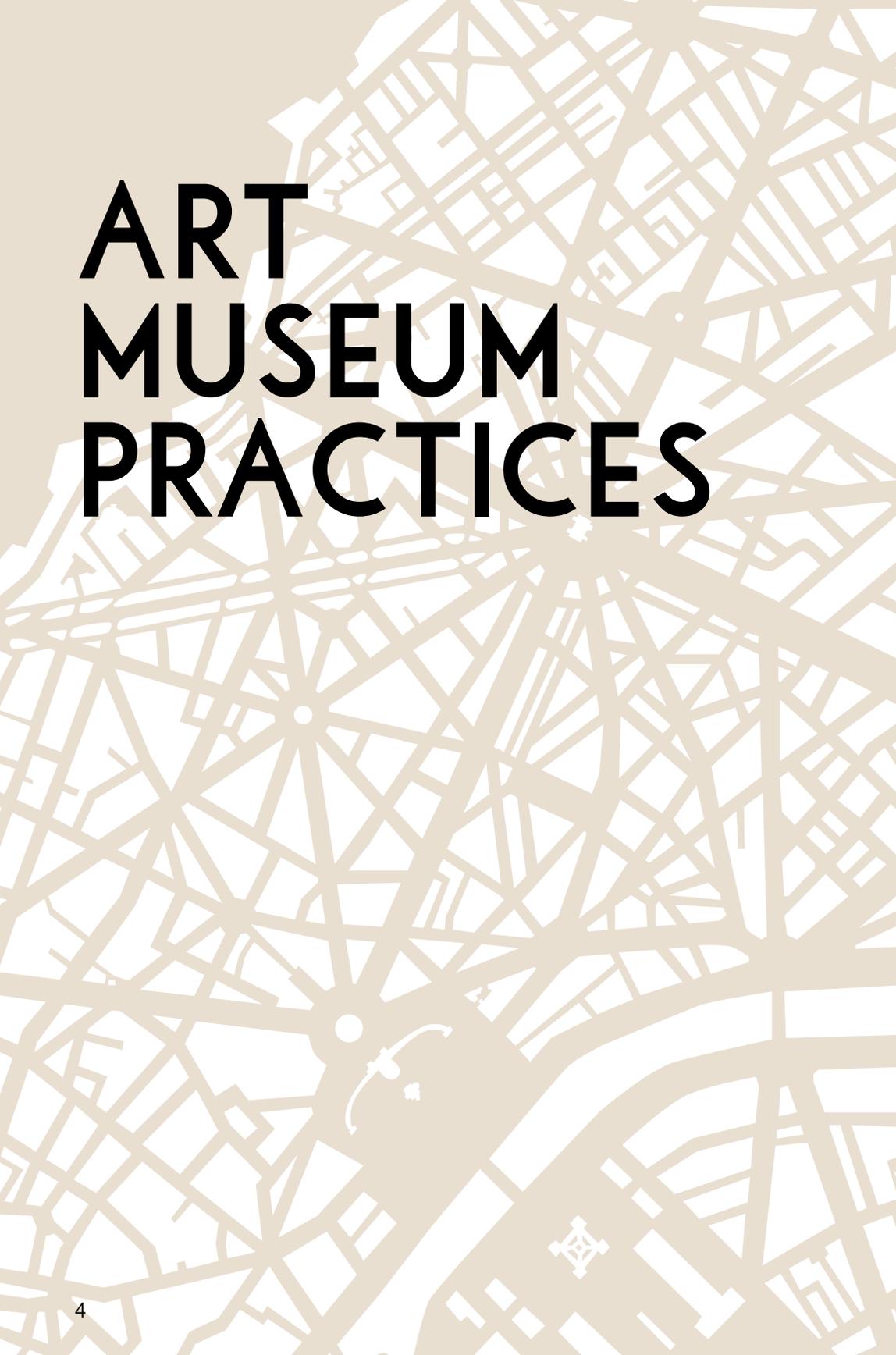
## INTRODUCTION

This book documents the building of a Toledo Museum of Art exhibition from the ground up by University of Toledo, Department of Art students. The exhibition, displayed in the TMA Grace J. Hitchcock Print Gallery, was centered around the theme of “the city”.

A museum visitor’s deceptively simple experience of looking at artwork hung on gallery walls is really the culmination of complex research, thoughtful curation, creative design and effective advertising materials all tied together and directed by a distinct visual identity. Every aspect of the selection, installation and accompanying text was overseen by UT students.



Students, professors and museum staff installing pieces from *The City* exhibition.



# ART MUSEUM PRACTICES

Art Museum Practices (AMP) is a course that provides students with the opportunity to gain real-world experience while working and curating in a museum setting. The AMP class was tasked with selecting a theme for the show, and the Toledo Museum of Art provided the class with exhibition space in the Hitchcock Gallery.

