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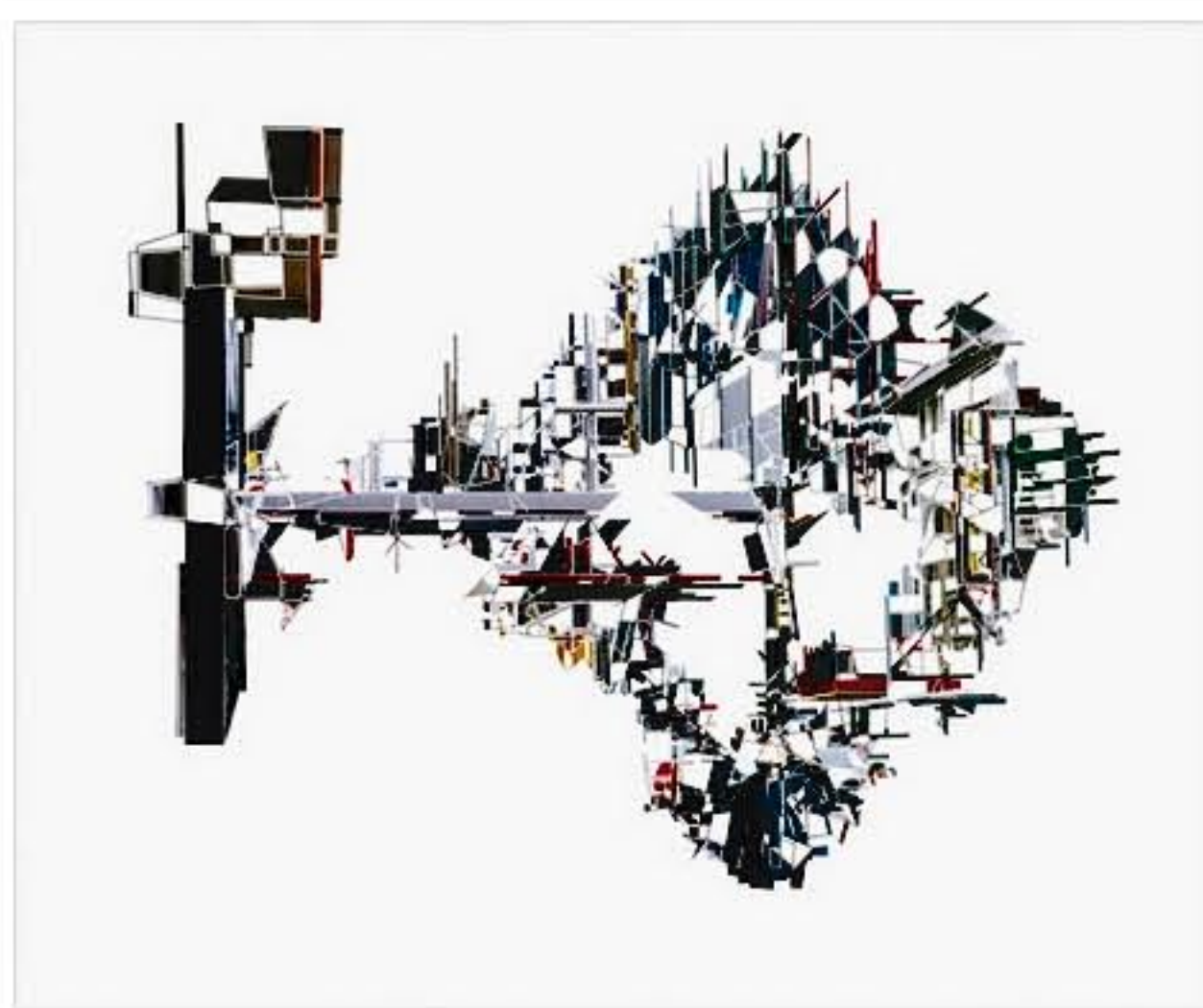
Richard Galpin 'Elevation' at Hales Gallery, London

28 April, 2009

By Denna Jones

Richard Galpin's works in the Hales Gallery exhibition are the legatees of Matta-Clark's 1970s urban blight. His cities of urban abandonment have evolved into Galpin's 21st century metropolises - the City's "Square Mile", Manchester, Chicago and New York City- blighted by deficit finances, and asset stripped to rickety frameworks.

