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PRESS RELEASE

All That is Solid

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Gil Heitor Cortesão

CARBON 12 is delighted to present their 100th exhibition, *All That is Solid*, Gil Heitor Cortesão sixth solo exhibition at the gallery.

For *'All That Is Solid'*, his fifth exhibition at CARBON 12, Portuguese painter Gil Heitor Cortesão (b. 1967, Lisbon; lives and works in Lisbon) presents a suite of large and small works extending his investigation into the fragile perceptive systems and architectures of modernity. Working with oil on plexiglass, Cortesão constructs images that hover between coherence and dissolution, framing painting as a system at once striving for and resisting cohesion. The plexiglass surface, with its luminous depth, becomes both an unstable ground where image and reflection, clarity and opacity, continually slipper.

At the heart of this new body of work lies the artist's ongoing archival process: photographs of modernist interiors and glass structures, reconfigured and filtered by color, space, and mood. These are not straightforward reproductions, but rather translations of perception where images are mediated through time, memory, and painterly gesture. As architectural historian Beatriz Colomina has observed, modern architecture was always mediated by images, and its transparency often concealed as much as it revealed¹. In Cortesão's work, this duality finds a visual counterpart: his spaces unfold as liminal zones where the boundary between inside and outside dissolves. Gardens seep into living rooms, reflections disrupt clear sightlines, and the supposed legibility of modernist design gives way to ambiguity. What at first appears rational and constructed slowly turns porous, open to the slippages of time and the instability of vision itself.

In his process, this conceptual fragility is reinforced formally. Reversing the conventional sequence of composition, Cortesão begins with the smallest details (plants, furniture, shadows) before filling in the surrounding space. This inverted construction produces an atmosphere of subtle disorientation: figure and ground continuously alternate, and what should be stable seems to drift. Cortesão's work stages what Rosalind Kraus calls the optical unconscious: the act of seeing is never neutral but inflected by the mechanisms that sustain it². His paintings explore the sense that every image carries its own undoing, every surface its own erasure.

The painting *Glasshouse* (2025) crystallizes this friction. Its luxuriant foliage and modernist furniture are overlaid with arcs and painterly traces, as if the glass walls both enclose and dissolve the space. The room appears suspended between exposure and concealment: light penetrates but also blinds; transparency reveals but fractures. Cortesão's brushstrokes, at once precise and vaporous, heighten this ambiguity. The surface acts like a photographic plate that captures and distorts, transforming a static image into an optical event. Transparency here is paradoxical: a structure of visibility that simultaneously reveals and withholds, a metaphor for the way perception itself is always contingent.

1 Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 13–15. Colomina argues that the modernist ideal of transparency—exemplified in the architecture of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe—was never purely visual or spatial, but deeply tied to systems of mediation, reproduction, and control.

2 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 7–10. Krauss introduces the notion of the "optical unconscious" to describe how modern visual culture—and by extension modernist art—reveals the hidden operations of perception, exposing the slippages, delays, and distortions that underpin the act of seeing.

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In *Villa Pompei* (2025), the artist's vocabulary extends into deeper tonal registers. Here, an interior emerges through veiled layers of color and soft shadow. Fragments of furniture and vegetation coexist within a delicate tension: lines tremble, reflections multiply, and the boundaries between surface and depth blur. The painting feels like a space remembered, its light diffused by time. The drips and faint abrasions that mark the plexiglass surface function almost like evidence of the painting's slow formation and the instability of what it seeks to hold. As in *Glasshouse*, Cortesão transforms architectural order into a texture of memory.

Across *All That Is Solid*, Cortesão reconsiders not the structure of modernity itself but the conditions of seeing that emerged from it. His practice oscillates between construction and dissolution, description and abstraction. Each work proposes a different threshold where space, light, and recollection intersect. The plexiglass surface—once a symbol of modern precision—becomes an instrument of delay, a way of holding the image just before it fades. Through this, Cortesão's painting achieves its quiet power: it captures not the certainty of vision but its tremor, the moment in which coherence begins to slip into reverie.

-Paz Monge