

Cities of the Future! Drawing Activity / All ages / Inspired by Charles Demuth



Left:

Charles Demuth (American, 1883–1935)
After All..., 1933 Oil and graphite on fiberboard
Bequest of R. H. Norton, 53.43 36 x 30in (91.4 x
76.2cm)

Charles Demuth drew inspiration for his artwork from a rapidly changing society. Many American artists at the time were depicting the modern industrial landscape such as skyscrapers, bridges, and factories as primary subjects in their work. Demuth played a leading role in the development of a style of painting known as Precisionism. The main themes in this style, include drawings of buildings and factories, and geometrical forms. Geometry is a kind of math that deals with shapes and figures. It explains how to draw and build many kinds of shapes. Precisionism uses buildings and these shapes, to present to us a modern idea of the future.

The painting *After All...*, offers a landscape transformed by industry. The buildings of the Armstrong Cork Company in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, appear as if seen from an upper story window. The viewer looks out at the profiles of buildings, fire escapes and towering smokestacks against a gray sky. A nearby building blocks our view of the left side of the scene. The jutting silhouette of a fire escape and a light pole with projecting loudspeakers offer a sense of scale to the brick and shingle structure. Two smokestacks, potent symbols of industry, loom over the smaller buildings on the right side of the painting. Demuth painted the work with great precision, and he emphasized the streamlined forms of modern industry as well as the geometry of the

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composition. Since the ground is not visible in the painting, the buildings appear organized as independent, collage-like shapes. The title is taken from poet Walt Whitman's "Song of the Exposition" published in 1871. In this and other poems, Whitman championed American industry. Both Whitman and Demuth seemed to acknowledge that the role of the American artist would not be to create new art forms, but to stamp those inherited from the past with a particular American character. Although no human figures appear in the painting, the setting encourages the viewer to discover what the dreams and obstacles were like during this era in American History.

MATERIALS

- Pencil
- Paper
- Colored pencils
- Ruler

INSTRUCTIONS

Precisionism is a form of abstraction in which hard lines and simplified forms represent objects and buildings from reality. Think about an industrial landscape in your town or neighborhood. For example, industry is a group of businesses that provide service. This includes the schools that educate us, farms that grow our food, or factories that make products. Observe the actual places and buildings you visit. From observation or use of your memory, you may draw shapes and forms you may find there. Using these ideas, create your own version of a city of the future.

1. Using a ruler, draw precise lines, shapes, and details. What type of places are inspiration to you?
2. When creating your drawing composition, think about the background, middle ground and foreground of your piece. How does line guide your eyes around the composition? Referencing the painting *After All...*, how has the artist used line to define certain details?
3. Once you created a composition think about small and large shapes. How does shape contribute to pattern? Which shapes seem closer to you? Does your artwork look flat or dimensional?
4. After your drawing is completed, choose your colors. What colors do you envision your cityscape? Are they cool or warm-or both? What do you think the artist is trying to tell you by his use of color?

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