

Debut - Discovering emerging artists

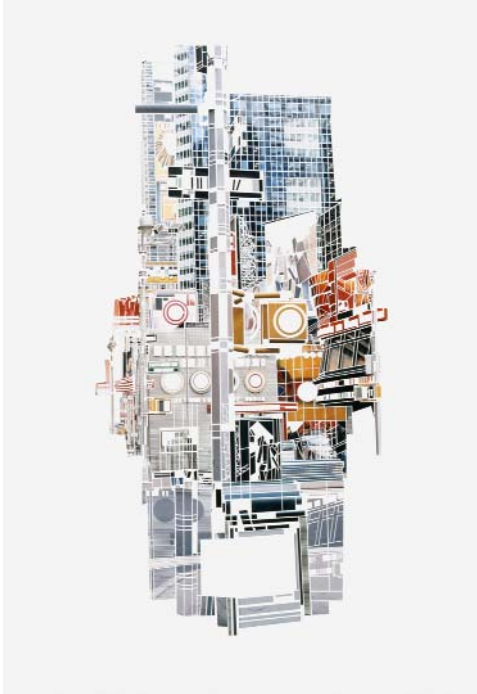
Richard Galpin

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Roebling Hall, New York

(+1 212 929 8180, roeblinghall.com)

Review by Minna Proctor



Above, left: Richard Galpin, *Automaton*, 2005, peeled photograph, 172.1 x 135.3 cm, 2005
Right: *Neo-Capital*, peeled photograph, 143.5 x 102.5cm

There is a certain exquisite presumption to the act of deleting significant chunks of a busy cityscape - carving for example, empty, truly empty, space into Times Square - as Richard Galpin does in recent works *Automaton* and *Dazzle Camouflage*, part of his debut New York solo show at Roebling Hall.

There is a similar maniacal quality to the act of building negative elements into a rollercoaster - revealing not the swooping gestures, the hair-raising hills and peaks one associates with such a ride, but rather its structural essence: the cross sections of the tracks, vertical patterns in the scaffolding. This is an artist who cares more about the vertebrae of the ballerina's spine than the divine execution of her pirouette.

Galpin's large format colour photographs of busy cities and rollercoasters are subjected to a surgical 'peeling' away: the scraping off of the top layer of a picture with a scalpel, leaving graphic fragments, patterns, revealed repetitions and dynamics, reconceived in relation to

the blank, slightly bruised fibres of the white page beneath. The effect is something like a reverse collage.

At first glance, in fact, the viewer may think they are looking at the fantabulous constructions of either a lunatic or genius, if only because of the degree of complication: trails of blue squares there, rows of red lines here, scores of yellow octagons. And then, lo and behold, these maddening geometries seem to embody a scene.

But then you get closer (or read the gallery's explanation of the process) and see that instead of pasting thousands of tiny squares on to paper, the artist has, instead, excised angular chunks, spidery-thin lines and dust-sized particles, making the exercise more akin to puzzle-making than outright lunacy.

The process of visionary reconstruction discloses not only intrinsic structural patterns, but chromatic patterns as well. *Fantasy Mouse* (2005), one of the show's highlights, works a range of earthy reds and powder blues to full expression. Throughout the series, the

banal colours of the man-made world (cityscapes, electrical towers and rollercoasters are after all profoundly man-made subjects) achieve a startling combination of the suffused and the muted through their isolation from light sources, natural tones and general environs. This sultry blandness is accuated by the stark white vacuum upon which the fragments float.

And yet the central point of this work is the tension between the idea of fragments that have been brought together, arranged into a whole, and the fragments that remain of what was once a whole.

Odyssey (2005), for example, could be the construction site of a Renzo Piano building, or a sun-drenched silver birch forest being invaded by flying red tin cans, or the icy *Fortress of Solitude* in *Superman II* (1980) - all in all, a chilly, phallic, futuristic and beautiful abstraction. The knowledge, however, that a full picture (of a rollercoaster) preceeds, or overlays, this array of forms, leads us to build backwards, to fill in the blanks. This is a wonderful twist in a series based on erasing: the task of construction or reconstruction falls to the spectator. The artist hands the baton back to his audience.

Having made reference to madness more than once in connection with Galpin's work, however I should qualify that I mean it in the most complimentary sense. The meticulous carving involved in the creation of these pictures is absolutely brainsplitting. The complicated image, *Neo-Capital* is a full-on, Argyle, kaleidoscope: the closer you try and follow the trajectory of the pattern of any given section, the more your eyes cross. In calling his work 'peeling', Galpin makes the process sound more like a fruit salad than the brain surgery, or lens crafting, that this intricacy must actually demand of him.

This is a labour-intensive performance photography of the subtlest order.