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Jack Bishop's *Urban Sprawl* exhibit paints a haunting landscape of consumerism

by Nick Laugher, Arts Contributor

A suffocating haze of neon lights and skyscrapers lingers in the circulated air of Gallery Page and Strange. Infrastructure and industry beg for bones, burrowing rabidly into the foundation. With a steadfast force of morose nostalgia, artist Jack Bishop descends once more upon the scene for his second solo exhibition at the gallery.

The exhibit *Urban Sprawl* unleashes a volley of frantic, iconic images of consumerism with a scathing simplicity. The St. John native's disdain and apprehension for modern gluttony and consumption cry out in vain from the walls, reverberating with a despondent echo from the very oil harnessed to craft the critical onslaught.

The NSCAD alumnus' paintings sigh with resentment and despair, foaming at the mouth with an unsettling juxtaposition of modernity and community. On the surface of his painting "12 Gas Stations," lies a serene, angelic Atlantic skyline. Deceptively, the white, graceful flakes flutter uselessly downward, struggling to obscure a claustrophobic barrage of gas stations huddled ominously in waiting. Swarms of commercialism slowly begin to seep into the painting as true, sinister intentions are unearthed, leaving only the unpleasant taste of a superfluous charcoal-grey.

Bishop's work is highly subversive: marrying a very understated, simplistic style with the creeping antagonistic bite of modern city sprawl and dramatic over-development. The artist's humble brushstrokes lull you into a tranquil nostalgia, anaesthetized for the sickening breath of sterility that begins clawing its way – silently – up your neck. Serenity begins selling its soul for hollow, vague apparitions and haunting skeletal remnants of a golden age. Concrete bones and shells of steel grin devilishly, calcifying in your heart as a foreboding sense of despair now takes root in the ashes of a simpler time. Bishop's work wears a disturbing sense of prophecy on its sleeves.

Paintings like "A Bigger Mini-Mall" are enveloped in a dark, unfortunate humour: the hyperbolic repetition of chain stores and fast food outlets inciting a chuckle until we realize we're knee deep in the terrifying truth and ubiquity of mass-consumption. The desolate "Starry Night Stripmall" gloats knowingly, bathed in the spectral frailty of the natural world. The naked sky, an endangered aura of

diligent stars, slowly dissipates under an onslaught of fluorescent advertising and favoured space. The sky is chimerical as it struggles viciously to reconcile this strange, strained duality.

Bishop's work takes a savage, brooding turn on pieces like "McEsso w/ Purple Sky" as the noxious, dizzying colours tear their way into the foreground, forgoing the subtle uneasiness in favour of a shockingly poignant ambient mist, riddled with anxiety and nausea. It seeps into the pores of the painting, a sickle-like shine of ill intent. The demonic, vermilion reds of "9 Drive-Thru" glare out from over a jagged, saw-tooth mass of fast-food buildings. Viruses masquerading as vehicles begin infiltrating the scene, cultivating the distrust of an expanding desolation.

Bishop's *Urban Sprawl* is a whirlwind of honest, jarring images, coalescing to form an unfortunate glimpse into the mirror of our material selves. Sparkling sympathetically with a grim grin, Bishop's work is reluctantly sincere – regretful in its need for expression, taking cover behind a sparse backdrop of commercialized community. Without resulting to shallow scare tactics or leaning on facets of a fabricated post-apocalypse, Bishop sidesteps the unfortunate stigma of environmental preaching and sends a sincere and frightening image of the threat of the modern lifestyle thundering through our spines.

Jack Bishop's "Urban Sprawl" will be on display at Gallery Page and Strange until Sept. 24.