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LIFESTYLE

# 15 artists explore the concept of a modern metropolis in 'Urban Impressions' on Rice campus



**Amber Elliott, Staff writer**

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Rana Begum's outdoor installation

Yi-Chin Lee / Staff photographer

What does it mean to live in a city today? That is the question Frauke V. Josenhans, curator for the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University, challenged 15 artists to answer with “Urban Impressions: Experiencing the Global Contemporary Metropolis,” an exhibition on view through mid-December.

Urban life and the modern metropolis have fascinated artists throughout history. Recall 19th-century Impressionists, 20th-century Expressionists, midcentury Situationists and street art from the 1980s; city architecture and microcosm is a

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For “Urban Impressions,” Josenhans tapped an international collective. Artists Rana Begum, Mary Flanagan, Katsumi Hayakawa, Kahlil Irving, Lucia Koch, Julie Mehretu, Sohei Nishino, Emeka Ogboh, Robin Rhode, Seher Shah, Liu Wei and Michael Wolf hail from Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Germany, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa and across the U.S. Representing Houston are Charis Ammon, Tiffany Chung and Rick Lowe.

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## ‘Urban Impressions: Experiencing the Global Contemporary Metropolis’

**When:** Through Dec. 17

**Where:** Rice University Moody Center for the Arts, 6100 Main

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“This new work was based on my experience of being in such a crowded, urban environment in Vietnam and Japan,” Chung says. “The visual language

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signs look a bit like cartoons. The signs are cohesive and still hilarious – I think you can compose your own narrative.”

She describes her practice as an inquiry of conflict, geopolitical partitioning, environmental crisis, displacement and forced migration. Despite the urgent subject matter, her work has a sense of humor. Chung explores the thin line separating utopia and misery by inserting a human voice and memories.

Two pieces in acrylic, ink and oil on perforated vellum and paper, from her “Terra Rouge” series, are also in the exhibition. They tap into the effects that war and colonialism have on nature.

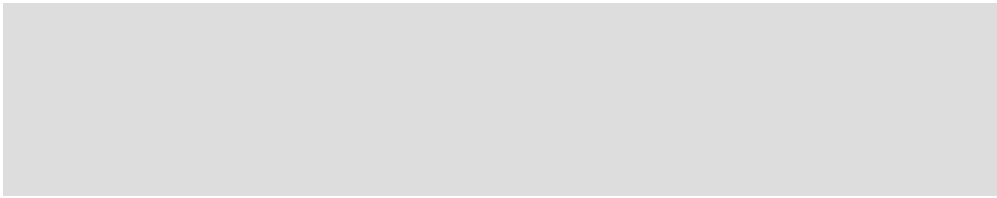
“Specifically, the region where my dad was a pilot and the airfield where he was captured,” Chung says. During the Vietnam War, her father flew helicopters in the South Vietnamese Air Force; he was taken prisoner in 1971 and spent 14 years in a North Vietnamese prison camp. “Now the trees are gone, and urban developments are built over these historic sites in the name of progress.”

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What will cities look like in the next 50, 100 or 200 years? Moody Center for the Arts commissioned an installation by new media artist Mary Flanagan to investigate. “Metaphysical Reclamations: The Metropolis Project” (2022) is a time-based media installation that uses two video projectors, two screens and oil on canvas to illustrate an artificial-intelligence-generated future.

“Perhaps AI is a better imaginer,” Flanagan said. “I wanted to use AI to imagine a future city and to imagine a sustainable future.”

She rendered more than 100,000 images using Google Mesh. They flash in rapid succession next to a student’s response to her installation; at one point, a SpongeBob SquarePants sequence appears next to Shanghai covered in vines.

She and Chung share a similar mindset. They agree that wit and playfulness are essential lenses for examining urban life. “I’m skeptical of utopia, but I’m not a dystopic thinker,” Flanagan says.

Just outside Moody Center for the Arts, Rana Begum’s site-specific, sculptural installation is the first glimpse of “Urban Impressions” visitors will see, and it provides an optimistic welcome. Her powder-coated mesh panels in vivid pink, orange and yellow are inspired by city architecture.

“The colors are intentionally intense,” she shares. “I love the way you can walk around in the work as it moves and changes.”

Josenhans shared that Moody Center for the Arts acquired Begum’s installation; it becomes a permanent addition to Rice’s public art collection.

Other components, such as Emeka Ogboh’s “Japa” (2022), can be viewed only during the exhibition’s run. The artist created a stout craft beer in collaboration with Astral Brewing in the Heights. And yes, pours will be served to visitors age 21 and older.

For Josenhans, “Japa” answers a critical, urban question: “As a city, what flavor would Houston have?”

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Written By  
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**ENERGY**

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As executives bask in the glow of short-term profits – much of them driven by Russia’s war against Ukraine – the oil industry faces the same long-term challenges that have threatened its future in recent years.

≡ **BY KYRA BUCKLEY**

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