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## ARTSCENE™

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Celebrating Our 25th Season

ANTHONY MITRI  
"WEST 54th STREET  
FROM THE MUSEUM  
OF MODERN ART"

ALEXEI JAWLENSKY •  
AUDRA WEASER and SOOJUNG  
PARK • DEBORAH DAVIDSON  
and PHOEBE BRUNER • JEANNE WILLETTE on  
THE NEW CLAREMONT MUSEUM • AND MUCH MORE

### ANTHONY MITRI

(Forum Gallery, West Hollywood)  
Now *this* is New York, gorgeous, gritty, and astride its dark subway system. Oh, and Paris, full of stately buildings with iron filigree and gray light. Then there is the breadbasket countryside of Normandy, idyllic in its natural beauty with the order of man imposed with a light touch. None of it is the homage of a native son, but an interloper hailing from San Diego. Anthony Mitri announces the geographical importance of his current images in the titles, but place is conveyed by feel rather than iconography. Talk about feel, there is no color in this show because everything has been executed in charcoal, and the level of mastery would be difficult to exceed. The balance between clear formal composition that conceives relationships that activate the parts, and an absorbing level of detail is outstanding.

The quality of naturalism in this work conveys an ease that is appropriately deceptive. A row of trees along a Parisian boulevard provides a quasi-unruly counterpoint to an early twentieth century apartment building and its geometric arrangement of windows in "Early Morning, Paris, France." But the real visual interest lies in the interplay between the iron balcony railings, and the tree branches reflected in the glass of the windows. For all of the quiet order one picks up from this and the other images, the underlying chaos of nature is not so much disruptive as a steadily present, if understated ground beneath the veneer of civility.

There is more than just a feeling of portentousness injected into images that are modest in terms of scale and medium, but grand for the swath of nature that is packed in. "Vacant Lot, Manhattan" anchors the eye on a brownstone across the street from the foreground lot of the title. Arranged symmetrically around it in contrastingly light tones are scattered bricks left from the demolition of the site,



Anthony Mitri, "Vacant Lot, Manhattan," 2007, charcoal on paper, 18 x 16 1/2".

graffiti-strewn walls of the two neighboring buildings, and a looming industrial building that rises ominously in the background. If even the weeds depicted tend to caress the eye, the weight of previous and impending urban change is suffocating.

This is not limited to the romantic anxiety of urban nostalgia for an architecture of heart replaced by an environment of bulky mass and coldness. Looking at "One Bale and One Silver Ring, Normandy, France," the bale of the title is centered alone in a cultivated field looking quite vulnerable to a towering cumulus cloud formation that we know is utterly benign, but in the image appears ready to crush our protagonist, invoking a living symbol of a fading way of life.

A similar effect comes across in "West 54th Street from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY," whose title forces you to include the great art institution in your thinking about the image. Rather than contemplate the art immediately behind us, we look at a neo-Renaissance building nestled in among grayish and nondescript neighbors to its sides, with anonymous Manhattan behemoths rising up towards the Upper West Side. We are fascinated by the implication that the city beyond provokes greater interest than the treasures of the museum. But far from selling the awe of New York's scale, it feels cut off from its own core. The formal cropping of this composition reinforces the point: The towers

to the right jut up and beyond the top of the image, while the trees below obscure any inkling of the bustling street.

The fact that Mitri chooses to depict two of the world's great metropoli and historical centers of art and culture without the bustle of the human presence is significant. The most common purpose for such a glaring omission would normally be to produce a portrait of the city itself, its inner spirit. More to the point, and very much reinforced in a series of "Penn Station" drawings, is a tone of gathering anxiety and pessimism. Rather than undercutting the technical authority and immediate eye appeal, this lends the work the weight of purpose. By choosing to imply rather than close the narrative, Mitri gives you a good deal to chew on.

Bill Lasarow