The theme chosen for the exhibition was centered around the concept of “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. Students had access to works on paper from the museum’s collection, and chose works that would be hung in the exhibition.

After the show’s content was decided upon, students began curation of the exhibition and set to work writing text about each category and artwork to be featured on the identifying labels.

# QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH AMP

The following questions were answered by student Jenna Barkley as representative of the AMP class.



Students Alyx Smith and Crystal Hand working with Claude Fixler, TMA Design Studio Manager.

## **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 Curatorial Assistant of works on paper. Mr. Hill graciously gave his time to allow the AMP class to view actual works on paper in lieu of just getting a document with pictures of the works and accession numbers. He helped us understand more about the curation process and gave us some ideas of what goes into label writing. Paula Reich, the Interpretive Projects and Planning Manager at the TMA, edited every label our class wrote and helped us understand the elements that go into writing the perfect label. Claude Fixler, the TMA Design Studio Manager, gave us a better understanding of the installation process and input about how to approach planning the overall exhibition and installation design. Lastly, we can't forget about our instructor, Dr. Thor Mednick, who helped us every step of the way. We couldn't have asked for better help!

## **How many different works of art did you identify at the start of the selection process and how did you go about narrowing the choices down?**

We started with 46 prints and narrowed them down to 39, plus one oil painting. However, before the exhibition class even began it's selection process, our instructor, along with the curatorial assistant for works on paper, went through hundreds of prints and narrowed them down to fit the city topic.

## **Did you have categories in mind when starting the selection of the art 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 narrowed down to three by the second week of the semester.

## **What was collaborative curation like?**

It was interesting collaborating with another class. We would have liked to have more collaboration with the NMPD class. For example, the AMP curators could have had 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 collaborative project with the museum to generate more foot traffic in the coming months. Now that the exhibition is open and runs through 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 DR. 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....

## **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?**

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.



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



# NEW MEDIA DESIGN PRACTICES

Students enrolled in the University of Toledo's New Media Design Practices Intensive course 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 with 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.

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 effectively spread the word about the exhibition. Additionally, the NMDP class formatted informational labels written by AMP students that would appear alongside pieces in the gallery. Following the opening, the class was responsible for documenting the exhibition.

# QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH NMDP

The following questions were answered by Shelly Trivisonno a student in New Media Design Practices class.

## How did the class begin with the design process?

Designing for a museum is a unique way of designing in that it has to be fairly minimal yet interesting and be fitting for the particular exhibition. All of the students in our class took the Topics course about the city to understand art's role in the history of the city. This gave us a good starting point on designing for the subject matter. During class we made revision after revision to come up with the perfect combination of title treatment and image while selecting from the works in the exhibition.



Students Mark Why and Shelly Trivisonno designing a pamphlet and web pages for *The City*.



Professor Barry Whittaker and student Nikka Geiermann reviewing page layouts for *The City: The Creative Process*.

## What is it like narrowing down designs produced by an entire class?

Everyone has his or her own preference in visual aesthetics. There were 13 people in the class and all of us submitted 3 designs each. There was a wide variety of works to choose from. We all agreed having a clean, minimal design that expressed the nature of the show and the integrity of the museum is what would come out on top. Jesse Heider's design did all of those things.

## Can you talk about the process of working with another class's writings and concept for the exhibition?

The AMP class had a more intimate role in the process, finding the works in the Print Study room, laying out the order for the show, and writing the labels for the pieces. It was nice to be in regular contact with the people who knew the work inside and out. They were able to give a different perspective on the design work, which came in handy. The show was definitely a group effort. Combining students of different skill sets was vital in putting on a fantastic exhibition. Go team!

## QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH NMDP

The following questions were answered by student Jesse Heider, designer of the final poster used for *The City* exhibition.

