

Ephraim Rubenstein



Courtesy George Billis Gallery
Ephraim Rubenstein's "Paestum III," 2010, mixed media on paper

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By **Kate Deimling**

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"Temples and Cathedrals"

George Billis Gallery, New York

Through October 2, 2010

[Ephraim Rubenstein](#)'s new show "Temples and Cathedrals" may contain only 10 works, but it creates an impression of size and grandeur. Rubenstein, who teaches at the **National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts** and the **Art Students League of New York**, pays tribute to the soaring architectural forms of the past in ink drawings whose shades of light, gray, and dark are the result of wax-resists followed by further ink washes and applications of charcoal, pastel, and conté.

These large-scale works — the smallest ones measure 38 by 48 inches and the largest is 60 by 46 inches — are an intriguing translation of architectural experiences into black-and-white two-dimensional images. In "Cathedral III," a static and rather somber depiction of a vaulted Gothic interior, the stained glass windows have been rendered as bright patches of light speckled with dark ink. Drained of color, they still evoke the brightness of stained glass and contrast with the shadowed archway below, while the lines and arcs of stones become the focus of the drawing.

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Yet the static nature of "Cathedral III" is an exception in this show. The use of ink in most of the drawings displays forceful energy, with ink splashes that resemble bursts or even explosions. "Selinunte II" — whose rippling patches of light and dark reveal the strong afternoon sunlight of Sicily as it might appear in a tourist's photograph — takes on a layer of added meaning because of those ink splashes, which seem to bounce off the top of the antique structure as if the process of its decay were rendered visible, or as if it exuded some kind

of mystical aura.

In "Cathedral V," a study of a pair of gargoyles, this technique lends a certain violent fervor to the stone beasts, who resemble wolves or leopards. It seems that the artist has granted special importance to these medieval symbols, as no other works in the show are so focused on decorative details.

On a purely curatorial level, an interesting contrast is created by placing ruined pagan temples in their classical majesty alongside ornately-designed Gothic cathedrals. This juxtaposition also points to the timelessness of the religious impulse, and the gallery's description of the exhibition compares the adaptation of pagan beliefs by Christianity to the recycling of marble from pagan temples for use in cathedrals. Following his series of paintings of the **Silvercup Studios** in Queens — **Hopper**-esque studies of industrial buildings and a water tower, with the blue Manhattan skyline a serene presence in the background — Rubenstein has turned to very different architectural models from the distant past and has managed to grant them uncommon urgency and vibrancy.

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