

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Frederick Hayes at Patricia Sweetow

By Mark Van Proyen

Ever since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the city has become an emotionally loaded subject for artists. Frederick Hayes's six untitled cityscapes, executed in ink, graphite and charcoal on thick paper, register an ominous aura of impending menace without pointing a finger at the source of that anxiety.

Each of these untitled 51-by-42-inch works (all 2003) was hung directly on the wall, like a banner or unfurled scroll. While the artist previously exhibited expressionistic portraits of ordinary working people, the new works focus on the brutalist impersonality of over-bearing urban facades. Always pictured frontally, the buildings comprise systems of grids that are occasionally torqued out of alignment. Though the interiors and their occupants remain invisible, the rows of windows seem to position the viewer as a subject of surveillance.

It is clear that Hayes uses a straightedge to make the heavy black charcoal lines that form the grids, but these decisive marks are subsequently accented by gestural applications of graphite and ink that modify both the buildings as image and the overall pictorial structure.

Even more striking than this counterpoint of image, composition and gesture are the seething clouds that Hayes renders as threatening shrouds crowning and sometimes enveloping the tops of the buildings. In *Untitled (Cityscape #5)*, for example, we see a cluster of tall buildings beneath a billowing knot of clouds that seems to advance like animated viscera or warring octopi.