

ART

Sleep Walking In The City: Erik Benson's Evocative Architecture

By Scott Indrisek , September 26, 2013

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Erik Benson's labor-intensive paintings depict spaces--abandoned or forlorn, industrial or crepuscular. His latest exhibition, "Sleep Walking"--**opening this evening at Edward Tyler Nahem in New York**--focuses on buildings at night, facades criss-crossed by bare tree branches. The artist composes these paintings by cutting and intricately collaging segments of acrylic paint onto the canvas (the process appears to be as painstaking and methodical as erecting an actual building, as evidenced by this sped-up video of one work's completion.) "The title of the exhibition refers to the purpose of these paintings, experience a place in darkness," Benson says. "It also refers to a psychological state in which the urban landscape is observed--whether with a tired eye, or a sleepy brain,

there's a more poetic approach to the subject than there is when observing it in the cold, hard light of day."

Empire depicts the titular Manhattan landmark as almost an afterthought, tucked toward the bottom of the canvas's frame, overshadowed by the looming dark. And *Bookman*, as Benson explains, shows two colorfully illuminated condos, their clean lines striking a Modernist grid against the night sky. "The feeling of that painting, for me, is of an uneasy, changing environment," he tells BlackBook. "It makes me think of Edward Hopper saying that he 'just wanted to paint sunlight on the side of the building.' Sometimes through the formal we arrive in places that are very socially relevant in the here and now, like it or not. It's an idea I'm moving through where abstracted elements occur between real forms of architecture and nature, where shapes and spaces are changed by angle and lack of definition: Glimpses of night windows, refractions from streetlights, silhouettes of obstacles, all lend themselves to an undefined footing. Shifting shapes and spaces. Dark sided glimpses of a changing landscape."