

# FRONT International's Cleveland Triennial focuses on modern art, but it will paint the town with some nostalgia, too

 [crainscleveland.com/article/20180319/blogs03/155391/front-internationals-cleveland-triennial-focuses-modern-art-it-will](https://www.ccrainscleveland.com/article/20180319/blogs03/155391/front-internationals-cleveland-triennial-focuses-modern-art-it-will)

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Photo by  
FRONT WEBSITE

Kay Rosen is one of the artists whose work will be part of the "Canvas City" exhibition.

CityLab.com helps you get excited for the upcoming [FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art](#) with [this story](#) about an aspect of the event that examines Cleveland's past.

The website notes that in 1973, in an effort to combat blight, Cleveland created something called the "City Canvases" program in which "a dozen murals by local artists appeared on the blank exteriors of downtown buildings."

Since then, as you might expect, most of that work has been painted over or razed.

But that's about to change as FRONT, which runs July 14-Sept. 30, launches the ["Canvas City"](#) exhibit, which "will feature a re-creation of one of the original murals as well as works by new artists," City Lab says. Instead of combating blight, the website notes, "these murals will speak to a place experiencing what (FRONT founder Fred) Bidwell sees as an urban revival."

Bidwell tells CityLab, "Rather than blight remediation, this is a way to take a city fabric that is changing—primarily in a positive way—and (ask) how can we make it more interesting, more intellectually challenging?"

The story notes that Bidwell and FRONT's artistic director, Michelle Grabner, "conceived Canvas City while visiting the home of Julian Stanczak, an artist who created one of the murals for the original Cleveland Canvases program." (Stanczak, a Holocaust survivor who taught at the Cleveland Institute of Art, died in March 2017.)

From the story:

*Grabner was drawn to the possibilities of Stanczak's abstract mural. Most modern murals in the public space are very narrative driven, Grabner said, and she started thinking about how meaningful it would be for a city to take on art that left more to the imagination, where viewers would have to interpret what the colors and geometry in front of them had to say about their surroundings.*

*"With narrative-driven murals, you read them and understand," said Grabner. "Abstract works demand an active viewership and changing one's mind."*

Bidwell tells CityLab that he hopes the murals will "alter Cleveland's skyline" and create conversations about its past, present and future. He says through "Canvas City," he hopes to create "a living museum of contemporary abstraction."

## THIS AND THAT

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- *The New York Times* runs a [fun Q&A](#) with [Stephanie Johnson](#), 49, a Kent State University graduate who, as a captain at Delta Air Lines, "has broken two glass ceilings." At Delta and, before it, Northwest Airlines, Johnson was the first African-American woman with the rank of captain. Her start as a pilot is charming: "The first time I flew in a plane is also the first time I flew one. I'd convinced my high school physics teacher to take me and a few friends up in his plane. We flew in his Piper Cherokee out of Burke Lakefront Airport in Cleveland. Once we were over Lake Erie, he actually let me take over for a few minutes. It was the thrill of my young life. By the time we landed, I knew I wanted to become a pilot." Johnson says she studied for my bachelor's degree in Aerospace Technology at Kent State and joined the school's R.O.T.C. program, thinking she would enter the Air Force. But, she says, "I soon realized the military was not a good fit for me," and after graduating from college in 1991 became a flight instructor until 1993, when Burke hired her as an airport operations agent and flight instructor.
- [Manhattan Institute](#) fellow Aaron Renn, at his blog Urbanophile, [calls attention](#) to an image that was tweeted recently by city of Akron planning director [Jason Segedy](#) that contrasts the amount of urbanized land in Cuyahoga County in 1948 and in 2002. In both years, the county population was about 1.4 million, but the percentage of land considered urbanized has grown exponentially. In other words, there's been a lot of sprawl without adding population. As Renn notes, "I'm not a hater on suburbanization. Growing populations require new urbanized land on the fringes. But when population growth is flat or negative in a region, which is the case in Cleveland and many Rust Belt cities, then sprawl has negative effects. ... When you double or triple your urban footprint, the cost of upkeep soars because you are paying to maintain and provide services to a lot more stuff." He concludes, "As a rough heuristics, development of new suburban footprint should largely be limited to the growth rate in households to avoid saddling a region with excess fixed cost."

- Put [this story](#) from CNNMoney.com in the "It's never too late to do the right thing" category. The website summarizes a recent South by Southwest panel about the competition to attract the Amazon HQ2 project. Curbed deputy editor Asad Syrkett moderated the panel, which included Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane, whose city is still in the running; Kansas City Mayor Sly James, whose city didn't make the cut; and [Justin Bibb](#), a Cleveland native who is a senior adviser at Gallup and advises on the well-being of cities. James said, "I haven't shed a tear since we did not make the list. It wasn't something I was worried about one way or the other," since winning would have brought major challenges that many cities simply aren't built to handle. The panel examined how the proposal process became so secretive, which James said was because cities don't want rivals to see what they're offering. Gallup's Bibb noted that his hometown of Cleveland has yet to reveal what it offered, even though it's no longer in the running, and he "called on officials to reveal the information to be transparent to their residents." (Don't hold your breath.)

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