

**CANVAS  
DETROIT**



# SCOTT HOCKING



RELICS (with Clinton Snider)  
Installation at the Detroit Institute  
of Arts, 2001  
(Photo: R. H. Hensleigh, Detroit  
Institute of Arts)



Scott Hocking didn't choose Detroit. Detroit, he says, chose him.

The story is more than a decade old, but it's a foundational tale in the making of one of Motown's most recognized artists. What the world already knows of Hocking is true: he bends the imagination by fusing decaying objects into experimental sculptures and photography displays.

His most famous projects have come to life inside the bellies of industrial burial grounds, abandoned car factories hollowed out by hard times and decades of civic neglect. Predictably, art critics and collectors have come calling. Photos from four of his projects, including Ziggurat, a site-specific sculptural installation made from 6,201 wooden floor-blocks within Detroit's long-abandoned Fisher Body Plant 21, were focal points of the Detroit Institute of Arts' 2012 exhibit, *Detroit Revealed: Photographs, 2000–2010*.

One of the art world's most respected periodicals, *Artforum*, has even lifted Hocking's name.

Still, Hocking says his career might never have happened if a hand had not intervened and saved him from himself. Here's how it happened: He was twenty-one and hell-bent, for the second time, on fleeing the Motor City. At eighteen, he almost got away. But when his engine blew in California, Hocking took the few dollars he had left and hopped a Greyhound bus back to Detroit.

Three years later, he hatched part two of his escape from Detroit. This time, he'd planned to head far west: to Alaska and a life at sea as a fisherman. A silver four-door Toyota that had been his home was fixed up and ready to be sold. But three days before the trip, the Toyota was totaled in a car accident. Hocking landed in the hospital minus insurance and minus a life plan, except for one detail.

"To me, it became very clear I was not supposed to leave Detroit," said thirty-eight-year-old Hocking, who grew up in Redford, a working-class suburb. "It felt like a hand had come down and smashed into my car and said, 'You shouldn't leave.' So instead of trying to get away, I decided to dig in."





*Fog Ship, Fisher Body*  
from *Ziggurat* and *FB21*, 2007-2009  
(Photo: Scott Hocking)

His life took on new focus. "I realized I needed to figure out what the fuck I was doing with my life." The interests of Scott the boy suddenly transfixed Hocking the man. "The accident put everything into perspective. Things I'd been doing my whole life: being interested in drawing, reusing things, working on gritty stuff, and going to the junkyard with my father; everything just made sense, became pretty organic. I decided I wanted to take a risk and try to be an artist."

At the time, his ideas of being an artist were vague. A trip closer to home helped to fill in the blanks: "I took the Grand River bus to the Warren bus and walked to CCS [College for Creative Studies], found out what the word portfolio meant, and then I made one."

A few months later, Hocking was formally a fine-arts student. The art world has been on his trail ever since.

Today, he's a known artist but still not a wealthy one, at least not by financial measures. In Detroit, there are other success indicators. There's the fortune of being able to live where he creates, on the top floor of a small two-story former industrial building in the city's North End neighborhood. Be sure to also count the steady stream of exhibitions and fellowship invitations he receives from other cities and countries. Once, such invites seemed impossible for Detroit-based artists. Now they come almost as frequently as the evening sun that pours through Hocking's giant studio windows.

"Right now, Detroit is still a pretty good home base for me. I still have ideas, I still want to make work here, and the city's on the art-map more than it's ever been."

Yet Hocking says some of the headlines leading young artists to relocate are misleading. "I think a lot of what people come here thinking they're going to find is false," he says. "I don't think it's a blank canvas. I don't think it's necessarily cheap rent and I don't think it's the kind of place where you can do whatever the hell you want."

Hocking is most disturbed by outside artists whose "gluttony" has birthed its own cliché: ruin porn. "Some of it is just nihilism," he says. "But I do think that there are some people who can't be so easily lumped into a negative category, when what they do might be the same as any generation documenting the time they're in, so future generations can look back."

Hocking insists his work inside Detroit's fallen factories and buildings is done with respect and an eye toward artistic inquiry. "I have a lot of ways I go into buildings that have to do with respecting the area the same way that I would if I was out in the woods. One of the reasons I work in abandoned sites is because I'm interested in changing people's perspectives, maybe shaking up their concepts of what's good, what's bad, what's ugly, what's decaying."

So long as Detroit stokes his curiosity, Hocking intends to continue digging for the art in things left behind. "The same way the accident gave me the sign that I shouldn't leave, I haven't had the sign that I should," he says. "I haven't exhausted Detroit yet."



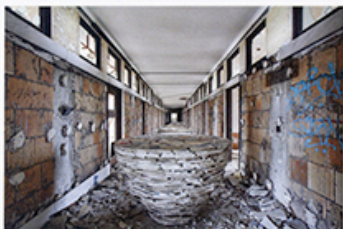
*Ziggurat, East, Summer II*  
from *Ziggurat* and *FB21*, 2007-2009  
(Photo: Scott Hocking)





*Mercury Retrograde*  
installation at Susanne Hilberry  
Gallery, 2012  
(Photo: Scott Hocking)





ABOVE, TOP:  
*The Egg and MCTS #3495*  
from The Egg and Michigan Central  
Train Station, 2007-2012  
(Photo: Scott Hocking)

ABOVE, BOTTOM:  
*The Egg and MCTS #5842*  
from The Egg and Michigan Central  
Train Station, 2007-2012  
(Photo: Scott Hocking)



*The Egg and MCTS #4718*  
from The Egg and Michigan Central  
Train Station, 2007-2012  
(Photo: Scott Hocking)