

URBAN DRIFT

by

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ABSTRACT

Urban Drift is about the flaneur, the derive... the psychogeography of the Midwest. We, as curious beings, drift to places that spark memories of the past; such is the way of a nostalgic subconscious. These drawings and sculptures provide a mysterious and yet vaguely familiar space that illustrates a collision of diluted symbolism and traces of nostalgia. The Midwest is filled to the brim with the geriatric and remnants of times long gone; but the objects in this show provide the atmosphere for an idling sensation to let ones imagination take them to a time of industrial production and shiny chrome, away from the crumbling concrete and dusty interiors. Therefore, this work aims to allure the viewer into viewing the decaying urban landscapes that currently occupy the rustbelt's interiors and the history that is being eroded away from memory in the Midwestern society.

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“All that was once directly lived has become mere representation.”¹

Toledo is an example of a Midwestern city that has run through a full life cycle (as Teaford puts it); but this city, like so many other rustbelt societies, has marched on and started the cycle over rather than just abandoning the modern decay. The crumbling landmarks littering the city have become financial burdens to their communities, and so, only few receive the opportunity to be sponsored as historical sites and given the care needed. Neglect befalls the mass left from the small list of historical structures given proper protection, and these left to their demise appear to our rustbelt culture as history/memory lost to decay like the senility that overcomes the geriatric. Urban Drift

¹ Debord, Guy. (1994) [1967] *The Society of the Spectacle*, translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books).

becomes the mirror reflecting the history and moments caught in derelict objects. Those objects are the triggers that suggest abandoned pasts and situations. So this work is not, in full, about the dismay of the Midwest's economic times, nor is it to beautify the hardships surrounding the state of these structures. Rather, this gathering of art is about the spaces and places that provoke and instill the ideas of urban drifting. The nostalgic ambiances that a flaneur might encounter and the raw beauty of corrosion or decay. Drifting is the sense of idling between moments, not necessarily clarity but may lead to clarity from the realization of what is in front of you.

“There where the real world changes into mere images, mere images become real beings.”²

“Flaneur” and “derive” are French terms used by the situationists, “urbexers” or “urban explorers” have taken over that title of the connoisseurs of the street and idlers of urban spaces. “Urbexers” are now exploring the inner shells of urban landscapes and many are retrieving images that allow brief glimpses into these buildings, but these only provide an ocular experience. In performing this duty, the gallery is to perform a duet with the work, the gallery being the stage and the art the props to deliver a dark and mysterious story that unfolds as it is investigated. This is the derive, and the derive brings us to the act of drifting or the loose imagination that follows the experience of our inner thoughts; when we are caught in a brief instant of time, and then quickly move on to the regular routine originally being followed. In such cases, the viewer becomes an important component to the work as subjective initiatives that navigate through these glimpses into Midwestern culture. But along with the viewer I (the artist) have become a part of the

² Debord, Guy. (1994) [1967] *The Society of the Spectacle*, translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books).

process. As the passive observer, I observe so the viewer isn't demanded to respond quickly, but rather pause in the captured moments. Yet as the passive observer, I am also the recorder, the drawings are vague and provoking of passing moments and the foggy ambiance that surrounds a passing memory. As cold silhouettes, they mimic the stark shells of the architecture that once stood in their place. Both the drawings and the sculptures provide a mysterious and yet vaguely familiar space that illustrates a collision of diluted symbolism and traces of nostalgia.

The paradox. There is a large paradox when speaking of urban blight, two sides that can inheritably gain precedence. One is the exquisiteness of the blight/decay. This wonderment and perceived inclination to explore derelict environments is created by the intrigue to remember. This nostalgia provides for a romantic view on such environments. These places are our history, they remind us of where we came from and whom we are by what means. On the reverse side, this is a metaphysical symbol of horridness of the current state of the landscape. Landscapes of such shape are a scar on the ecology and economy of the community. Current communities are striving to cope with a fast-paced world that in retrospect has left them behind to deal with a post-industrial mess. Ecologically, the buildings are so far into disrepair that nature has started to reclaim the spaces.

“The spectacle is not an ensemble of images, but a social connection between people mediated by images.”³

³ Debord, Guy. (1994) [1967] *The Society of the Spectacle*, translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books).

