

JEFF BYE

Urban Decay

Pennsylvania-based artist Jeff Bye portrays the raw, gritty side of city life, often beautiful in its own intrinsic ways. He walks the streets of places like New York, Chicago, Baltimore and Philadelphia, observing, investigating and ultimately understanding these places on a deeper level before setting paintbrush to linen or canvas. Currently, Bye is a professor of painting and drawing at Penn State and Elizabethtown College, using the summer months to focus wholly on his artwork. He received his undergraduate degree from Rhode Island School of Design before moving on to obtain his MFA in painting from New York Academy of Art, remaining in Brooklyn for 15 years thereafter.

Bye's artwork falls into the realm of realism—much like the cityscapes he depicts, his work has a sort of roughness to it, with faint smudges of color

in the monochromatic tones of an industry-laden metropolis. “The dirtiness of the city is something I’ve always loved. I love that character,” the artist shares of what drew him toward painting America’s “urban decay.” Each neighborhood has its own personality, he says, adding that in recent years New York City has lost some of that character as it’s gotten more cleaned up.

A forthcoming exhibition at Greenhut Galleries in Portland, Maine, showcases new works from Bye's oeuvre. These pieces, Bye explains, are connected by the qualities of light present in each of them. “How the light starts to filter into these spaces...how it creates a mood. They definitely have a presence. There's almost a haunting quality to them,” he says, adding that they channel the work of Edward Hopper. “There's a beautiful stillness in the work that had a haunting effect that

1
Look Alive, oil on linen,
17 x 28"

2
Rent, oil on linen,
17 x 32"

3
Jeff Bye at work in
his studio in Hershey,
Pennsylvania.

4
The Everett Theater,
oil on linen, 36 x 52"





2



3



4

makes you keep looking.”

The artist searches for old buildings and places imbued with stories and history, from Everett Square Theater in Boston’s Hyde Park to a rundown strip of Manhattan’s Chinatown. “You spend all

of this time developing [the paintings]. They’re all special in their own ways,” Bye says. “It’s challenging, and I always love doing it.”

American Roots will be on view at Greenhut Galleries from October 3 to

26. An opening reception is being held October 3 from 5 to 7 p.m., and an artist talk will take place October 5 at 1 p.m. ●

Greenhut Galleries 146 Middle Street • Portland, ME 04101 • (207) 772-2693 • www.greenhutgalleries.me