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here is a specific stillness to the nine paintings of Portuguese artist Gil Heitor Cortesão. The somber expanses of architecture exist halted in time, as though you stumbled across an old photograph (Giorgio's Room, 2016) or a space quietly abandoned the morning after (Passage #2, 2018). There is an abruptness to the serenity, rendering the tension uneasy—and the translation of its Latin title, "shadow", offers no reprieve. The narratives linger ambiguously; you're left questioning if these paintings, with delicate, uncanny realism, are public or private spheres peered at voyeuristically, or if they are dreamscapes buried somewhere within your memories.

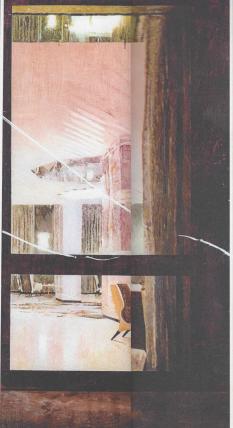
Cortesão's reverse painting technique on Plexiglas or glass, which involves painting on the opposite side to that which is exhibited, depicts inner and outer volumes of Modern and Late Modern architecture from the 1950s-70s. "They completely eliminate urban identity," says Kourosh Nouri, Carbon 12 co-founding director. The paintings read equally nostalgic and futuristic. "They have the quality of looking quite familiar,

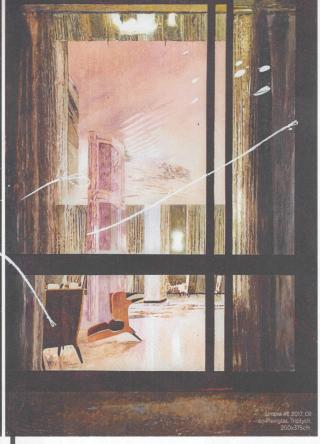
but at the same time, there's a sense of distance," explains Cortesão.
"Distance is both temporal and spatial, and I'm interested in ideas of future-past' and retro-futurism." The omission of linear chronology, geographical roots, and often figures, creates a peculiar, haunting atmo-

sphere within the near monochromatic works, easily interchangeable as a living room in Tehran or LA (*Umbra #2*, 2018), or a Tokyo hotel lobby or entryway in Brazil (*Umbra #1* (*Trippych*), 2018). Interior and exterior perspectives, frontally or from high corners, hint of palpable histories contained within, but remain just disorienting enough that individual schemata step up to rectify the scenarios.

Stripped of formal corporeal identification, this very reduction is what incites such visceral rationalisations. Cortesão's limited incorporation of people does not overpower the traces of the lives that could







Bated glimpses of restless memory

Gil Heitor Cortesão's fourth solo exhibition Umbra at Carbon 12 through paint, leaving the viewer oscillating uneasily between

have lived, or perhaps still do, within the works. "Frequently in the more 'architectonic' works, the human figure is absent," admits Cortesão. "It is a way to bring the viewer into the painting, to make them more conscious of what is being seen. Due to viewpoints, there is

always an implicit person, someone entering into this illusionary space." Engaging psychological and social manipulations of perception and interaction with environments, the line between private and public space, let alone whose, is dissolved, and you become an intruding spectator. "Gil's composition and general absence of people creates this Hitch-cockian narrative," observes Nouri. However, though you are paramount in interpreting the nuances, Cortesão is also present, his person prevailing over the lack of painted others via the splashes, drips and smears of Passage #1 (2017) and Circular

appropriates Modern and Late Modern architecture voyeurism, memory and space, discovers Katrina Kufer



Pool (Quadriptych) (2018), or corrugated lines that reveal the process of adding and removing.

"What interests me isn't exactly the image itself, but its potential for future pictorial use, the changes I'm already projecting upon it," explains Cortesão. The combination of mostly unshown works alongside pieces from his Passage and Magic Carpet series reinforce how Cortesão's painterly deconstruction of appropriated imagery is further intervened upon through the reversal of the pictorial process—beginning with details and finishing with the backgroundtransparency and tonal juxtapositions. While Passage #3 (Diptych) (2018) is subdued, others like the blanched View with a Room (2017) are luminous, employing painted light and the effect of it through glass as a tool to express mood. The resulting layered imagery occupies a singular space that is, Cortesão indicates, very suggestive. "There is a very close relationship between support and subject in my work," he says. "Glass was widely employed in Modern architecture, associated with an ideal of transparency and clarity." Given that Modernist creators viewed painting as a subsidiary discipline of architecture, Cortesão's choice to depict structures on glass is charged, as is the meta inclusion of frames within frames: the windows and doorways serve as additional layers of glass, futile barriers to the everincreasing leer of the viewer.

Cortesão's architectonic practice taps into a sphere of visible and invisible boundaries and thresholds between space, people, objects and circumstances.

Despite firm rooting in photographs discovered in old books, magazines and postcards, or taken by the artist himself, *Umbra* is surreal, inciting gentle pleasure in relishing the disquieting space between the familiar and the unknown. "You 'read' an image according to the cultural codes you know," says Cortesão. "If you show a perspective drawing to members of certain tribes, it won't be recognised as a translation of a real spatial experience. It will remain incomprehensible if you aren't aware of the code used." While the universality of Cortesão's imagery paradoxically encourages its implacability, Nouri implies that they are a reminder of utopic intentions to build perfect urban environments, rendering *Umbra* somehow so appropriate to the city in which they are currently shown. "The works don't age a minute," he says. Indeed, they rest static, floating in the unsettling confusion of unsure glimpses into your, or another's, real or imagined memory.

Umbra runs until 1 May. Carbon12dubai.com