Complex layering and merging of found imagery are the central elements in this work; they create the atmosphere and the stage for viewers to enter into the space. While some viewers will identify with the recorded ambiances of decay, others will only receive a privileged glimpse into the Midwest's gritty atmosphere. These source images are the results of recording experiences and become the catalyst for recall. Found imagery edits the corruption of these sites because memory is subjective to each individual; while the work holds deeply personal constraints the content is not intended to be solely viewed as my own nostalgic memories of place. Rather, these productions are for a wider scope, including the idea that while memory is subjective; it can also intersect by means of experiences. Much like the chaotic ideas of Dadaism, my work involves techniques of collage, photomontage, and even light hints of assemblage. Collage and photomontage can both be seen throughout the drawings, by using these readily available images I limit the scope of the content to the Midwest because of personal ties and my heritage within the Midwest landscape. Keinholtz is one such artist that uses collage out of detritus to inform viewers of the history remaining in the discarded elements of our past. From the car hoods to the lath and plaster walls, I have brought assemblage to this show for the dislodged ambiances that one might experience in an abandoned building. Dislodged referring to times other than the current moment.

Researching contemporary artists such as Nikhil Chopra and Abigail Reynolds, gives thought to scale as Chopra produces work that encompasses entire canvas tents to draw his landscapes. This rises to the thought of the sublime, as I have chosen large scale drawings as the metaphors for the window planes in which the viewer may enter. Such

large entry points pursue the minds ability to perceive the recorded landscapes as one might a memory. Reynolds has addressed layering to create a dialogue of how environments change throughout time. This idea of layering to perceive evolution in a landscape dominates much of the content of Urban Drift's drawings. But one is to be remised if not to include the perspective atmosphere that profoundly resonates throughout the show. A technicality that, without it, would render the show pointless and drab as this series is to provoke a viewer's thought palate. This provoking is, to put it simply, to poke a stick into our fast paced everyday routine and make us stop even so briefly to glimpse our surroundings. Randall Tiedman is a regionalist painter who also influenced this progression of work, his ominous and dark interpretation of the urban landscape reveals a colder side to the post-industrial Midwest; but his style lends to the organic, much as my own does by utilizing loose hand gestures to create the cold silhouettes and then overlaid to produce semi-abstract compositions. Derelict environments depicted within the scenes of the rustbelt provide atmosphere and depth into the psychogeography of the rustbelt. Like the artists who come together for the Psy.Geo.Conflux in New York City:

“Psychogeography encourages us to buck the rut, to follow some new logic that lets us experience our landscape anew, that forces us to truly see what we'd otherwise ignore. Chance and randomness, are what's exciting.”⁴

We must continue to take a new look at the everyday landscapes around us; reinvent them in our mind so we do not forget what surrounds our culture.

⁴ Joseph Hart. A New Way of Walking - Utne. (2004, July 1). <http://www.utne.com/community/a-new-way-of-walking.aspx#axzz3HOZun85E>.

“With the destruction of history, contemporary events themselves retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations and untenable reasoning.”⁵

Urban Drift is representational of the vernacular of the urban landscape. The people of the everyday experience go along the same weathered path without a second glance. But to jar that self-sustained reality ensues the realization of the surrounding randomness of the landscape. It provokes the will to investigate the mystery of an unknown landscape, as the viewer becomes the flaneur they idle and perceive the surrounding landscapes as one might if remembering a memory long forgotten. This work begs for the viewer to reimagine the space around them and brings to light the paradox of the beauty and dismay that becomes a derelict urban environment.

⁵ Debord, Guy. (1994) [1967] *The Society of the Spectacle*, translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books).

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Image 1 – abandon/recall detail



