



ROOK & RAVEN

ALEXIS DAHAN

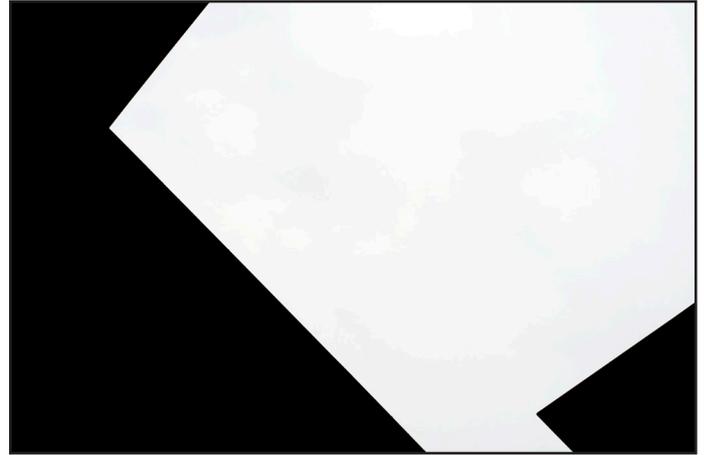
the sky is shaped by its city buildings

may 9th - june 6th 2013

opening: may 9th 6 to 8pm

Rook & Raven is pleased to present Alexis Dahan's debut solo exhibition in London, *The Sky Is Shaped By Its City Buildings*. The show includes new work in a variety of media, photography, drawing, sculpture and related collages as part of a larger and ongoing series of iconological abstracted forms culled from the rituals of daily life.

The works included in *The Sky Is Shaped By Its City Buildings* evoke themes of memory, time, and dislocation, lingering interests first explored in Dahan's series on the human form (*The Lover's Body Parts are Separated*, 2012). In the former series, the body was reduced to outlines and creases that removed much of its personal and erotic connotations, in order to suggest a labyrinthine landscape or a field one could project his or her own memories and desires. In his new work, Dahan takes the urban city as his point of departure, locating the personal within the realm of the public street. Although this series is entirely void of a human figures, the viewer's body is implied and metaphorically inserted via the shifts in perspective and scale that the work registers, suggesting a multitude of simultaneous views.



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Four distinct bodies of work will be on view in the main gallery

Four large-format photographs depict buildings in Milan and London, which together form asymmetrical compositions of opposing monochromatic fields. These are printed with a process known as piezography, which eliminates color ink in black and white printing, allowing for greater detail, richer tones, and increased luminosity.

A grid of 16 charcoal drawings explores similar viewpoints in greater detail, highlighting the tension between the stability of architectural elements with the fluidity of the spaces they contain. In Dahan's vision, the streets shift and morph into one another, forming an imagined city that is at once wondrous and disorienting. With a nod to an existing structure of the urban grid, he juxtaposes the expected coldness of the Minimalist grid with the organic geometric forms found in everyday life.

A suite of six paintings on wood loosely titled 'pieces of the sky' corresponds to actual configurations in the sky formed by the random intersection of buildings. These organic shapes are rendered sculpturally and painted. In literally extracting its presence, Dahan attempts the impossibility of capturing the sky through geometry. Formally, they wittily recall the shaped monochromatic paintings of Ellsworth Kelly or else the architectural 'cuts' of Gordon Matta-Clark; for Dahan, these objects correlate with concrete moments and perceptually locate the limitless in a tangible form. This work likewise bridges the photographic with the painterly, in specifically toying with the procedure of perspective control, by correcting a distorted view for a more legible, geometric construction that may or not be the way the site physically appears. Dahan suggests there is not a single truthful view, but rather a hybrid of memories and impressions of that view.



Further in the exhibition, a grouping of photo snapshots presents a more straightforward anthropological approach in rebuilding Dahan's physical journey from memory, revealing the way in which the site is initially encountered. Arranged as a mosaic, the images convey the randomness and temporality of contemporary urban life.

The Flaneur and the Utopian Impulse

With this work, Dahan is in essence acting as a modern flaneur, turning the literary "urban wanderer" into an active, rather than traditionally passive figure. According to Walter Benjamin, the flaneur represents a mix of interior and exterior worlds, of looking out and being looked at; the figure's eventual cultural decline meanwhile coincides with the urbanization in Paris. Dahan recuperates this lamented personage for our 'age of the snapshot,' not through vernacular photography of the past or rehashing the oversaturated, hyper-populated streets of today, but through a foregrounding of the abstractions and patterns that emerge in everyday skylines.

His interest in the mapping of bodies and territories eschews narrative in favor of a cerebral and philosophical reading of forms. In appropriating the Minimalist grid, so often used in art history to express universal or utopian themes, Dahan makes a comment on the elementary forms that give cities their physical structure and expresses the utopian connotations of urban planners who knowingly alter human behavior by reorganizing the space in which people move. The floating, isolated shapes in these images function like a series of lost islands relaying this dislocated feeling. While Dahan's source material is firmly located in the present, meaning is malleable and formed not in the literal, but in the abstracted marginalized spaces, where fleeting memories and movements are incessantly mapped and continue to evolve.

text by Dmitry Komis

A native of Paris (b.1982), Dahan has lived and worked in New York since 2005. Dahan became German painter Hermann Amann's assistant at age 20 while studying literature and philosophy in Paris and Siena, Italy. In 2007 he opened his studio in Union Square where he organized French artist Laurent Grasso's first US show entitled *Electric Palace*. In the last seven years Dahan has been regularly commissioned by Purple Magazine, W Magazine and Elle Italia for editorial projects, while continuing to develop his personal work. In 2012, Dahan was the subject of an acclaimed solo exhibition at New York's Half Gallery where he exhibited works from his series *The Lover's Body Parts are Separated*.

Rook & Raven is a gallery, publisher of fine art prints and books, and creative portal situated in the heart of London's Fitzrovia district. As an extension of the Gallery's exhibition portfolio, and through collaborative ties to various creative industries and outside curators, Rook & Raven has evolved the standard art space into an innovative nucleus that aims to advance the remit of visual expression.

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