NAPPING CITIES, NAPPING CULTURES

The thread weaving the bulk of this issue together is CITIES. Moving from Tehran to Jeddah, Palestine, Beirut and Syria, *Canvas* looks at how artists are engaging with the urban fabric in their practices. Some comment on the impact of rapid urban transformation, while others lament the destruction of heritage and the erosion of human dignities. Meanwhile placing human beings centre stage in massive metropolises is the focus of street artist-provocateur JR, who gives *Canvas* an exclusive from NYC.

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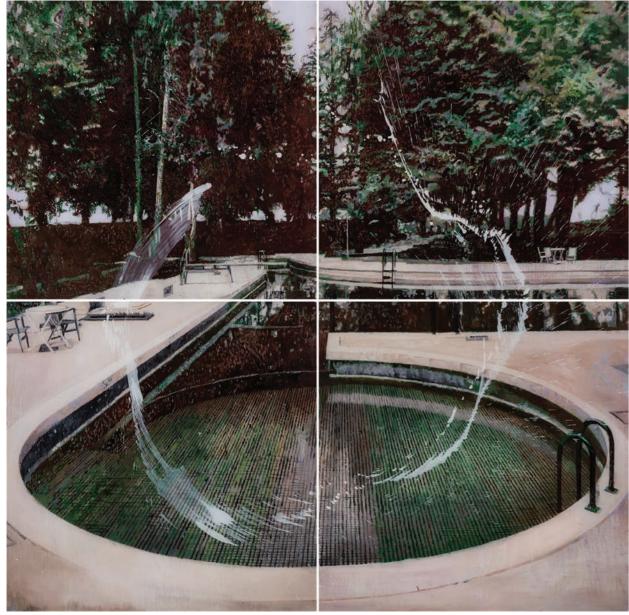
Moath Alofi. *Mihlaiel*. 2018. Video, projection, colour, sound. 11 minutes 30 seconds. Image courtesy of the artist and Athr Gallery, Jeddah. Commissioned by Saudi Art Council for 21,39

ANSARINIA ON TEHRAN	70
DDAH TO ABU DHABI: AN ATHR SHOW AT JSE421	74
AL & ALESSANDRO PETTI ON PALESTINE	80
ABOULSI ON BEIRUT, WAR AND PEACE	84
R CORTESÃO & MODERNIST CITIES	88
BIENNIAL: FIRST EDITION	92
ART BASEL IN HONG KONG	98
RMORY SHOW IN NYC	102
ON THE ARMORY SHOW PANEL	10
E WITH JR	11
E ABU HAMDAN AND SYRIA	11
	6.0

REVIEW



A sense of loss and melancholy pervades Gil Heitor Cortesão's subdued paintings. They carry an ambivalence that's somewhere between retro-futurism and ruin, a utopia that was never realised. Eschewing traditional painting on canvas, Cortesão composes his works on plexiglass using found images from the 1960s and 70s, creating uncanny tableaux that are dilapidated reproductions of interiors and landscapes from a modernist era, frozen in time. **Arie Amaya-Akkermans** speaks with the artist about his latest show at Dubai's Carbon 12 (which ran until 5 May), and his dream of lost futures.



Gil Heitor Cortesão. *Circular Pool.* 2017. Oil on plexiglass, quadriptych. 168 x 168 cm

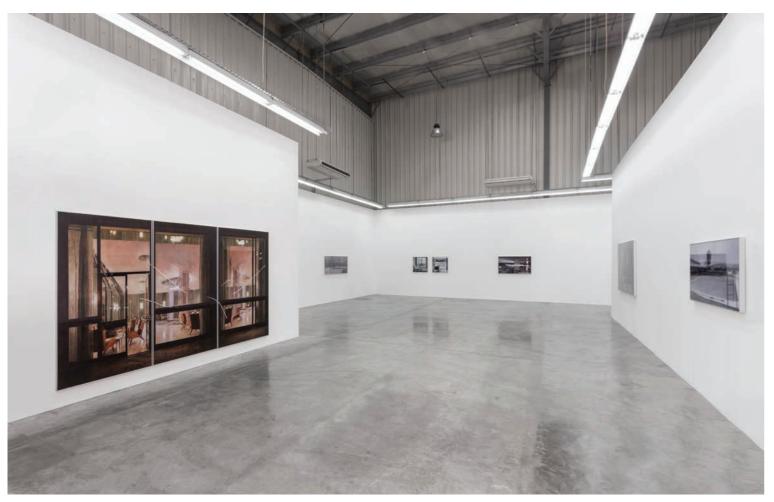
Contemporary painting is replete with remote, unattainable 'pastness' of today. Cortesão's exhibition at Carbon 12, allusions to architectural space as a form fittingly entitled Umbra, as the Latin of surrogate domesticity. It is as if depicting these abstractions of space, and the traces word for shadow suggests, is a lot about conveying the sombre character of the of our lived time within them, would be enough to substitute the displacement, a built environment through the use of subtle seemingly inevitable characteristic of being contrasts of colour and tone, rather than modern – of learning how to live without merely imagining it (which would be too the illusion of a past. But abstract space is easy). The works speak about something not a place with permanent memory, and stronger than abandonment or decay. these can never be transformed into solid Rather, they are about a suspension of spaces. However historically inert, abstract temporality, the 'now-time' that Walter space needs to be ultimately discarded, Benjamin used to describe the 20th century abandoned and replaced. and, as a whole, the project of modernity; a