Image 2 – abandon/recall detail



Image 3 – abandon/recall detail



Image 4 – abandon/recall detail



Image 5 – abandon/ recall and what remains



Image 6 – abandon/recall detail

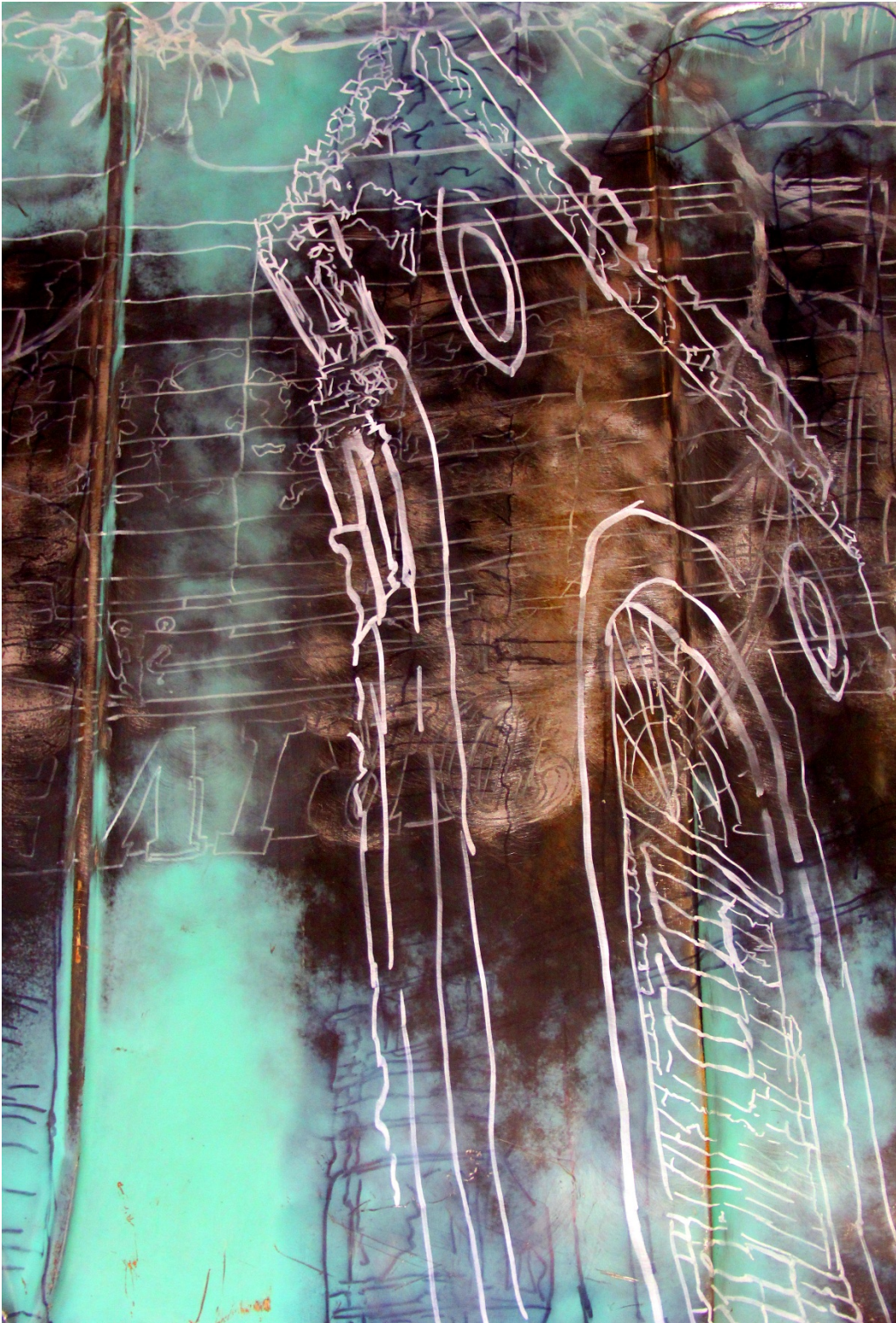