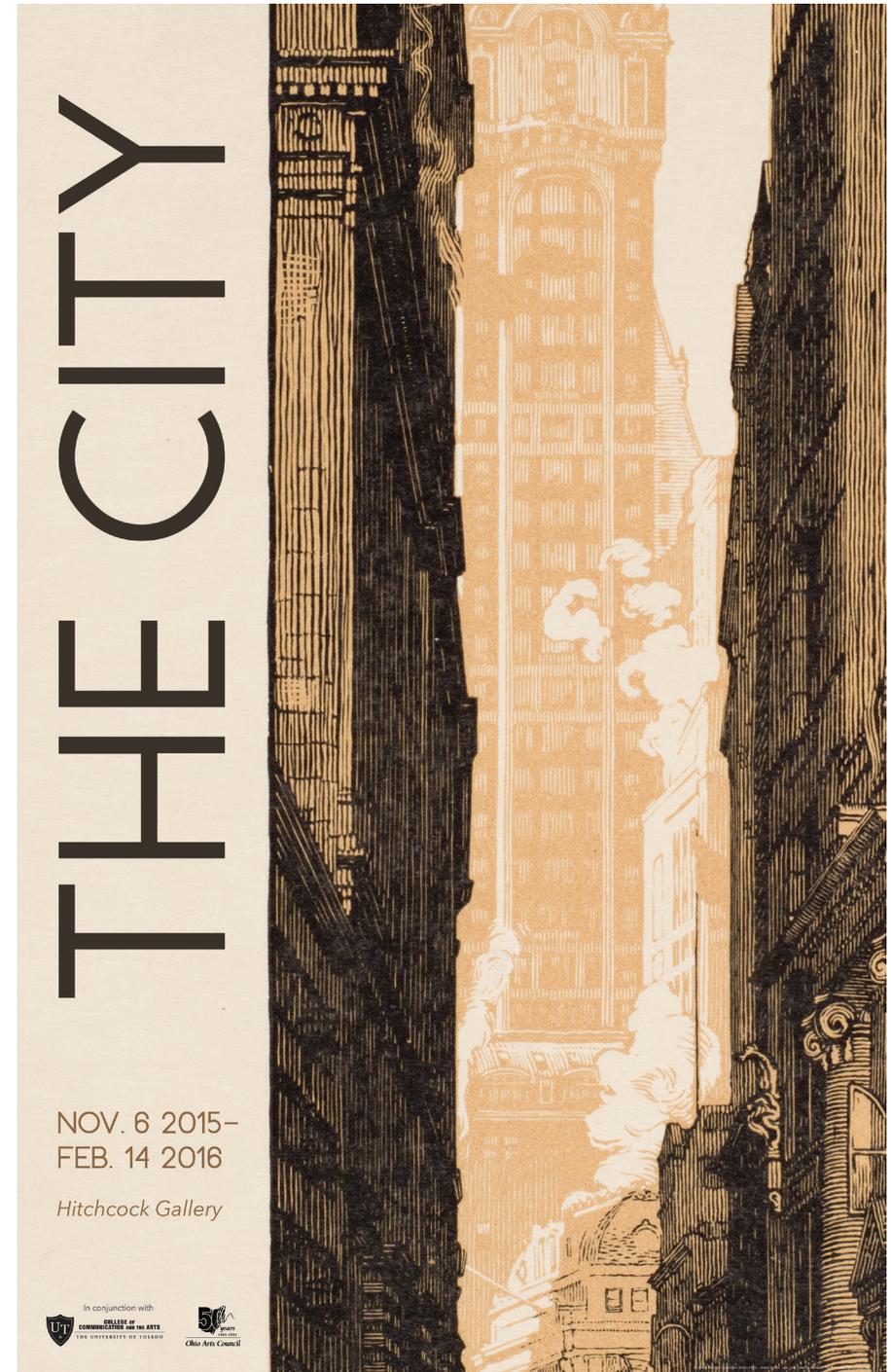
### **How did you decide on an image to represent the show through the poster and advertisements?**

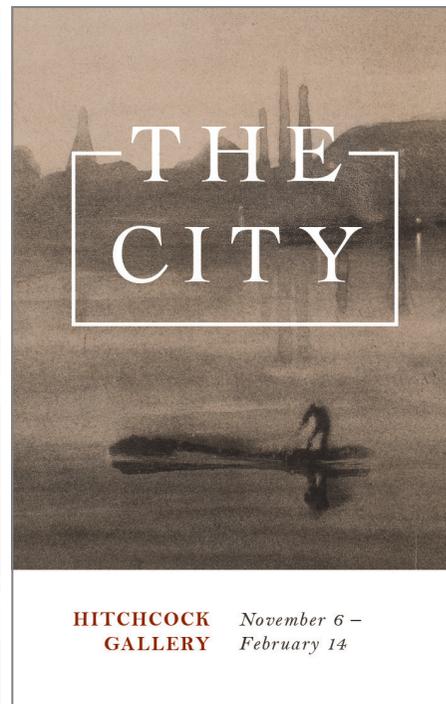
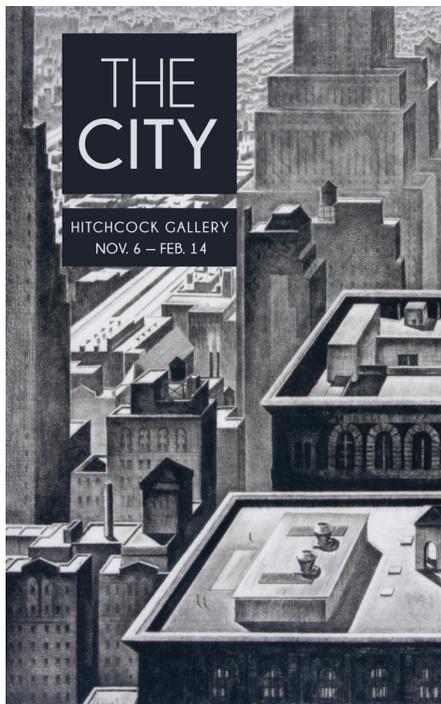
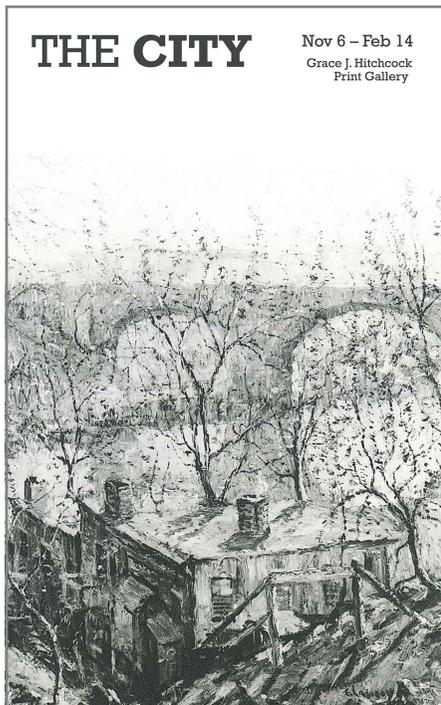
The image I chose to represent the exhibition was one that had muted color, but still stood out among the rest. It is a vertical piece, so my design played off that aspect and took on a simple, to-the-point layout. Once I saw the actual piece hanging in the exhibit, I was shocked at how small it really is.

