ABOUT THIS GUIDE
This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for K-12 educators bringing their students to visit Encountering the City: The Urban Experience in Contemporary Art, on view at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum from September 12, 2014, through January 4, 2015. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, gallery discussions, and postvisit suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and help make meaning of the art presented. Teachers at all grade levels should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful to their students.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION
Encountering the City: The Urban Experience in Contemporary Art investigates aesthetic engagement with the urban landscape and the experiential impact of contemporary built environments, encompassing a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, photography, and video. Many of the artworks on view probe the relationship between art and architecture, from critical responses to the failed social aspirations of modernist architectural forms, to evolving conceptions of place and space as they connect to themes of globalization and urbanism. Other artworks focus on the material fabric of particular built environments (New York, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Rome, and Beijing) and how the aesthetics of a city are informed by culture, economics, and politics. Although diverse in material and approach, all of the artworks in the exhibition suggest different ways of inhabiting and viewing the world around us, urging us to question how we live and how we understand ourselves within our perpetually evolving surroundings.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS
Architecture, Art, Art History, Global Studies, Mixed Media, Painting, Photography, Sculpture, Urban Studies, Video

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Students will discuss the relationship between architectural form and contemporary visual art.
Students will examine conceptions of space and place as they connect to themes of globalization and urbanism.
Student will explore how the aesthetics of a city are informed by a variety of factors from culture to politics.
Students will discuss the ambitions and failures of modernist architecture with a focus on St. Louis and Pruitt-Igoe in particular.

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BEFORE YOU VISIT
Suggested topics to explore, research, and discuss before visiting the exhibition.

Urbanism
Discuss the history of urbanism. What did early cities look like? How are American cities distinct from cities in other countries? Compare and contrast the cities of ancient Greece with 19th-century Paris and the contemporary megacity of Mumbai.

Favorite City
Think of a favorite city you’ve visited. Write about that experience. Was it crowded? Walkable? Was there a train system, or did you drive around? What did the buildings look like? What did you do while you were there?

IN THE GALLERY
Ideas to consider when viewing the exhibition.

Franz Ackermann, Untitled (yet) (2008–9)
Themes such as globalization, travel, architecture, and urbanism can be found in Franz Ackermann’s artworks. Ackermann, a well-traveled contemporary artist, will often record his visits to various cities around the world in what he calls “mental maps”—small drawings and sketches drafted while traveling as a means of capturing both spatial and psychological impressions—which he then incorporates into large-scale colorful paintings, sculptures, and installations. In the painting Untitled (yet), a mass of cables and cords connects clearly discernable components such as an aerial tramway and a modernist apartment building with other more abstracted elements of the urban fabric.

Discussion questions: What adjectives would you use to describe what you see here? Do the bright colors remind you of anything? How do the colors affect how you interpret the painting? How would your impression of the painting be different if the colors were muted, or if it was painted in black and white? How do most people record visits to cities? What do you remember about a place you’ve visited—the smells, the streets, the people?

Isa Genzken, Bill II (2001) and Little Crazy Column (2002)
These sculptures by Isa Genzken reflect her ongoing interest in the connections between art, architecture, and the urban environment and look specifically at the interplay between sculpture and architectural form. The mirrored surfaces fracture the reflections of the viewer, creating an experience analogous to walking through a densely populated city such as New York, while the sleek columns, reminiscent of modern glass skyscrapers but on a smaller scale, bring the built environment down to a more human level.

Discussion questions: Genzken has referred to her artwork as “contemporary ruins”—what do you think she means? Can you think of an example of a “contemporary ruin”? How does the artist’s use of inexpensive, ephemeral materials such as foil and tape affect how you interpret these sculptures?
Modern architects from the first half of the 20th century, like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, were motivated by utopian and often rigid ideals about urban planning and how architectural space could and should shape the lives of its inhabitants. Jakob Kolding’s work investigates the contradictions between how architectural spaces are planned and how they are ultimately used, between space and behavior. In *How to Build a Universe that Falls Apart Two Days Later*, Kolding uses the traditional propaganda mediums of posters and collage, appropriating and remixing images from a range of source material, including modernist art and architecture as well as sci-fi movies and comic books. The piece consists of multiple copies of four black-and-white posters adhered in a pattern to the wall and placed in stacks on the floor, free for visitors to take. While each of the four posters presents distinct compositions, when hung on the wall together they create a larger pattern.

**Discussion questions:** Where do you normally see posters? What are posters typically used for? How does the fact that visitors can take a poster with them when they leave the museum change the way you think about the work? What are some of the considerations city planners have to think about when designing communities?

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Josephine in tube; Lutz in tube; and Victoria Line, glass partition* (2000)

These three works are from Wolfgang Tillmans’s *Portrait* series and feature riders on the subway (or “tube”) in London. In these photographs the artist captures the “non-place” of the subway, a location where one can lose one’s sense of space and distance. While riding a subway may generate feelings of disconnection, monotony, or boredom, it might also offer an unexpected break from the flood of stimuli characteristic of urban experience, fostering a moment of rest and possible contemplation. Tillmans, who photographs in a wide range of artistic genres—landscapes, still lifes, abstraction, portraiture—is known for his documentation of daily life and the subtle interaction of individuals.