Image 7 – abandon recall detail

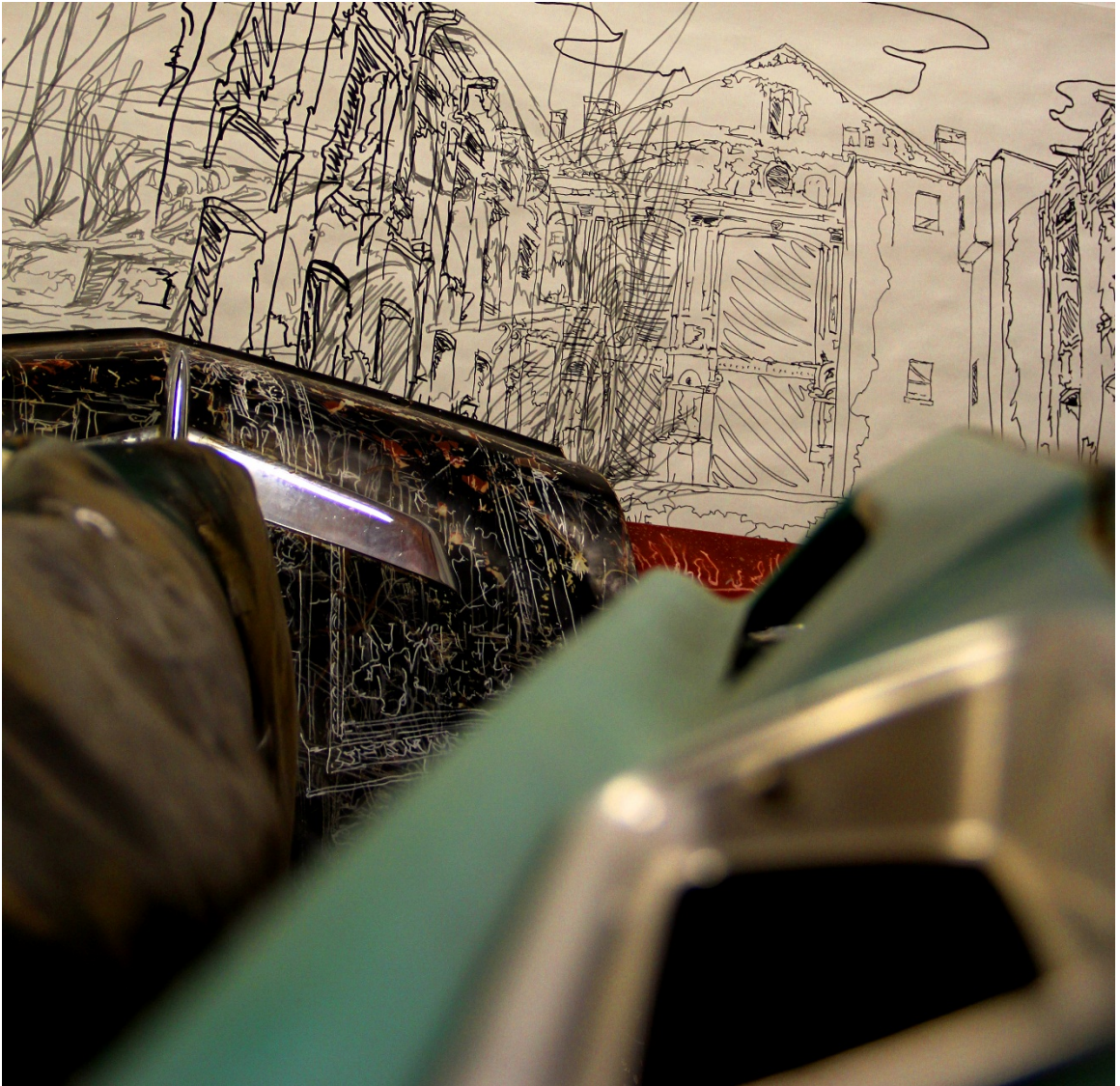


Image 8 – abandon/recall and derive

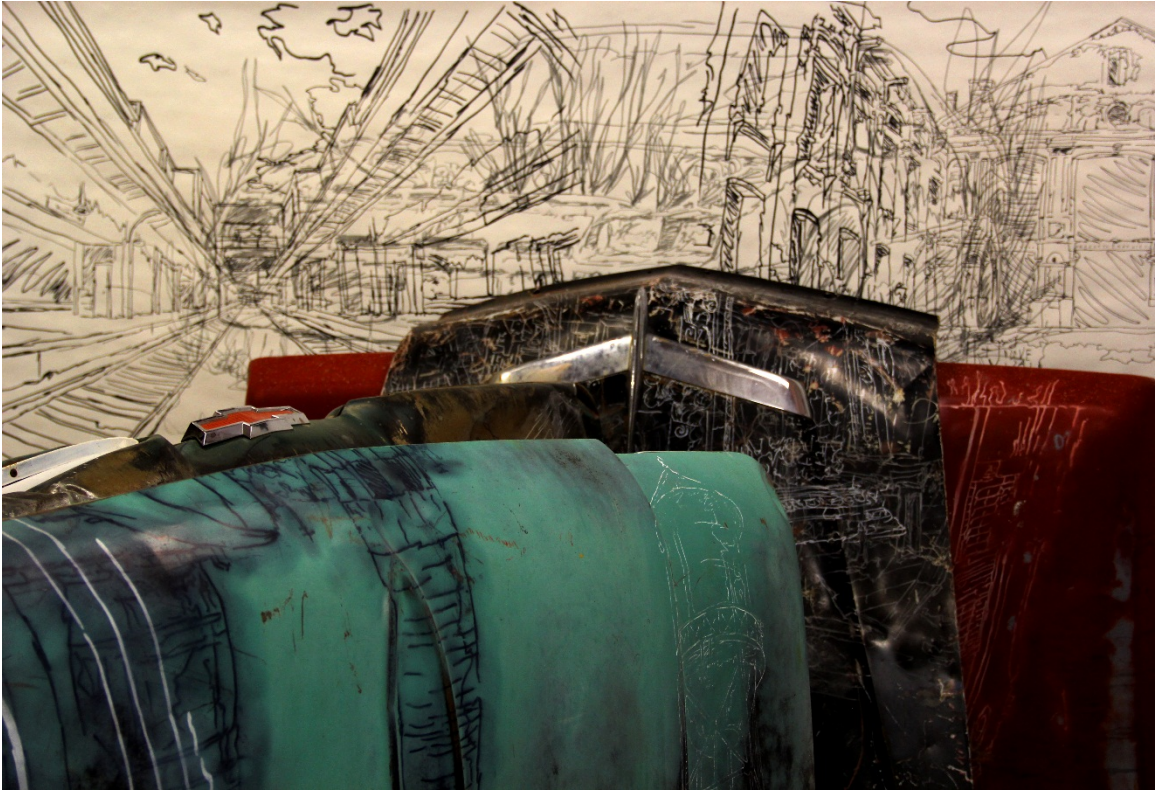


Image 9 – abandon/recall and derive



Image 10 – abandon recall detail