But tempting as it is to decode Galpin's works as though they are financial Rosetta stones capable of explaining how we got ourselves into the current fiscal mess, Galpin's view is more prosaic, less conspiracy theory. "I wanted to work with colours and textures and to play with perspective and exposed areas. The logic of what I remove or leave behind is increasingly ambiguous and complex."



Free State I, 2008. Peeled photograph 132.5 x 158 cm, Richard Galpin

He makes no claim to link his forms to the crisis of cities, but he doesn't deny his works have become progressively darker. Although he always left original solid forms in his finished pieces, he now leaves behind bits of windows or reflections. What we see or think we can see in these small areas of reveal are what contribute to the dystopian atmosphere. Galpin invites us to see transition, deconstruction and reconstruction, and like Matta-Clark's reworking of abandoned buildings, his process is aggressive but the outcome less so.

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Richard Galpin photographs city buildings, concentrating on clusters of urban density. But where previously he rubbed, erased and overpainted his photographs, in 2001 he began to interfere directly with the fabric. He cut areas of emulsion, but when he discovered how easily emulsion separates from its ground, he abandoned cutting and began to slice and excise areas in a process more akin to sculpting. He exposes the city's subsurface patterns; reveals frameworks unrelated to built reality, and allows these creations to float untethered, hobble on spindly tripod legs, or moor precariously to pylons anchored on bold white backgrounds.

The workers, bosses, and clients who inhabited these buildings are gone. Pedestrians and landmarks have vanished. The city's stripped framework emerges from the excised emulsion, its sinews and sins there for all to see.

Before Galpin began to lay serious siege to cities with his scalpel, his sliced and sculpted city photographs were measured, lower density images. These earlier works have elements of stencil technique. As he cut and removed areas, small joins or ties were left behind to anchor each section of the photo to the whole and establish the final pattern. And just as architectural tie-rods stabilise buildings by holding elevations in secure tension, Galpin's ties were safe and secure. But his newest "cluster works" act more like the architectural equivalent of Pump and Dump stocks. They intentionally mislead. Surface blocks follow the photograph's original perspective, but their ties lead to blind alleys, false connections or dead ends.

The City of London's financial "Square Mile", Manchester, Chicago and New York City are among the urban centres reverse engineered by Galpin from

expansive, solid photographs to fractured parables of urban development and decline. His new images are the legatees of American artist Gordon Matta-Clark's cities of urban abandonment, but instead of 1970s urban blight, Galpin's 21st century metropolises are defined by deficit, punished by Ponzi schemes, and asset stripped to rickety frameworks.

Galpin's technique and structures mirror elements of Matta-Clark's 3D "building cuts". Matta-Clark sourced his material from the thousands of abandoned buildings that littered many US cities during the 1970s decline in inner city settlements. He cut and removed sections of elevations, floors and interior walls, leaving sufficient ties to keep the building standing. His deconstructions were not reflections on structural failure (Charles Abrams' 1971 glossary "The Language of Cities" states many abandoned buildings were structurally sound), but a critique of social and political issues.

Galpin makes no claim to link his forms to the crisis of cities, but he doesn't deny his works have become progressively darker. His new works include intentional glimpses into other realities through fragments of windows or reflections. What we see or think we see in these small areas further contribute to a dystopian atmosphere.

Susan Sontag saw photographs as thin slices of space and time. The slices and fractures in Galpin's works are anonymous and project unease, something many of us believe is relevant to our space and our time. The city as we knew it is no more. Time to reconstruct our cities and our lives in entirely new ways. We are all survivalists. Building our New Jerusalem starts now.