



DANNY HELLER

# Midcentury design

**W**hen painter Danny Heller was in high school, he traveled to New York City and was transfixed by the sights that stretched in every direction, including up. “From a kid out of the suburbs of Los Angeles, going to this concrete jungle definitely left a big impression on me,” he says.

Now 33 years old, Heller has turned his paintbrush back on the city that captivated him as a teenager. A new exhibition of his artwork, much of it focusing on midcentury modern architecture and design, will open March 1 at George Billis Gallery in New York City. It is the second show to focus on Heller’s appreciation of New York and its stunning architecture.

“This body of work picks out all that great 1950s and 1960s architecture that is hidden within the art deco and the modern buildings that New York City is known for. I’ve really enjoyed focusing on the midcentury materials, and creating a whole scene and feeling around this great city,” he says, adding that it’s tempting to want to live in the city back in that time period. “I very much appreciate the day and age I’m living in now, particularly with our advances in technology and social aspects. I’m happy to live in the here and now, but the design from that era, that’s what I really admire about the time period. The best part is that those designs are still there, preserved in the city.”

Heller says that what draws him back to 1950s design are the strong lines and simplified forms. “They really paid attention to the basic geometry of their designs rather than the ornate details, whereas, in the 1920s and ’30s, design hearkened back to more ornate themes, with a lot of influence from Native American design, South American design, Asian design,” he says. “The midcentury modern stuff stripped all that away and went back to the basics with these dynamic structures with strong lines. Painting these shapes on a two-dimensional surface has been a lot of fun. And you get to appreciate these really great abstracted forms.”





**1**  
*Window Shopping*,  
oil on canvas,  
22 x 30"

**2**  
*Goldberger's  
Pharmacy*, oil on  
canvas, 34 x 48"

**3**  
*Queensborough  
Bridge and Ford*, oil  
on canvas, 26 x 20"

3

Works in the show include *Madison Av*, featuring a low-angle look up an office building, and *Maritime Union Building*, with its iconic squiggle built into the façade of the concrete structure. In *Queensborough Bridge and Ford*, Heller takes post-war design and combines it with the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century design of the famous bridge that connects Queens to Manhattan. "With that one I wanted to bring some aspects of earlier eras to show how things transitioned," the artist says. "I wanted to give it a peaceful feeling so I stripped it of color. It gives the feeling

of peace—subdued, mellow, maybe a bit mysterious."

Collector Tim Hanford owns several Heller pieces after seeing his work for the first time in 2010. "The realism in his paintings, his colors and his use of light, shadow and reflection capture perfectly ideal moments that are usually impossible to see in real life. We particularly like Danny's midcentury modern architecture and New York City paintings," Hanford says. "His stunning technique—paintings so real that they could almost be photographs—and

strong use of perspective are what first caught our attention. As you approach his paintings, however, you start to appreciate the subtle textures, shadows and a color palette that escorts your eyes around the basic lines of a beautiful, midcentury modern building or car, and then draws you in further to a chosen point. He seems to have a deep appreciation and honest respect for the architecture and style of a bygone era."

Heller's show continues at the gallery through March 26. ●