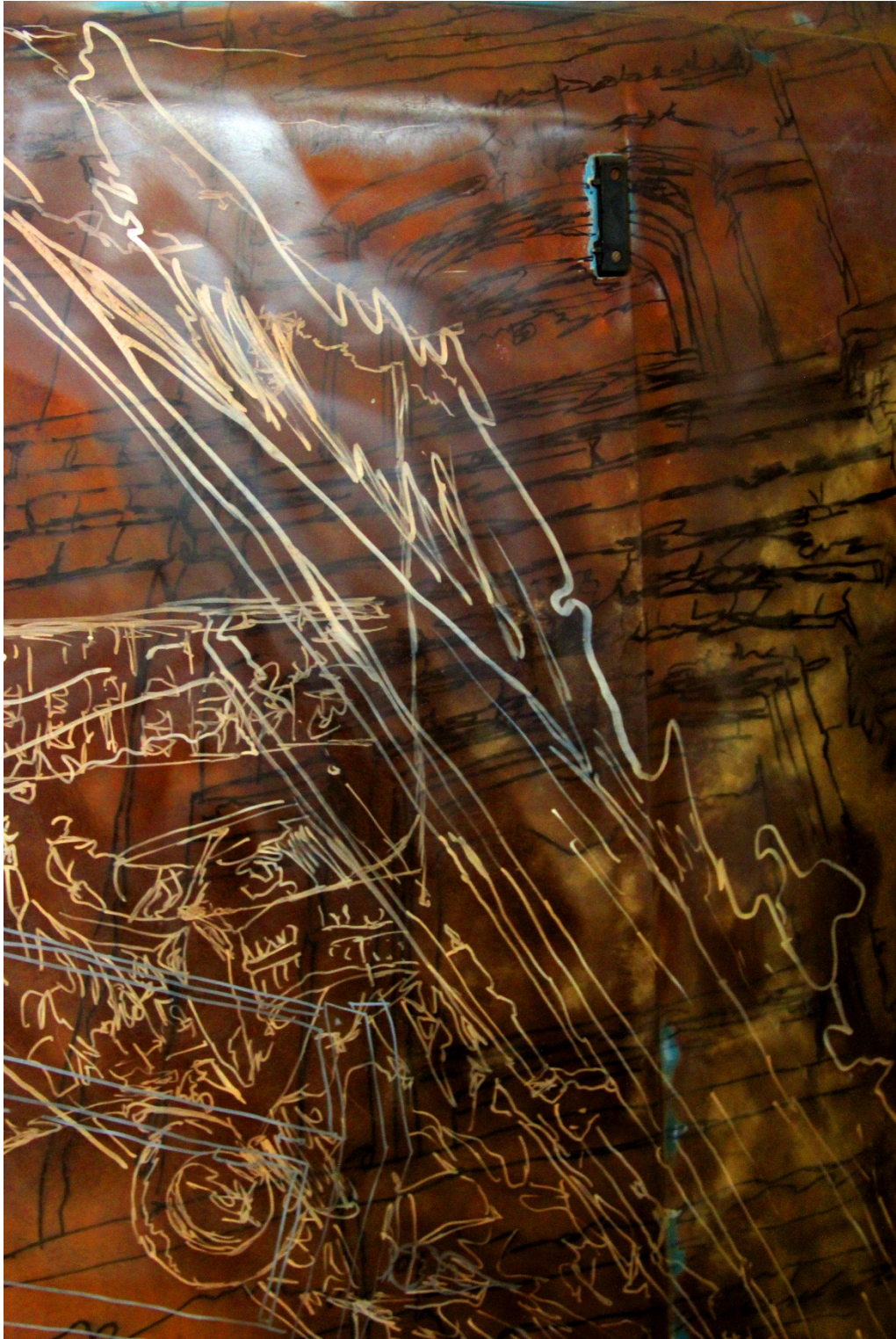


Image 11 – abandon/recall detail



Image 12 – abandon/recall detail



Image 13 – abandon/recall detail



Image 14 – abandon/recall detail



Image 15 – urban detritus



Image 16 – urban detritus detail



