

MURRAY ESKDALE



PERSPECTIVE

**RDS Gallery
2022**

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An Essay on the Occasion of the Exhibition
Murray Eskdale: Perspective, at RDS Gallery,
6 Castle Street, Dunedin,
14 January – 5 February 2022

Occasional Essays Series
Editors
Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner

RDS GALLERY

Cover Image: *Olympic Park, Sydney*, Murray Eskdale, photograph 2019, print 2021

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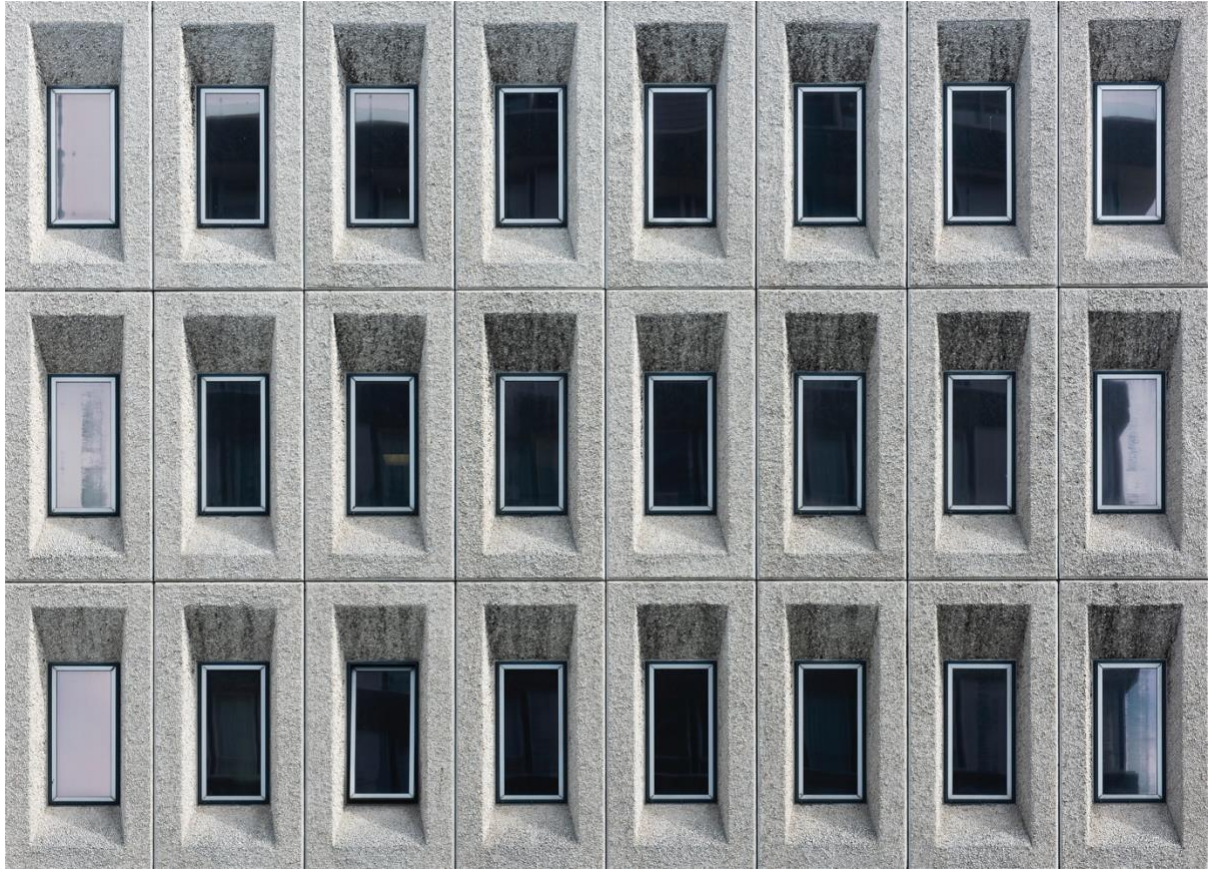
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Rodgers House, Dunedin, Murray Eskdale, photograph 2021, print 2021.

New Perspectives: The Photography of Murray Eskdale

By Philip Madill

The German photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch argued in his book *Die Welt ist schon* (1928) "Let us leave art to the artists ... and let us try to use the medium of photography to create photographs that can endure because of their photographic qualities."¹ That is, photography should be pursued for its own characteristics rather than adopting those associated with history of painting. Renger-Patzsch, a leading advocate of the movement known as "New Objectivity" or *Neue Sachlichkeit*, focused primarily on capturing the form, material, and surfaces of the German industrial landscape in minute detail. New Objectivity emerged in the 1920s as a counterpoint to the dominant expressionist aesthetic in photography. The movement promoted an unsentimental depiction of modern life and commonplace objects, which were captured in granular detail, the idea being that the photograph should present a true representation of the world rather than a false one contrived through manipulation.

¹ Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 204-5

Murray Eskdale's approach takes its inspiration from the tradition of "New Objectivity" by retaining its documentary method, especially in its more recent iterations as expressed in the work of Hilla and Bernd Becher (1934–2015, 1931-2007), and that of their students, most notably Andreas Gursky (1955–present). Eskdale's architectural photographs achieve a precision of detail by capturing the repetition and scale of the urban skyline in large format images. Allowing the image to be created through the lens of the camera and remain largely unfiltered, Eskdale uses the same theoretical approach advocated by the New Objectivity. This is evident in *Rodgers House, Dunedin* (2021), which depicts a section of the façade of an office building on the corner of Dowling and Prince's Street. The photograph is taken as a closeup to remove any extraneous detail except for the concrete cladding and reflection of the windows. The result is an image that is devoid of people and where form created by the structure of the building becomes the focal point of the image.

