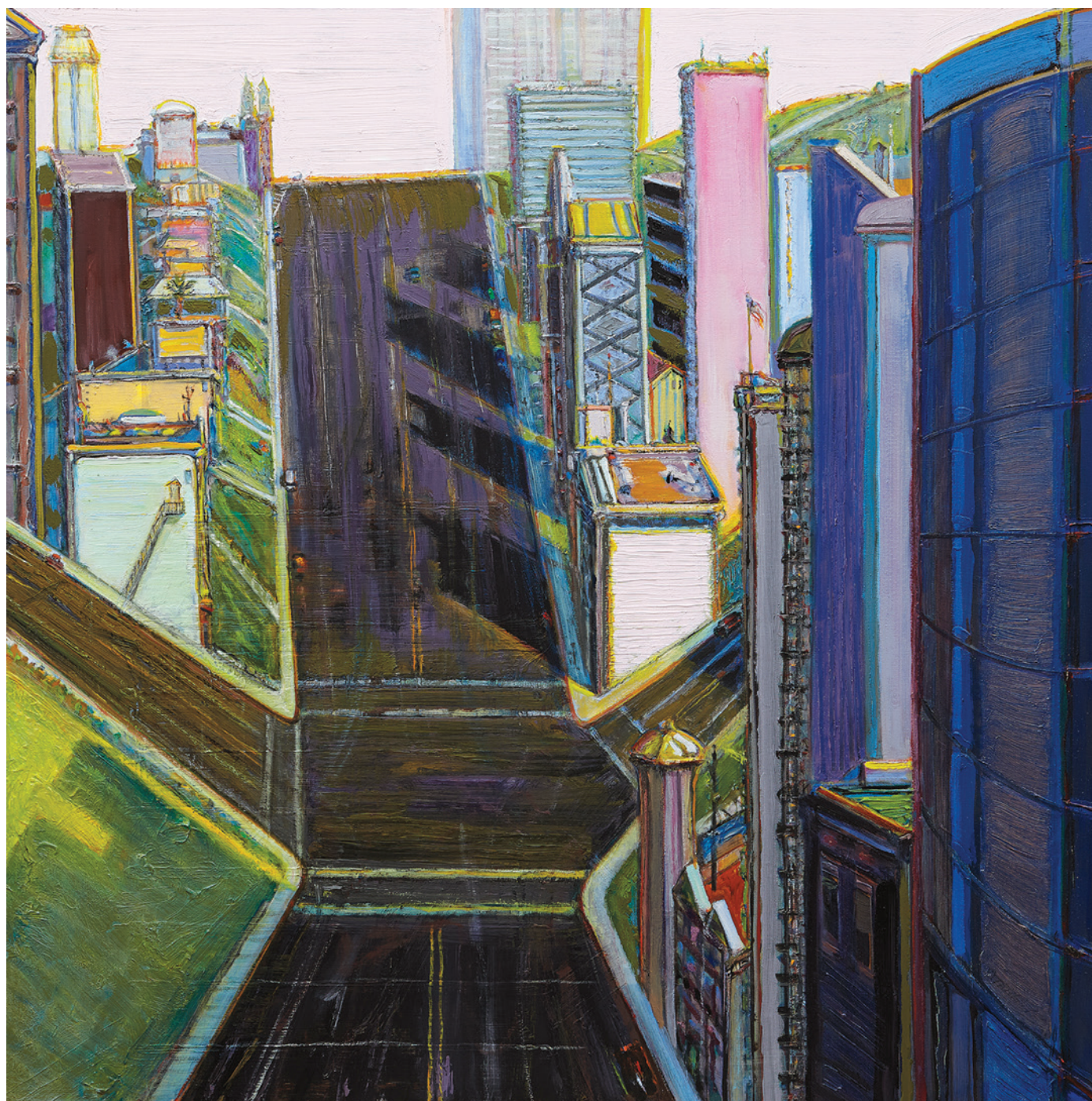


## WAYNE THIEBAUD

*Intersection Buildings*, 2000–2014  
Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in



ART © WAYNE THIEBAUD/LICENCED BY VAGA, NEW YORK, NY  
IMAGE COURTESY AQUAVELLA GALLERY, NEW YORK

## DON SKILES Iron City

In those days, so long ago now that they seem like a black-and-white movie, grainy and flaring, he rode a noisy diesel bus to a stop downtown in Pittsburgh and got off and walked up the hill to the college. It was actually a university, the enrollment was around six thousand or so, but it wasn't the one he had wanted to attend, not even third or fourth in the list, for that matter. But he could commute, live at home, and that proved the decision maker.

He used to ride a streetcar out through the leafy Oakland area, where Carnegie Tech (as it was called then) and the University of Pittsburgh were, and there was the elite women's college, Chatham, in Shadyside, but nobody like him ventured there at all. In the fall, he would see the frat men sitting out on the porches of their houses, wearing khakis and dirty white bucks, smiling; some had stylish horn-rimmed glasses, with crew cuts, buzz cuts, and he thought he would like to look like they did, and sit on the porch and bullshit, and somebody else paid the tab, wrote checks for you. What would it be like to go to college like that? On the weekends they had house parties, grilled hamburgers and hot dogs outside in the tangy fall air, and drank beer. *Iron City* (although his uncle had loudly proclaimed, "Worse damn beer I ever drank."), *Duquesne* ("Have a Duke!"), *Rolling Rock*.

He had an alcoholic priest for his 8:00 a.m. English class. The priest smelled of sour wine, and a deeper, older, dusty smell. His black robes made an odd swishing sound, a sort of rustle, when he entered the room and mounted the small platform where the instructor's desk was, which he always sat behind. He never moved from it—even when they handed in their essays, they carried them to him, sitting there, with a high red flush in his sallow waxy cheeks, the veins broken and purple in his long, thin nose. In the winter, the priest's nose dripped, and he had sat in fascination and discomfort, waiting for a drop to fall, or the priest to finally yank a dirty yellowed handkerchief from his sleeve and wipe it. "Disgusting, disgusting," the guy behind had muttered, several times. "Jesus!" But the priest was also somewhat hard of hearing, and did not notice.

The priest gave him scrawled B- grades on his essays, invariably, and he wondered if he actually read them. When would he read them, for that matter? In the stone and brick building where the priests lived, off by the library,