Image 17 – idling sensation



Image 18 – idling sensation detail



Image 19 – what remains



Image 20 – what remains detail

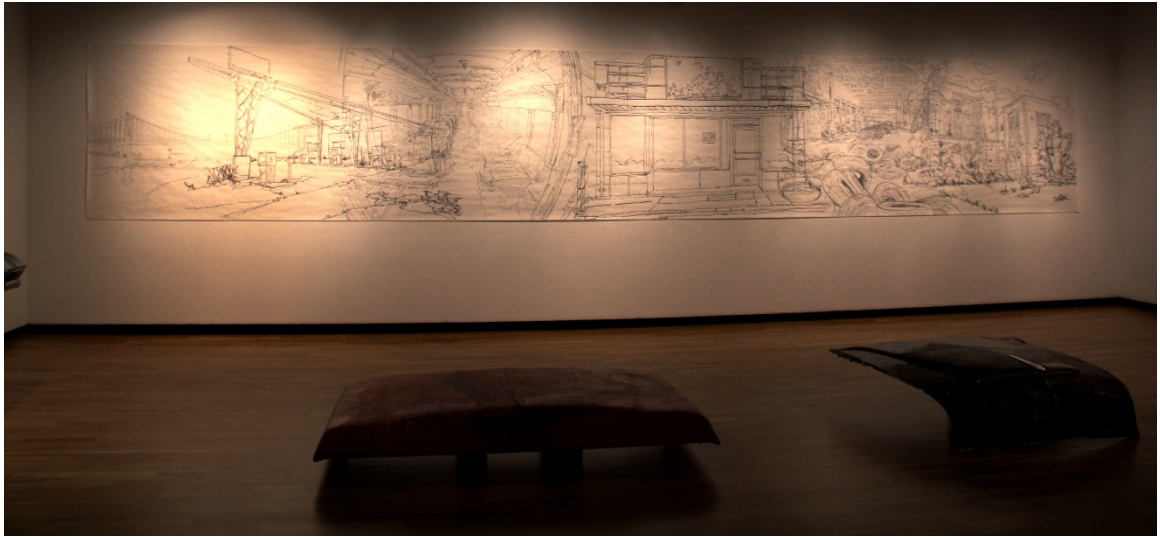


Image 21 – reinventing the urban landscape