### **What was it like creating a visual identity for an exhibition?**

It was a lot of fun, and sometimes stressful, creating an identity for the show. It was an amazing feeling to see my poster design hanging in the museum and seeing all of the work that our two classes did to bring this show to life.

The opposite page shows the final poster design for *The City*, shown outside the Hitchcock gallery





## THE PROCESS

The opportunity of designing a visual identity for a gallery exhibition as a student does not come along often. For the NMDP class, this was a new and exciting yet challenging process. The first step was to strictly work with text. How can a distinct visual design identify the concept of *The City* without having to provide an extended written explanation of the theme?

The NMDP class collaboratively decided which graphic layout was strongest, then applied the text to a poster design, incorporating an image from the exhibition. This was the longest and most important step in the design process, with each student designing five poster layouts to be reviewed. Through a process of elimination by the NMDP and AMP classes and professor, Barry Whittaker, the final design was agreed upon.

As the exhibition approached its opening date and the final poster was chosen, it was time to get the word out with web and print advertisements. The class translated the poster into different sizes and shapes optimized for web and print platforms while still preserving the same impact and delivering all necessary information related to the exhibition.

Documentation tied the whole process together with still images taken of the gallery, interviews with students and faculty, a visual catalog displayed on the TMA's website, web pages for the University of Toledo's website and a hardcover book—that you're holding now.

The images to the left are alternate design proposals by Nikka Geiermann, Shelly Trivisonno, Emily Rose and Mark Why (top left to bottom right).



# GALLERY

The setup of artwork in a gallery, with accompanying didactic information is integral to an exhibition's success. Solidly considered curation is a fabulous method of leading the viewer through a gallery's physical space, as well as the show's emotional and intellectual space. Carefully ordered placement of artworks creates relationships between the works that otherwise may not have been apparent.

The small scale of the Hitchcock Gallery space was a challenge students had to work with when designing the show. They creatively solved this by incorporating the furniture and permanent fixtures in the room to complement the artworks.



Two AMP students installing works in the Hitchcock Gallery.



Museum visitors enjoying the works on view.



TMA employees in the process of readying prints from the museum's print collection, to be included in the exhibition.



*The City* exhibition on view in the Toledo Museum of Art's Hitchcock Gallery.

# THANK YOU

For all their help in making this exhibition possible, we would like to thank the UT Department of Art, The College of Communication and the Arts, and the Toledo Museum of Art. Your support allows students to receive the richest education possible through experiences that will ensure success in our future careers.

## New Media Design Practices students (top):

(from left to right) Breana Cousino, Emily Frank, Mike Miller, Emily Rose, Blake Ody, Abbey Ruppel, Nikka Geiermann, Katelynn Meyer, Jesse Heider, Anna Bui, Shelly Trivisonno, Chelsea Thompson, Mark Why.



## Art Museum Practices students (bottom):

(from left to right) Lida Ervin, Crystal Hand, Brandy Save, Alyxandria Smith, Kaitlynn Grey, Jenna Barkley, Danielle Hedger, Joanne Joys, Molly LaBadie (not pictured).



