

DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

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Steve DiBenedetto: *Chaoticus*

Exhibition Dates: Saturday, May 10 – June 21, 2008

Opening reception: Thursday, May 8, 6-8 pm

For his second solo show at David Nolan Gallery, Steve DiBenedetto delivers a new series of paintings and works on paper incited by contemporary architecture's inability to evolve beyond its utilitarian and economic constraints. DiBenedetto's agitated depictions of skyscrapers melting into their structural parts are sources of liberation for the buildings themselves, but ultimately serve as visual metaphors for their generic embodiment of power and nothingness.

Known for his large-scale oil paintings that pit octopi against helicopters amidst a cantankerous backdrop of spinning Ferris-wheels, carrousel and shattered TVs, DiBenedetto departs from his symbolic lexicon to focus on the architectural elements of his imagined world. The introduction of a new medium in several of his works speaks for this shift in interest. DiBenedetto unloads fast-drying gouaches and watercolors onto polypropylene with the same confident vigor and rebelliousness as his oils on canvas. The works have a new speed and pull; spilling, bubbling and melting recognizable structural elements into intense pools of abstraction. DiBenedetto teases out the emerging forms, allowing his brush to feel its way across the composition to discover its

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position and potential within the whole, in the fashion of Philip Guston and Malcolm Morley. The outcome is frenetic, pressurized and ultimately restless. The dimensional limitations of the painting surface cramp the skyscrapers; crouching and bending before hot magenta skies. The rendering of a linear blueprint in watercolor seems frustratingly counterproductive in itself, but perhaps it is this impracticality that DiBenedetto calls for-- the creation of a building with a mind of its own.

The ability of architectural space to insight a physical or psychological response has factored into DiBenedetto's work throughout his career, most recognizably in his lavish paintings of grandiose Cathedral interiors tiered with gilded icons, stained glass windows and unique altarpieces that mystify and overwhelm. As buildings that reflect what is around them instead of what is inside, DiBenedetto's skyscrapers attest to the prevailing trend in post-modern architecture. They are physically large, but visually unobtrusive. But what happens when glass towers are designed to underwhelm us? to blend into their environment? when modern places of worship could be confused for movie theatres, sports arenas, office buildings or private homes?

Since the late 1980s, Steve DiBenedetto has played Kafka and Freud to our civilization, making art that responds to our cultural, spiritual and creative malaises. He was awarded a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award in 2002 as well as a Rosenthal Award and Guggenheim Fellowship Award in 2003. In 2005 he was included in a noteworthy group show at The Whitney, *Remote Viewing*, which ushered his work to its current position at the forefront of contemporary painting. In July 2008, Steve DiBenedetto and sculptor Keith Edmier will join forces on a museum-wide collaborative project at The University Art Museum at SUNY Albany.

Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday, 10-6, Saturday 11-6.