



The Wolfsonian–Florida International University Redefines the Art of the Landscape

The Big World: Alternative Landscapes in the Modern Era

On view September 21, 2023 through June 2, 2024

explores the Wolfsonian landscape collection from the early 20th century
and its prescient reach into present-day

MIAMI BEACH (August 23, 2023) — The Wolfsonian–Florida International University tells the story of how artists ventured beyond the traditional content and form of landscape art to make sense of a rapidly changing world in *The Big World: Alternative Landscapes in the Modern Era*. On view beginning September 21, 2023, the exhibition moves from bucolic scenes to an increasingly industrial world, represented not only on canvas, but also on furniture, ceramics, glass, and textiles from The Wolfsonian’s expansive collection. *The Big World* is co-curated by Wolfsonian chief curator Silvia Barisione and curator Lea Nickless.

Starting with an ornate pastoral scene carved and painted onto the side of a grand piano, the exhibition aims to upend visitors’ expectations of the landscape genre. “Preparing for *The Big World*, we investigated the landscape holdings in The Wolfsonian’s collection and were surprised by the number and variety of works that we hold,” Barisione said. “While many artists continued to find inspiration in nature, the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the 20th century provided others with provocative new subjects.”

The exhibition documents how the artists’ responses to these new realities ranged from celebration and veneration to anxiety and ambivalence, charting the story of modern landscape in three sections:

- **The Natural World** – Mountains, deserts, forests, and coastlines inspired art that expressed veneration and fantasy, while other works celebrated the land as provider of sustenance. Paintings and decorative arts, including a grand piano from the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, brought nature into the domestic world.
- **The Built Environment** – Features of the built environment such as smokestacks, dams, bridges, and skyscrapers elicited admiration from artists who were stirred by these monuments of modernity. But 20th-century landscape art also sounded the alarm about encroachments on nature from industrialization and urbanization.

- **The Battle for the Land** – In contrast to the vitality of modern cities, nature often appeared damaged and depleted in modern artworks with defoliated trees symbolizing harmful human impact. Ominous imagery of devastated cities and debris-littered vistas, such as in Raymond Daussy’s painting *La bataille pour la ville* (The Battle for the City), offered artists a way to convey the traumatic experience and aftermath of the two world wars.

The Big World does not shy away from issues relevant today, such as harmful impacts on nature, whether from industrial development or warfare. At the same time, visitors will be inspired to find beauty in the world around them, not only in unspoiled vistas but also perhaps in the intersection of natural and human-made environments.

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Image

Painting, *The City*, 1936. Virginia Berresford (American, 1904–1995), New York City, oil on canvas. The Wolfsonian–FIU, Miami Beach, Florida, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, TD1988.137.1

About The Wolfsonian–Florida International University

The Wolfsonian–FIU is a museum, library, and research center that uses objects to illustrate the persuasive power of art and design, to explore what it means to be modern, and to tell the story of social, historical, and technological changes that have transformed our world. Our holdings comprise more than 200,000 items dating from 1850 to 1950—the height of the Industrial Revolution through the aftermath of the Second World War—in a variety of media including furniture; industrial design; works in glass, ceramics, and metal; rare and reference books; periodicals; ephemera; works on paper; paintings; sculptures; textiles; and medals.

The Wolfsonian receives generous and ongoing support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners; State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and City of Miami Beach, Cultural Affairs Program, Cultural Arts Council.

About FIU

Florida International University is a Top 50 public university that drives real talent and innovation in Miami and globally. High research (R1) activity and high social mobility come together at FIU to uplift and accelerate learner success in a global city by focusing in the areas of environment, health, innovation, and justice. Today, FIU has two campuses and multiple centers. FIU serves a diverse student body of more than 56,000 and 260,000 Panther alumni. U.S. News and World Report places dozens of FIU programs among the best in the nation, including international business at No. 2. Washington Monthly Magazine ranks FIU among the top 20 public universities contributing to the public good.