



unearthing a great american city, one story at a time

## the arts

10/11/04

Scott Hocking: Drawings, Photographs, Sculpture @ District Arts



[DISTRICT ARTS GALLERY](#), 955 S. Eton Street, Birmingham, MI 48009 248-258-9300  
September 18 through October 16; 11:00 am - 5:00 pm, Tuesday- Saturday, or by appointment.



An artist can offer us a unique perspective - turn something we take for granted into something engaging, beautiful, and with that change the way in which we look at a part of our world. Scott



Hocking irrevocably alters how we look at rust and by extension decay on a larger scale. (This is true - after seeing his work in a gallery, you can not look at rusted out metal below an overpass the same way ever again.) This show featuring rusted metal is perfect for fall - as we are drawn to the beauty that is the draining of chlorophyll from leaves, there is a parallel in finding beauty in the oxidation of metal.

Hocking has been making a significant mark on the Detroit art landscape, and the District Arts show is no exception. (For a recent profile on the artist, click [here](#).) The opening room of the gallery provides an establishing shot through photography of where Hocking has been to find what he makes. Two widescreen shots stitched together from multiple images, immerse the viewer deeper into the environment he captures. One image depicts the whole of the sweeping ruins of a former Mecca of Detroit's industrial past (the Studebaker plant). (And by ruins, these aren't simply in a state of disrepair, but have the look about them as if they served as the ring for the Godzilla vs. the giant monster of the week smack-down.) These are captivating images, at once both sad and beautiful in the same instant.

If these pieces provide the overview, the next work encountered provides more intimacy. Presented in a montage format (which foreshadows the presentation of the main body of work deeper in the gallery) Hocking has assembled a number of photographs from his explorations of the city mounted neatly on a wood backing. There is beauty - a near Kodak moment of a rainbow arching over the long abandoned train



station, the vivid green of foliage viewed through the archway created by cold hard metal grain silos, and the iridescent coloring on the neck of a dead pheasant. Death not just decay plays a role in his photography, as Hocking displays a powerful shot of two dead dogs on the street, victims of illegal dog fighting. These images have their beauty, though in great contrast to the picturesque, up-kept nature of Birmingham. The pictures seem as if they were taken a world

away, rather than a mere 15 miles.

In showing the character of the forgotten, Hocking is in some ways a naturalist of a new era. This is not nature in the pristine, but nature reclaiming that which was once most built up, most devoid of the natural.



The photos provide an introduction for the salon-like installation Hocking has created - covering all the walls of a room floor to ceiling with his finds - rusted metal, paint chipped wood all cropped to fit into ostentatious, showy frames. The salon presentation prompts viewers, overwhelmed by the diversity and assortment that they are confronted with to exclaim, "Oooh, I like that one" before discovering another beside it which quickly generates a similar reaction. And then another. (I've narrowed my favorite one down to seven at this point.) The salon is the candy store - there is an abundance of objects we want to have.

These are successful - as on one hand they all come from the same cloth - the disintegration of an industrial town - but on the other hand this decay has left its imprint in completely unique ways. Hocking has captured - through his eye and his aesthetic sensibility - a beauty few might discover left to themselves. The organic patterns of rust are reminiscent of the shifting forms of clouds, of tranquil ink washes, of Zen flow drawings. It's enough to have captured it, found it, and presented it framed - making it art. This is not a trick of semantics but a unique, hard-earned skill requiring the eye of a photographer and the compositional sense of a painter. The transformation is complete. While these are not canvases, not something originally intended to be viewed, they have not only taken on new life as artworks but are imbued with that vestige of what they once were and how they reached their current state before Hocking found them. And rust does make a record. The patterns, the outward reach of decay, like growth rings on a tree, preserve in some way the tides of the elements, slowly but most assuredly dissolving away these metal forms.

So then what are we to make of the select few pieces (outside the salon, in the hallway space) that Hocking has altered? He has drawn upon them, almost etching-like, allowing the found objects to act as surfaces, merging the imagery with the characteristics of the piece itself. The piece "Sisyphus and the Pyramid of Rejection" is quite clever and perhaps symbolic of the ruins of civilization he works in: man builds up, climbing the mountain of development, only to have it roll down to some other state. This points toward the cyclical nature of rebirth and decay that is such an inherent theme in all of Hocking's work.

These works definitely garner a different reaction than the unadulterated objects. That isn't to say that they're not drawn on well, or that they aren't interesting in their own right - for they are. Only that in light of the nature of the other work, it is difficult to reconcile their place. Perhaps that's ok though - for they may satisfy a desire by Hocking to draw, to exercise that artistic muscle in a way the other work doesn't allow. In that they offer another dimension and possibility for exploration to add to his already rich repertoire.

It should also be noted, that on hand are boxes from the fabled "Relics" show from the DIA exhibition with Clinton Snider. It's good that these are still able to be seen - for each time offers a new reading, and they offer an important foundation for accessing Hocking's newer works.

Hocking conflates creation and decay, beauty and disrepair, and by showing in Birmingham sheds some light on a world that few here get to see, but doubtful will be able to forget after seeing this work. As always, Hocking offers eye opening, engaging, and important work that is not to be missed. - *Nic Sousanis*