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ALSERKAL AVENUE'S "GALLERIES NIGHTS"

BY KEVIN JONES

Flux. It's a word commonly used to describe Dubai's construction-crazed urban environment, its teeming waves of here-today-gone-tomorrow expats and its relentlessly renewed quest for the bolder, brighter and bigger. Perhaps more than any other, Dubai is a city built by "flux."

The city's cultural nerve center, Alserkal Avenue, a neighborhood of galleries smack at the heart of a heaving industrial zone, is having a flux moment of its own. A booming expansion that will endow the hub with 40 additional spaces, practically doubling its existing size, is careening towards completion. Promise of a cascade of summertime "soft" openings peppered the conversations of the many gallery-hoppers who turned out for the first of this year's Galleries Nights—the bi-monthly evening of *vernissages* at Alserkal Avenue. Under a night sky punctuated by gently swaying cranes and grid-like building skeletons, flux was almost everywhere to be seen, cavorting in all its finery.

A surprising painting sub-theme underpinned this spate of shows—from Gil Heitor Cortesão's oils-on-plexiglass segmented by aluminum profiles to the bitumen paintings of London-based Nathaniel Rackowe to the deeply structured, highly "geometricized" worlds of Benjamin Senior's canvases. Familiar artists showed surprising new work—Zsolt Bodoni's explosion into color, Jessica Mein's cloth-based interpretation of reality-meets-representation—while newcomers to the Dubai scene provided fresh perspectives.

"Radiant Trajectory," Nathaniel Rackowe's debut solo show at Lawrie Shabibi gallery, showcases the artist's ongoing work with light, with one Dubai-specific series being a memorable standout.



Photo by Kevin Jones for ArtAsiaPacific.

The flux-master. These graphic paintings, made with bitumen on textured cardboard, are outtakes from Nathaniel Rackowe's photographic field trips into the rich heartland of Dubai's ever-changing urban fabric.



Photo by Kevin Jones for ArtAsiaPacific.

Afloat in the glow. The backs of the welded steel frames are painted with yellow or red, casting its color onto the wall behind.

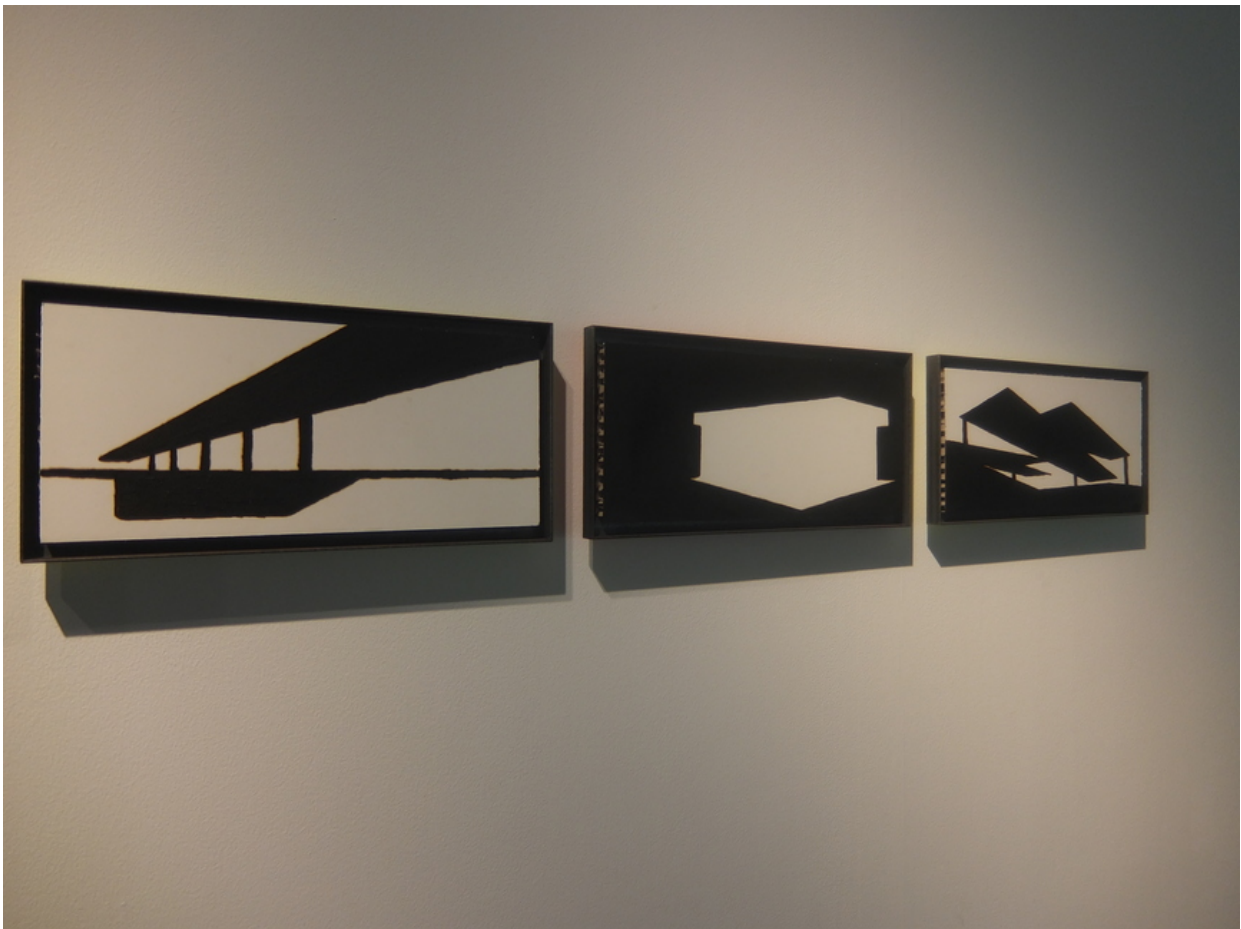


Photo by Kevin Jones for ArtAsiaPacific.

Where's that? Covering a range of industrial zones, historical areas and retail palaces, the stark bitumen paintings play with positive and negative space without ever falling into the easy spot-the-landmark trap.



Photo by Kevin Jones for *ArtAsiaPacific*.



Photo by Kevin Jones for *ArtAsiaPacific*.

De-sanctifying Flavin. Light is perhaps Rackowe's medium, more than the mass-produced construction materials he uses to sheath it. Tubes, clamps and colored wires open up the Flavin mainstay of neon to new interrogations and dialogues.



NATHANIEL RACKOWE, *SP9*, 2010. Photo by Kevin Jones for *ArtAsiaPacific*.

Light box. The cornerstone of the show is *Black Shed Expanded* (2014), a cubic structure made of bitumen-clad wooden slats, which is literally pulled apart at the edges. The violent yellow light within the structure floods out into the gallery, framing the petrol-black slats against its invasive glow.



NATHANIEL RACKOWE, *Black Shed Expanded*, 2014. Photo by Kevin Jones for ArtAsiaPacific.

Carbon 12 invited Lisbon-based artist Gil Heitor Cortesão for his third solo show at the gallery, entitled “Out of Season.” Known for his nearly people-less paintings of photo-inspired modernist interiors, Cortesão makes a radical break from his previous works. In this series, people frolic and lounge, stare and swim in a snapshot world, with aluminum profile frames slicing in to wedge some tension into the scenes.

