

Paper City: Kiel Johnson Crafts Tiny Cityscapes From Scraps of Cardboard

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Most days (and nights) Los Angeles-based artist Kiel Johnson can be found holed up in his El Sereno studio creating tiny cityscapes from various scraps of paper and cardboard. The space is filled with waist-high tables littered with miniature buildings and thumbnail-sized cars. These paper cities are Johnson's main focus in his work



Johnson is a craftsman, first and foremost, and comes from DIY stock. "My mom is a quilter, crocheter, clothes maker, craft person extreme -- she is always doing something with her hands and that stuck with me," Johnson told the blog Los Angeles I'm Yours. "My dad owns a small newspaper that, until a few years ago, was completely analog, hand crafted, using layout boards, type setting machines, waxers, and X-Acto knives just like they did decades ago." He continued, "It was a huge inspiration to see that thing literally being built by hand, week after week."

The artist first took up sculpture at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, then made his way to LA. In grad school, he started working with cardboard, since it was an easy and inexpensive way to craft his drawings in 3D. Tiny buildings turned into miniature cityscapes and before he knew it, Johnson was pulling from his imagination, memories growing up and LA landscapes to create the paper structures complete with real-life scenes like a cop staking out a burned-out meth lab.

Earlier this year, Johnson was invited by TED to run a workshop, inviting others to help create a paper metropolis. Over five days, the workshop attendees assisted Johnson by contributing their own additions like LED lights to the cityscape. (Watch the step-by-step creation of the tiny city in the time-lapse video here.)