Portuguese painter Gil Heitor Cortesão, kind of collective slumber. 'Umbra' is often translated as shadow whose work often depicts aspects of the urban fabric and employs buildings as or shade but the original Latin expression metaphor-structures for what he calls the also denotes something spectral and memory of modernism, speaks about the ghostly. Accordingly, the word for utopian – and therefore unfinished – quality penumbra in Portuguese, derived from of modern architecture. "Modernism has the same Latin root, is translated as a half-light or dusk. This European palette, a very strong utopian dimension," he tells me. "In many cases, it was a question of boasting a nostalgic homesickness and creating a new society, a new world in rich in pictorial loneliness, is at times the which art took an hitherto unknown role site of profound contradiction; exteriors and interiors are executed on plexiglass, or stopped being strictly necessary as the boundaries between life and art were a material that belies the internal weight of overcome. But the modern project was the composition, almost causing them to left incomplete and its conclusion was disintegrate. An essay in deconstruction, Cortesão begins on the backside of probably impossible anyway." The skillful manipulation between the inside and the the transparent surfaces, moving from outside in his paintings, which are endowed painting in the finer details first and the with an almost cinematic chiaroscuro, overall backdrop last in a reverse glasscelebrates this incompleteness - a kind of painting technique





Gil Heitor Cortesão. *Passage #3*. 2017. Oil on plexiglass, diptych. 72 x 173 cm



Installation view of Gil Heitor Cortesão's solo exhibition Umbra at Carbon 12. 2018. Image courtesy of Carbon 12

In a broader reading, this unfinished business of modern the ever-changing nature of the UAE city complement each other in complex ways.

In pieces such as Giorgio's Room four times in the last nine years - but in a (2016) or the diptych Passage #3 (2017), the images are so familiar that they could be polaroids from a family album, or nature of the UAE city complement decomposing memories. It is akin to that imaginary moment when Gordon Matta-Clark or Rachel Whiteread were faced with a flat surface, just before they cut up and Dubai, in turn, by means of establishing architecture and the buildings or filled them with concrete. The pools, depicted in *Passage #2* (2017) or in the quadriptych Circular Pool (2017), could conjure up many art historical references but here they're placeless, cut off from the real.

> Though the contrast between the slow methodical painting and the high-speed metropolitan textures of Dubai is very stark, Cortesão doesn't seem intimidated - he has exhibited his heterogeneous yet consistent body of work with Carbon 12 architecture that is shaped by the viewers

broader reading, this unfinished business of modern architecture and the ever-changing each other in complex ways. Cortesão's mesmerizing 'anarchitectures' slow down the seamless time warp of the global south; a radical distance from the European urban model of history, endows the works with the timeless quality of an artefact. The conversation between the artist and his host context remains dynamic and openended over the course of almost a decade.

The term 'anarchitecture' is closely associated in art theory with Matta-Clark, referring to a position that's not necessarily posited against architecture as much as it encompasses a critical discourse about



Gil Heitor Cortesão. Passage #1. 2017. Oil on plexiglass. 73 x 128 cm. All images courtesy of the artist and Carbon 12

and the world, instead of being conceived always very aware of the importance of in merely functional terms. This of course abstraction in 20th century art; I think that applies to Cortesão's work, but the definition in several ways it is like a post-abstract figuration, something like a second-degree falls short, precisely because of the role that architectural depictions have played figuration." Overcoming the end of painting, in contemporary painting since the 1990s, once the ultimate project of abstraction, when artists began exploring architecture here also means to become sceptical in a painterly way. Two entire generations about painting in general, experiencing constantly, as both viewer and maker, the of European abstract painters passed before the objects of the world would empty spaces under our feet. It is difficult become tangible for (or mediated in) the to tell where exactly we stand; Cortesão has aptly titled a number of his paintings act of painting again, so that thinking about architecture from the 1990s has meant also Passage, in a series that lend the impression being keenly aware of the abstract essence of a permanent transition or threshold, a of (and influence on) spatial thinking today. passageway, a double-entendre, and a When asked about the relationship of labyrinth. We are left rootless and perhaps figurative painters such as Sabine Moritz as Cortesão intended, our world has (Gerhard Richter's wife), to both abstract become undermined by the passage of European painting and his work on empty a time that we have consistently failed to architecture, Cortesão remarks, "I was grasp or adjust to. 🕕

