

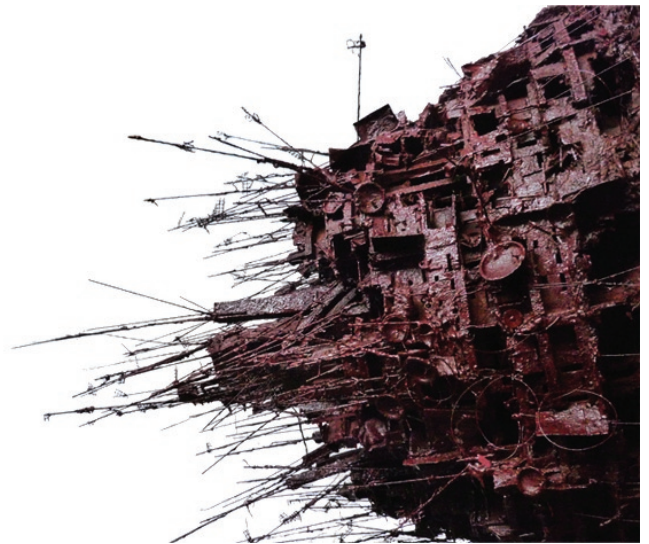
B A B Y L O N

Paintings by Gerry Judah

20 November - 24 December 2009

Private view Thursday 19 November 6 - 8pm

Flowers 82 Kingsland Road, London, E2 8DP
T +44 (0) 20 7920 7777 www.flowerseast.com



Babel 2009 (detail), mixed media and oil on canvas, 225 x 190 cm

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The ideology of Modernism manifests in a competitive verticality: a sublimatory drive that conjures our contemporary aesthetic and architectural panoramas in the image of the capitalist system. Gerry Judah's paintings recast the visual and ideological axes of this culture of monumentalism. Apocalyptic settlements, comprising buildings replete with stairwells and satellite dishes, shot through with the wiry networks of communications systems, emerge from Judah's canvases like tectonic tumours. He defies their ascendant impulse by tethering their foundations to the wall – so that they lurch onto the horizontal rather than soar skywards – and then systematically destroying them. Smothered by layers of oil or acrylic gesso, the structures are abstracted into form/ground indistinction and silenced into monochrome.

Testament to our changing urban landscapes and the redundancy of traditional hierarchies at the End of (art-)History, Judah's paintings also pulse with the cadences of modern conflict. Extending his visual vocabulary from the haunting 'white on white' works of *Motherlands* (Louise T Blouin Institute, 2007) and *Country* (Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 2009), Judah strives for visceral resplendence in new works that exploit the bruised complexion of war. The sticky, scarred and mutilated skeins that cling to the picture plane in 'Red Babel' (2009) and 'Red Country 1' (2009) are as abject as they are sublime; in 'Black Country 1' (2009), the spectral absent-presence of earlier works is reconfigured, as luminosity gives way to all-encompassing shadow. Evocative of the blood stained and oil-slicked imagery of war, these paintings are potent talismans for our contemporary cultures of conflict.

It is perhaps important to consider the extent to which Judah's paintings are destructive and the degree to which they are *deconstructive*. The linguistic allusion is a significant one. Inspiration for this exhibition came, in part, from Judah's contemplation of Breughel's 'Tower of Babylon' (1563), itself an artistic response to the story of Babel as told in Genesis. The Book of Revelation records how the people of the earth, a united humanity with one language, determined to build a tower to reach to the heavens. To counter this impertinence, God imposed a multiplicity of language, scattering the people across the globe to form many nations. Babylon, the city that provided the stage for this divine act of anti-verticality, is thus the ultimate borderland: the spatial manifestation of difference, otherness and a confusion of tongues. Whilst it is easy to read Judah's injurious, anti-architectural practice as essentially destructive, the notion of discursive generosity, traceable in the narrative legacy stemming from the Bible to Breughel, is central to his work. These paintings do not aim for nihilism. Instead, they seek to generate dialogues that straddle the aesthetic and the political, rendering them provocatively indiscreet.

Gerry Judah has shown his work in a number of solo exhibitions including *Frontiers*, the Timber Yard, London, 2005, *Angels*, the Royal Institute of British Architects, London, 2006 and the British High Commission, India, 2007, *Motherlands*, Louise T Blouin Foundation, London, 2007 and *Country*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Wolverhampton, 2009. His paintings are included in a number of international public and private collections including the Saatchi Collection, the Israel Centre of Arts and the Imperial War Museum, London. BABYLON is his first solo exhibition with Flowers.

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