Image 22 – reinventing the urban landscape detail



Image 23 – reinventing the landscape detail

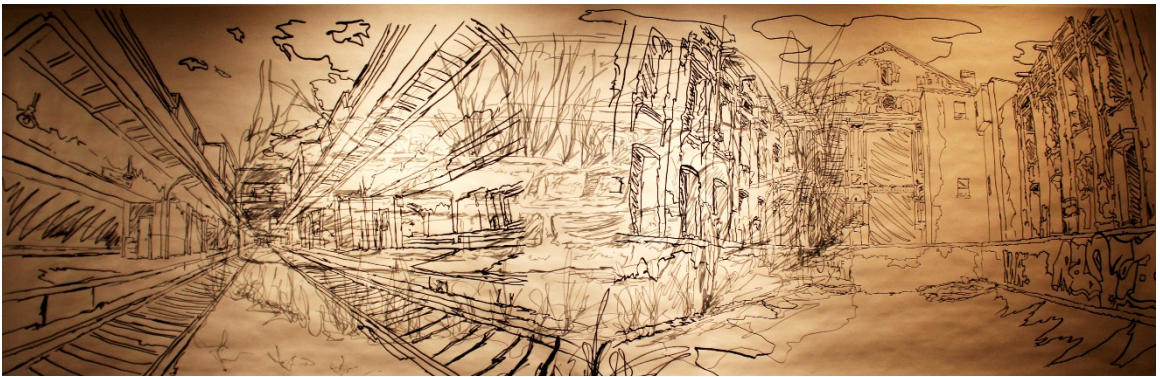


Image 24 – derive



Image 25 – derive detail

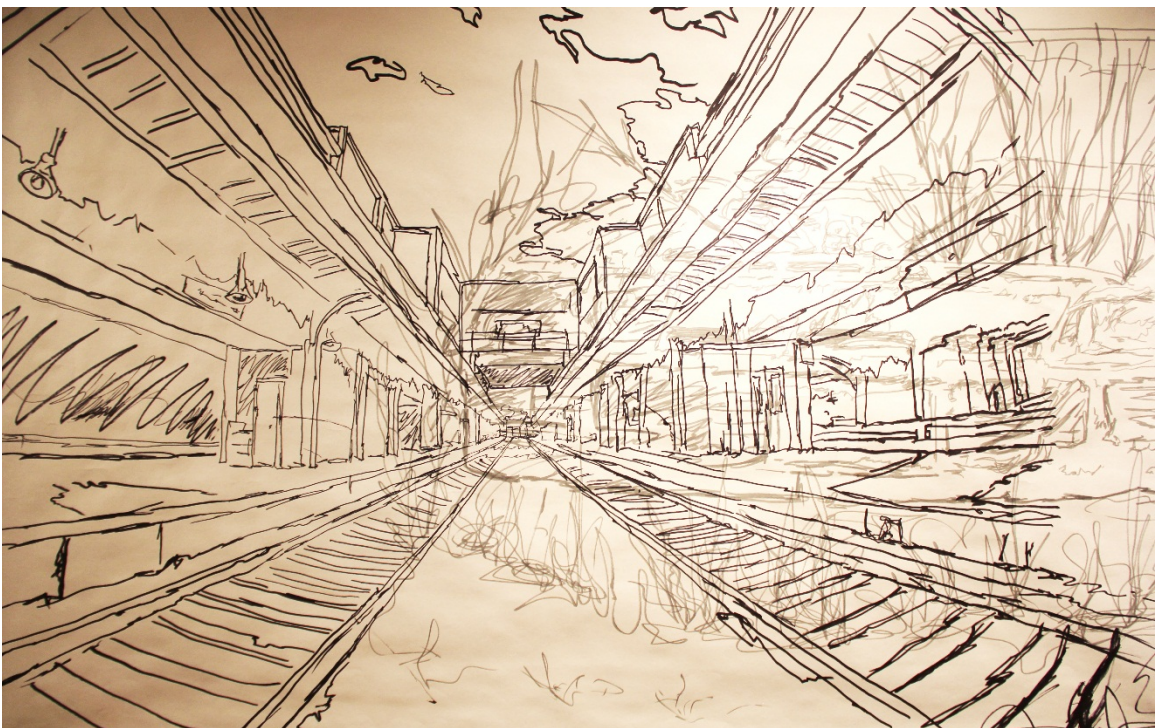


Image 26 – derive detail