



Yek

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The notion of an architecture of the sky is a beguiling proposition, one that may seem unimaginable to all but the most visionary of artists. The British writer J.G. Ballard has occasionally described this very idea, particularly and extraordinarily in his collection of short stories, *Vermilion Sands* (1971). Ballard's take on the skies above the fictional and exotic resort community of Vermilion Sands—not unlike Palm Springs, California or Scottsdale, Arizona—parallels postwar British art in its focus on the figure. While the author tends to concentrate on the figurative aspects of his imagined settings through the invention of activities such as cloud sculpting, a distinctively Western or West Coast perspective may likely focus on the sky sans clouds.

What is striking about the work of the Las Vegas-based artist with the single moniker, Yek, is that his paintings absolutely *do* evoke an architecture of the sky. Yet his sky is a cloudless, seamless gradation of pigment, unencumbered by any cloud figuration. Yek's paintings create fictional panoramas of the atmosphere that could only be taken from observations of the desert, particularly during sunrises and sunsets. Often garish colors fade and blend as a result of the artist's deft employment of an airbrush (an often discredited device due to its historic overuse in illustration). Yek uses intense colors in what one would normally think of as utterly jarring combinations, such as the hot pinks, bright yel-

lows, and electric greens of *Ole Devil* (1999). Such hues, including the artist's ironically "cooler" palettes of turquoise, lavender, and orange—in the aptly titled *Shameless & Relentless* (1998)—simultaneously refer to the landscape of the American Southwest and the night-bright vernacular of Las Vegas. Maintaining the ambiguity of inherently natural and super-synthetic colors heightens their effect.

Also characteristically West Coast are the sleek, convex panels on which Yek paints. These gently sloped, pristine surfaces call to mind—yet hold an inverse physical relationship to—Robert Irwin's signature discs and Craig Kauffman's vacuum-formed Plexiglas works. The languishing colors in Yek's paintings seem to envelop the viewer, drawing us inward, and, in the larger pieces, consuming our entire field of vision. Mimicking the way we view the sky, the artist bends it around, destroying our sense of peripheral vision by collapsing it into an arena that is continuous throughout our visual field. Especially evident in the comparatively achromatic *Delusions of Somewhere* (1999), his paintings function as visual machines, forcing the viewer to confront color as something more than paint layered atop a surface. Yek's airbrushed panels demand that viewers question and consider the idea of color alone.

Yek finishes his paintings with the application of a formal device that resembles thin calligraphic swaths. These linear elements often have the feel of Arabic script. Upon first sight, viewers may wonder what such odd, loopy scrawls are doing draping from the corners and edges of otherwise unsullied panoramas. Functioning as tropes of classic landscape painting, these marks establish a fairly conventional figure-ground relationship. Applied to complement the blended background areas, they amplify the emotional collapse that takes place behind them. As such, they drive the visual gymnastics of the paintings forward, often at high velocities.

To compare Yek's and Ballard's atmospheric architectures is also to take into account the political and physical geographies from which they arise. Yet, Yek's paintings are more than just mimicry of typical Vegas antics. His intellectual endeavor argues that color constitutes a complex and knowable language—that through its use one may be able to comprehend the nature of how we take in and process visual information. What could be a better platform for this discussion than the sky itself?

Yek
Ole Devil, 1999
Acrylic latex and enamel on panel
48" x 48" x 6"

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