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Big Boxes

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Look around. Giant bigger and better mega-chainstores are popping up everywhere, leaving their smaller big-box versions empty and abandoned. What does the future hold for these marginally smaller retail buildings?

Ohio based writer and artist [Julia Christensen](#) has been exploring how communities reclaim the growing number of abandoned spaces since 2003 and authored the forthcoming book, [Big Box Reuse](#). Christensen writes in her introduction that 253 Wal-Mart owned properties were available for leasing. *Big Box Reuse* illustrates the new and inventive ways communities are recycling empty super-center retailers. Can you imagine, an 33,000 square foot abandoned K-Mart in Minnesota converted into a [Spam Museum](#)? It's true. A barely recognizable K-Mart structure has been home to the mystery meat memorial since September, 2001.



Alongside Julia Christensen's book, her newest exhibit, "[Your Town, Inc](#)" is on display at CMU's Miller Gallery through November 23. The exhibition features photographs and installation pieces that show how communities are creating new uses for vacant spaces. A collaborative piece with Oberlin College and Carnegie Mellon students will be situated on top of a parking lot. The structure is titled, *Unbox* and will be transportable, reuseable and constructed with recycled materials.

And if you haven't had enough, Julia Christensen's work will be displayed in the upcoming [Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes](#) exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art, opening October 4. Organized by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, artists and architects reimagine new ideas for the familiar look of the suburban landscape.

- Lisa