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Landscape works under construction for artist

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Steel, glass, concrete and brick have a beauty most people miss as they trudge through the chaotic streets of the city.

Artist Ben Schwab finds inspiration in the hard-edged, man-made composition of metropolitan landscapes.

"I really enjoy the complexity," Schwab said.

In his oil paintings, Schwab tries to capture the life of cities - the symbiotic mix of decomposition and rebirth.

"Conceptually, over time, I've begun to think about the city as being an entity itself - a living and growing organism. It grows and it changes and it evolves and it decays and regenerates," he said.

Schwab's landscapes currently are on display, along with paintings by Dana Clancy, at the Courthouse Gallery in Lake George. The "Inside/Outside" show runs through April 16.

His cityscapes are as much construction zones as they are works of art.

"Within one painting, I'll have a different duality. I like the idea of the painting itself to be a reflection of the subject. The painting itself is under construction," Schwab said.

The artist compares his process to the work of a contractor.

"The way I paint, I build up marks on the canvas. It's so connected to architectural form," Schwab said.

The artist's canvases are delineated with strong strokes, which blend into more recognizable urban forms.

"Certain elements will be really flushed out. Others will be very open. It works with the conceptual idea of the city being under construction - of change and growth," he said.

Schwab often begins the process by working from a photograph. As the image starts to take shape on canvas, it usually finds a life of its own.

"I take the photograph away and construct the image by putting my own ideas in there," he said.

The paintings range in size from large pieces to works as small as 2-by-3 inches.

The tiny cityscapes were inspired by a cell phone.

"They are basically homages to an iPhone screen, which is 2-by-3 inches," Schwab said. "I thought it would be funny to play on digital imagery. It's a drawing, which some people might think of as an antiquated way of making an image. It seems so easy now to just take a photo on your phone."

So far, Schwab has completed cityscapes of Philadelphia, Manhattan, Albany, Troy and Tokyo.

An assistant professor of art at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, Schwab received a grant last year to study and do research in Japan.

The painter was fascinated by the difference between Tokyo and American cities.

"It's so densely populated and the buildings are so compact with one another. There's so much for me to work with," he said of the Japanese cityscape.

Because Tokyo had developed over such a great period of time, it was much different from the layout of places like New York.

"There's no grid. The entire city of Tokyo is huge, and it doesn't make any sense how it is laid out. But I love that about it," he said.

Schwab found inspiration in the mix of old and new, where history meets modern innovation.

"The juxtaposition of pre and post-war structures is very interesting to me. The variation of structures is very different than it is here. There are buildings that are so old, and right next to them is a building that was built last year," he said.

For Schwab, the coexistence transcends architecture.

"These structure we build are a reflection of us," he said.

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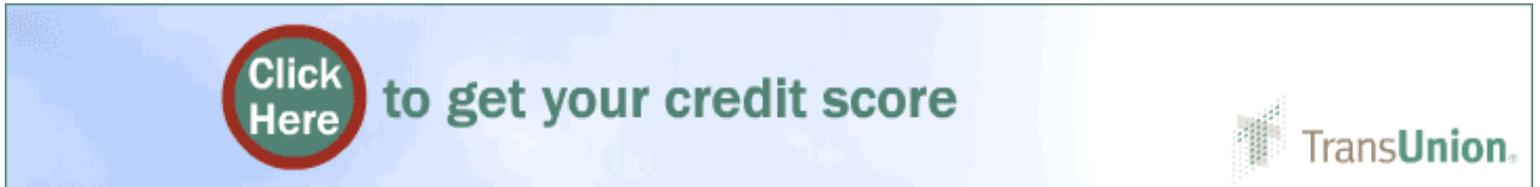
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