**Discussion questions:** What are some adjectives to describe the subjects’ facial expressions or body language? How is personal space negotiated while using public transportation? What are some of the public spaces in St. Louis where humans actively engage with each other? How is human interaction at the Arch, for example, different than on the Metro?
Gary Simmons, *Plaza Inferno Grid* (2008)

Gary Simmons’s work addresses identity and race in contemporary America. *Plaza Inferno Grid*, a multipart painting, uses the 1972 sci-fi B movie *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* as its point of reference. Considered a metaphor for race relations, particularly the violence and destruction perpetrated in the Los Angeles Watts riots in 1965 that came to symbolize strife in midcentury urban America, this film uses the skyscrapers found in the corporate environment of Century City in Los Angeles as the setting for a dystopian future. In *Plaza Inferno Grid*, created during the 2008 presidential election, Simmons produced a powerful work of art that resonates as a provocative symbol for the politics of race brought to the fore when the nation elected its first African American president.

**Discussion questions:** Does the grid presentation remind you of anything? What one word would you use to describe the mood of the artwork? Can you think of historic or present day examples where politics, social factors, and economic considerations have affected the development of a city?

Andrea Zittel, *Wall Sprawl #6 (Between Enterprise and Henderson)* (2011)

In *Wall Sprawl #6*, Andrea Zittel’s custom-designed wallpaper repeats a satellite photograph of urban expansion and its encroachment on desert areas outside Las Vegas. The artwork extends across the gallery wall in identical, repeating units much the way urban sprawl expands across natural areas. Zittel’s mesmerizing patterns offer different ways of viewing the world around us, asking us to reevaluate systems of city planning common throughout the United States.

**Discussion questions:** How does this wallpaper make you feel when you look at it? What specific issues does the desert present in terms of habitation and development? What examples of urban sprawl are found in St. Louis? What are some of the environmental effects of urban sprawl? What are some of the socioeconomic effects of urban sprawl?

**COLLECTION CONNECTIONS**

Explore these connections to artworks on view in the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum’s permanent collection.

**Willem de Kooning, *Saturday Night* (1956)**

Willem de Kooning’s *Saturday Night* conveys a sense of intense energy and immediacy, suggesting city blocks or the congested clutter of buildings in urban spaces, with its network of vertical and horizontal lines. Considered one of the leading painters of the New York-based Abstract Expressionist movement, de Kooning was known for his bold color choices and loose brushwork.

**Discussion questions:** Both de Kooning and Franz Ackermann have painted their impressions of cities. How are their approaches similar and different? Are there realistic elements in de Kooning’s work? How does each artist create space and movement and convey his experience of the city?
IN THE CLASSROOM OR AT HOME
Follow your visit to the Museum with one or more of these suggested activities.

Selfies and Portraits
Have students take their own portraits, akin to Wolfgang Tillmans's photographs, using the built environment of St. Louis or their school. Create a display of the students' work in the classroom.

Google Maps Project
Using Google Maps, have students make graphic design and artistic choices to create their own version of Andrea Zittel's Wall Sprawl #6. Looking at St. Louis, explore which areas represent the densest populations. Are there natural areas amongst the built environment? Where is urban sprawl most prevalent?

Pruitt-Igoe
St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe housing development is considered by many to be the biggest failure of public housing in the United States. Opened in 1954, Pruitt-Igoe's design was praised as a breakthrough in urban renewal, but the development was demolished a mere two decades later. Have students research Pruitt-Igoe and discuss their findings. Compare and contrast Pruitt-Igoe to the adjacent Carr Village, which had a similar demographic makeup but was considered a success for low-income housing during the same timeframe.

VOCABULARY
1. Demographics — Relating to the study of changes that occur in large groups of people over a period of time.
2. Globalization — The international integration and interchange of products, economies, worldviews, ideas, and other aspects of culture and society.
3. Megacity — Generally considered an urban area with a population of at least 10 million people.
4. Modernist architecture — A simplified and unornamented architectural style that emerged in many Western countries in the decades after World War II.
5. Socioeconomic — Relating to or concerned with the interaction of social and economic factors.
6. Urbanization — The process by which towns and cities are formed and grow as more and more people live and work in central areas.
7. Urban renewal — The rehabilitation of city areas by renovating or replacing dilapidated buildings with new housing, public buildings, parks, and industrial areas.
8. Urban sprawl — The spread of urban development into previously remote and rural areas adjoining the edge of a city, often resulting in low-density, auto-centric communities.
9. Utopia — An imaginary society in which governmental, legal, and human conditions are perfect.
10. Dystopia — An imaginary society in which governmental, legal, and human conditions are marked by deprivation, oppression, or terror.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ARTISTS
Franz Ackermann
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4bTUK6X3EI

Isa Genzken
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/arts/design/isa-genzken-retrospective-at-museum-of-modern-art.html?_r=0
http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/isagenzken/
http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/11/isagenzkens-beautiful-ruins.html#slide_ss_0=1

Jakob Kolding
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaGOVAtCYGY

Gary Simmons
http://garysimmonsstudio.com/

Wolfgang Tillmans
http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/wolfgang-tillmans#
http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/09/wolfgang-tillmans-interview
http://artreview.com/features/feature_wolfgang_tillmans/
For more about Wolfgang Tillmans's Portrait series: http://kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/collection/explore/artist/1251

Andrea Zittel
http://www.zittel.org/
http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/01/04/a-sprawling-world-suspended-andrea-zittel-in-the-contemporary-galleries
http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/andrea-zittel

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

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