Despite the impression of direct realism, however, the proliferation of digital photography in the late twentieth century has come to redefine the authenticity of the photographic copy because of the ability of digital photography to be endlessly manipulated without the manipulation and post-production being self-evident. As a result, there is often little trace of the artist's hand in the final rendering of the image.

During the 1990s, the contemporary German artist Andreas Gursky notably used digital manipulation to create a new hyper-real form of documentation. Gursky's work focused primarily on expansive views of factories, stock exchanges, airports, highways, buildings and other public spaces, as a way of capturing patterns in crowds and the infrastructure in urban environments. Gursky, who is often known as a "*Bild-Erfinder*," or "Pictorial Fabricator," uses heightened scale, colour and detail to enhance the artificiality of the subject and immerse the viewer. That is, he uses new technologies to construct his images rather than traditional photographic techniques.² In *Dubai World* (2007) the man-made islands of an emerging mega project are seen under construction. The deep vivid blue of the ocean is artificially enhanced to create an almost other worldly effect, as the ocean disappears into the vastness of the horizon.³

Eskdale's architectural photographs, inspired by Gursky's work, offer a prime example of how the reality of the object world exists not only through the act of capturing an image, but also as a consequence of the nature of its digital replication. Eskdale uses similar digital techniques as part of his photographic process, yet their presence is more subtle, being used to correct distortions created by the camera without undermining the plausibility of the image. In *Scenic Hotel, Dunedin* (2021), we are presented with a

² Gabriella Sanderson, "The German School of Photographers: Thomas Ruff and Andreas Gursky," *LVH Art*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.lvhart.co/journal/a-class-of-their-own-the-german-school-of-photographers>, accessed December 17, 2021.

³ Ibid.



Scenic Hotel, Dunedin, Murray Eskdale, photograph 2021, print 2021.



Flats, Hong Kong, Murray Eskdale, photograph 2017, print 2021.

front facing view of a hotel in Dunedin. The use of light and shadow in the image has been sacrificed for the accuracy of the detail. Like *Rodgers House*, the facade of the building fills the entire frame, while the two top corners of the composition are stretched out horizontally. Eskdale's manipulation of the image is intended to shift the perspective of the building from a ground-level shot to one that appears to be at eye-level. Like Gursky's *Dubai World*, the image is a prime example of how manipulation is at the core of all photography, even when hidden in a seemingly every-day subject.

Eskdale's visual sleight of hand in his photographs produces an exhibition that navigates between the artificiality of object world and its equally inauthentic digital representation. The photographs can be divided mainly into two groups—namely those taken in Hong Kong, and those taken in Dunedin—which are used as a framework for representing the contrasting effects of urban design. In the later photographs the artist employs a greater degree of manipulation, while still maintaining the integrity of the image. The photographs of Hong Kong, in contrast, show a commitment to presenting the environment as it is captured by the camera. As a result, this show presents us with a question when confronted with the reality of the digital image. Which reality are we experiencing? That captured by the camera, the viewer, or the artist?

Contributors

Murray Eskdale

Working in a bank for several years after leaving school, Murray realised he wanted to do something more. First gaining a Higher National Diploma in Photography at West Arts College, he then went on to enrol at Reading School of Art and Design, gaining a BA Hons in Photography and Digital Imaging, specialising in Art Photography. He was particularly drawn to architectural and industrial themes, which in time became the main focus of his work.

Following graduation, Murray was able to engage his talents as Production Manager for Hyatt Studios in the U.K. In this role, he built on his studies and honed his skills: becoming an expert in Photoshop, editing and retouching images, and printing and finishing for a group of portrait and wedding photographers. Adventure called, however, and he set off to New Zealand in 2007. Murray travelled the country for five months before settling in Dunedin. He worked as a photographer, printer and framer in Dunedin, culminating with opening his own art gallery in 2011.

Having the structured freedom of academic study allowed Murray to develop his creative vision and style, which combined with his expert industry skills, has led to an extremely polished output of personal work.

Although he grew up with a camera in his hand, it wasn't until his early twenties that Murray saw the potential that photography had to provide order to his life. The search for order amongst chaos while simultaneously providing excitement is a major theme in Murray's works.

Rather than searching for an underlying sense of the world, Murray has been drawn to examine the way in which humans, their structures and technologies have created order. This hasn't only been from a "humans as the destroyer" perspective but rather seeks to document the harmony between man and his surroundings.

Early student works relied heavily on manipulation. As the artist and the creator, Murray used reflection, refraction and multiplication to create the patterns that were not naturally there. As his work has evolved, his perspective has shifted significantly, from creator to observer. Current works are heavily viewer perspective based.

Murray now works from his studio in Dunedin where he has more focus on his own practice. Work has been regularly exhibited in New Zealand since 2011 and is part of many collections worldwide.

Philip Madill

Philip Madill was born in Dunedin in 1980 and has been a practicing artist since graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Otago Polytechnic in 2009. He also holds a bachelor degree in history from the University of Otago (2005). In 2014 he completed a Masters in Fine Arts with Distinction, in which he worked primarily in drawing.

Madill was shortlisted in the Parkin Drawing Award, Wellington, in 2013 and 2014, and a finalist in the Wallace Art Awards, Auckland, in 2011, 2012 and 2013. As a student, he was awarded Otago Polytechnic School of Art Undergraduate Drawing Prize in 2008 and the Postgraduate Drawing Prize in 2013. Madill was the recipient of the Supreme Award at the Cleveland National Art Awards in 2019. He is currently working towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Art and Design at the Auckland University of Technology.

Madill's work examines the historic proliferation of virtual technology and its impact on the role of drawing as a form of mediation. He creates immersive dystopian landscapes that are littered with defunct machinery, in order to emphasis the dehumanizing and hybrid nature of the virtual world.

