

# ARTFORUM

## Driss Ouadahi

CAROLINE PAGÈS GALLERY

Rua Tenente Ferreira Durão, 12-1º Dto.

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In “Implosion,” 2013, Driss Ouadahi’s new series of paintings and debut solo show in Portugal, the Algerian-born, Düsseldorf-based artist depicts scenes of European cityscapes, replete with the grid scaffolding of construction sites. In *Stepping Out* (all works cited, 2013), for instance, an urban vista has been whisked onto the canvas in hues of violet and blue. High-rise buildings punctuate the background, coaxing the eye to recede into illusory distance, while four facadeless structures seem to levitate, ungrounded, with cubic frames exposed. The orthogonal forms of their innards contrast with the more gestural paint of the cityscape viewable through the naked cubic units. With some of the scaffolds right on the surface of the image, the spatial logic unfolds as foreground and background shift and then finally merge in an unyielding visual interplay between depth and planarity.

The absence of human figures raises the question of whom these construction schemes are meant for. Resembling the bare-bones *habitations à loyer modéré* (rent-controlled housing) of France—cheap, expedient, yet often unfeasible housing projects meant to mitigate municipal overcrowding—the exposed skeletons of these structures, which once supported the promise of equitable shelter for all, have been discarded as the naked monumental ruins of a failed dream of twentieth-century urban planning. In *La Barre* (The Bar), the grid of another construction site spans the width of the canvas, dissecting the panorama into discrete frames that bring to prominence the loose and painterly strokes of the city scene beyond, while completed versions of the projects occupy the background. Their rectilinear, mostly white facades, sporadically fitted with blocks of solid color, call to mind the flat, geometric order of one of Mondrian’s metaphysical compositions. Here, the scaffold becomes a barrier, obstructing the viewer’s access to a modernist utopia of architectural planning with the remains of its collapse at the forefront of the picture plane.



Driss Ouadahi, *La Barre* (The Bar), 2013, oil on canvas, 71 x 79”.

— Julian Elias Bronner

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