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## Stanley Bell exhibit opens at the Wheeler in Aspen

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The Aspen Times  
Aspen, CO Colorado

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Stanley Bell of Carbondale opens an exhibit of his work Wednesday at Aspen's Wheeler Opera House.  
Stewart Oksenhorn / The Aspen Times

ASPEN — Stanley Bell has adapted well to life in the Roaring Fork Valley. The 32-year-old is settled into an employee housing unit in Carbondale. As co-director of marketing at BJ Adams and Co., he gets to exercise his creative side, handling the real estate firm's graphic design.

But still, five and a half years into the mountain life, Bell hasn't quite left behind his former existence as a Texas city-dweller. In his paintings, often the most recognizable elements are tall buildings, office-filled skyscrapers, the kind a Carbondalian doesn't find until he reaches the outskirts of Denver. It is further evidence for the proposition that an artist's first influences are powerful ones, not easily left behind.

Bell grew up in north Dallas, any area that is suburban in look and feel. But he attended a magnet school, Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, in downtown Dallas. And the last thing Bell would see before entering his classes — mostly in metal sculpture at first — were the buildings that became bigger and

increasingly prominent as he approached the school.

"I can't seem to let go of the building structures," said Bell in the lobby of Aspen's Wheeler Opera House, where an exhibition of recent paintings opens with a reception at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday.

But he is trying. Or perhaps it is simply happening without conscious effort, as his ties to the big-city landscape weaken their hold. Several years ago, Bell's work was marked by relatively realistic urban scenes. "You could tell that it was more an actual city landscape. There were buildings and bridges, and it was in that scale," he said.

In the most recent work, the scale has been altered so that the buildings take, at most, a secondary place on the canvas. And the buildings have become disoriented in space, no longer necessarily cemented next to the street.

Several things are going on in the evolution of Bell's work beyond the temporal separation from the city — both Dallas, and Boulder, where he attended the University of Colorado, studying painting and printmaking. One is an interest in the vast range of visual perspectives, from the enormous to the microscopic.

"There's that scientific thing, the orders of magnitude," he said. "It's that movie you see in school — you start in space, then you see the earth, then your state, then the atom. I've been playing with that a lot."

Another factor in the new work is an increased attention to the energy of a city, rather than its objects. The recent paintings feature more abstract, graffiti-inspired shapes, including components that look like body parts, and elements that Bell thinks resemble cartoon-like dialogue balloons.

"I was thinking about the energy between buildings, the energy that you don't really see," he said. "It's cool for a viewer to think of the stories in a city, the situations. There are so many humans and bodies and I'm trying to illustrate that energy. There's a lot to explore in there."

Yet another factor in the recent work are the steel frames built by Carbondale's Brent Curtis. Bell says the frames are so integral to the paintings that he felt like he was collaborating.

Bell's art is getting increasing attention in the valley. He has been included in a show at the Red Brick Center for the Arts in Aspen. At the Aspen Art Museum's Roaring Fork Open this past fall, his piece was exhibited on the museum's most prominent wall.

Just as Bell's work can be seen as an example of how early influences don't fade quickly, they can also stand for the idea that all art is an expression of a yearning for something. Bell says he doesn't miss Dallas.

"But I guess there's something about the familiarity of those buildings I miss," he said.

And if he ever leaves the valley, what might he paint?

"I think if I move somewhere outside the mountains, I'll probably paint mountains when I'm gone," he said.

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