When we present the image of cities (or places) to tourists, we often do so in the form of picture-postcard images—photographs of the city displayed from a single viewpoint. However, when we think about how we experience the city visually, as we travel through it each day, rarely do we see the city from a single, immovable viewpoint (as in this photo).
Artist Inspiration:

The artist Romare Bearden created seminal collages that pictured life in Harlem in the mid 20th-century. These works of art used fragmented photographs and pieces of paper to reconstruct city viewpoints in a manner that illustrates the city as a shifting, fragmented, and multifaceted place.

Task:

Locate an image on-line of Romare Bearden’s work, “The Dove,” from 1964. How would you describe the energy of this artwork: Energetic or tranquil? What type of music do you think he was listening to when he made this: fast or slow? What type of instruments? What do you notice about how the figures interact with the buildings? What types of symbols appear in the artwork?

After observing the painting, watch this short PBS video that highlights Bearden’s Harlem collages and process.

Stuart Davis was another artist who used collage-style paintings to represent the city. Like Bearden, his work isn’t an attempt to illustrate the city exactly as it looks, but rather to describe what it *feels* like—to represent the energy of the place. However, both artists offered clues to some meanings behind the locations, and occasionally used political references. Davis was also influenced by jazz, and by the idea that you could visually represent music in a work of art through rhythm and movement.

His painting, “Mellow Pad,” which is in the collection (and usually on display) at The Brooklyn Museum, is a great example of the idea of the fragmented city.

[https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/2101](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/2101)
Project:

Create a work of art that represents a single location in the city, but do so utilizing the idea of fragmenting images—-or using multiple viewpoints (rather than a single “picture window.”) You can also create this fragmentation by using disparate materials, like various kinds of paper.

Like Bearden and Davis, you might choose music to listen to while making your work that you most closely associate with the location.

Materials: You can use collage, photo-collage, or create a drawing of painting from source photos of your location.
In this example, I began to re-create a location (in photo collage) of a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (the neighborhood of Vidigal, near the ocean) by printing out photos I had taken, and finding additional pictures of water in magazines.

You can source paper from magazines, photo print-outs, found paper, recycled paper, etc.
Your photo collage could also be a sketch for an eventual painting or drawing. In the case of the last image, I used the arrangement of the collage to help create this painting on paper.

I photographed the collage, and then used a digital projector to project the image onto paper, and trace it.
Here is an example I did using Times Square as a location for a drawn collage. I had taken photos during a protest, and then went back to Times Square to photograph more imagery. Using those photos, I recreated the scene as a sort of collage of activity. While it appears to seemingly represent a single viewpoint down Broadway, on close examination you will see that it blends blocks together in an elongated frame.
In this example of a collage, I used drawings that I had cut up, and then cut those shapes into rectilinear shapes (on the right). I then used those shapes to create the cityscape on the left. Do you think the collage is more like the work of Stuart Davis or Romare Bearden?
After making your collage, show your artwork to another person. If you were listening to a particular type of music while constructing the artwork, ask if they can guess your musical inspiration.

REFLECTIONS:

1. In considering the artwork of Romare Bearden and/or Stuart Davis, what did you find most compelling about their work?

2. How do you feel your final artwork describes the place you picked to represent?

3. Does your finished work illustrate the place, or represent how it feels? Is the final work completely abstract in nature, or are there hints of representation (like figures, signage, etc.)?