

Sabrina Amrani is delighted to present *Image Cities*, Anastasia Samoylova's third solo show at the gallery.



Anastasia Samoylova's *Image Cities* represents a sprawling international tour through the world's most significant urban centers, which together form a powerful interconnected global network of cultural and economic influence.

Throughout 17 cities, which include New York, Paris, London, Zurich, Tokyo, and Milan, among others, Samoylova trains her lens intently on the public-facing images that saturate the surfaces of these metropolises and forms a critical and lyrical study of how such images exert their influences on urban inhabitants. In doing so, the artist shows us not what is unique to these places but what is the same: The ominous and creeping homogeneity of commodity culture that is manifesting from an increasingly corporatized planet.

When we walk through the streets of a major city, we absorb the environment as a part of our identity. Who we are and who we become is so often realized by where we are and the influences of culture and values that surround us. What does it mean to be a New Yorker, exactly? Or a Parisian? The notion of local heritage is one that has traditionally guided our orientations toward the rest of the world. However, what we find in *Image Cities*, and what Samoylova urgently attempts to warn us of, is that when our environments change and become draped in the cloth of a larger globalized culture, we very likely will change along with it.

The city speaks to us as we walk its streets, and in *Image Cities*, Samoylova interprets its messages. Thick with advertisements for watches and blouses, billboards flaunting shiny and expensive goods, and construction banners that offer us hopeful glimpses of how old buildings will transform into new luxurious oases, the city becomes an arena of promises that beckon from all directions. As we continue our deep march into the 21st century, we should be well

aware that pictures are such promises - of a better life, of expensive ideals - which direct us with feelings of glamor and aspiration. Much of what we encounter in our daily lives is guided by the slick aesthetic templates of contemporary image makers. This is the song of a corporatized world, and these are the values it urges us to keep closer.

The culture of commodities now circulates the globe, and the city is now an ideological battleground between the local and the global, between community and the aspirational self. We are the target of such advancements, caught between forces beyond our control. The immediacy of visual communication is difficult, if not impossible, to defend against, and so provokes an important question: Is it possible to prevent the influences of commodity culture from penetrating us? If we fight back against such visual persuasions, perhaps it is only in the production of new images that we can counteract the spells of rhetoric that so frequently tempt us.

While absorbing and reflecting on these core themes, Samoylova's aesthetic tactics form a unique lyrical and symbolic visual play. Throughout her images, the artist employs collage-like pictorial strategies that hybridize figure and environment. It is a visual language made possible with the use of a telephoto lens - an antithetical tool to street photography's traditions, yet one which allows the artist to compress visual space and muddy the distinctions between figure and ground. Throughout *Image Cities*, this mode of visual synthesis makes it difficult to separate the singular human and the cultural constructions which surround them, mirroring the symbiotic relationship between product and consumer.

In the end, what *Image Cities* becomes is a portrait of the quickly advancing optimism that the conglomerated corporatized world thrusts upon us. They ask us to abandon the old and embrace the new, yet the question of why such change is important to begin with is one that these messengers hope we avoid at all costs.

Gregory Eddi Jones
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Image Cities
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