

# METRO PICTURES

Martin, Olivia. "What to See at the First Front International Cleveland Triennial," *ArchPaper.com* (March 16, 2018)

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*The Beijing International Hotel* by Chinese artist Cui Jie.

On July 14 the inaugural FRONT International Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art opens in Cleveland, Ohio, marking the latest in a string of art, design, and architecture events across the Midwest. Although it is primarily arts focused—unlike the Chicago Biennial and Exhibit Columbus—the theme, “An American City” and the dramatic backdrop of Cleveland’s downtown lend itself to several architecturally significant installations. “We are very much aware of putting the exhibition within the context of a cityscape,” said Fred Bidwell, executive director of the triennial. “It is not about Cleveland, per say, it is about using Cleveland as a canvas for the artists in an urban context.”

The potentially most striking exhibition is Canvas City, a mural program across approximately nine downtown blocks that revives Cleveland's 1973 City Canvases program and Julian Stanczak's iconic mural. FRONT will restore Stanczak's mural on its original twelve-story building on Prospect Avenue and Ninth Street. Over the next three years, more murals will be completed throughout the city by contemporary artists Odili Donald Odita, Sarah Morris, Heimo Zobernig, and Kay Rosen. "In the 1970s, the mural program was part of a blight remediation movement to help revitalize a very bleak condition," said Bidwell. "Now, this is not a remediation, but a celebration and a way to enhance the city with new works by important artists and a tribute to Julian." For this first triennial FRONT will create augmented reality versions of the proposed artworks.

Cleveland Clinic, which is already home to a renowned art collection, is adding two new artworks, a wall painting by abstract artist Jan van der Ploeg and an installation by multimedia artist Sharon Lockhart.

At Case Western Reserve University, FRONT artistic director Michelle Grabner and the university commissioned Chicago-based artist and sculptor Tony Tasset to create a pavilion for the 34,000-square-foot plaza at the university. The result, *Judy's Hand Pavilion*, represents the hand of Tasset's wife touching down on the earth. "It has this great interplay of masculine and feminine because it is clearly a woman's hand, but also has these God-like references reminiscent of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*," Grabner said.

The triennial expands beyond Cleveland into nearby northeast Ohio, including Akron and Oberlin. Oberlin College will also serve as a site for a few important architectural events. Conceptual artist Barbara Bloom will create a new installation in the Robert Venturi-designed wing of the Allen Memorial Art Museum by building architectural elements around the existing artwork.

The museum will also feature Chinese artist Cui Jie's futuristic city paintings that explore utopian/dystopian urban landscapes. To create these fantastical works, Jie combines the stories of Orson Wells with her perspective of Chinese cities, including Chinese propaganda and communist aesthetics.

At Frank Lloyd Wright's Weltzheimer/Johnson Usonian House—five minutes away from the museum—painter Juan Araujo will add a new series to the modernist art collection curated by art history professor Ellen Johnson, who lived in the house from 1968 to 1992.

"A lot of people have realized that the contemporary art, design, and even architecture worlds are very concentrated in the big coastal cities and hubs, which distorts the market and creates this bubble-effect," Bidwell said. "Cities like New York and L.A. are terrific, but they are very unique and really don't represent the rest of the country. In addition, it can be difficult to do anything new in those cities because of the expense and hassle it takes to put on a biennial or a triennial. In a city like Cleveland, we have seven major arts institutions with international and national exhibitions across multiple venues and over 100 artists to create an expansive, thought-driven, thematically linked art triennial. It is an important time in the history of the U.S. to rediscover the center of the country."