

MSSNDCLRCQ
Meessen De Clercq

ELLEN HARVEY
What is missing ?

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The second exhibition by Ellen Harvey (b. 1967) at the gallery is composed, in the **right-hand room**, of *Pillar-Builder Archive*, an installation of thousands of postcards depicting classical and neo-classical buildings which are stylistically very close. The organization and classification follow a formal logic that juxtaposes authentic buildings from Antiquity such as the Parthenon in Athens and the Maison Carrée in Nîmes with bland buildings of the last century. This neoclassical architecture has literally invaded Western urban development to the point that it has become virtually impossible to distinguish, for example, a building in Cleveland from another in Vilnius. Duplicating the artistic heritage of the Ancient Greeks and Romans enabled building governments to assert order and power and rationalise thought, while erasing any semblance of architectural imagination. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the function of these buildings seems interchangeable at will; in this constellation of postcards, we see: temples, churches, libraries, synagogues, museums, stadiums, courthouses, theatres, Fascist monuments and parliaments. Facing this banal state architecture, Ellen Harvey has placed paintings of ruins that seem to show the inevitable fate awaiting all human construction. The ruins are unique in that they tell the hidden, unknown side of a city or a civilisation. They reflect a past state that is hidden from us. The theme of the labyrinth is also raised and emphasizes disorientation and the multiplicity of choices for moving around a space. The use of a mirror in several works also plays on the idea of a kaleidoscopic view of the world and its *mise en abîme*.

One work leads to another and the visitor discovers in the **left-hand room** a work which is fragmented like a jigsaw puzzle that has not been assembled properly. Elliptical mirrors reflect the gallery space while hiding the very subject of the painting. The disconcerting visual appearance is even greater since Harvey has painted a checkerboard composition, alternating figurative and abstract elements. This attraction to optical distortion is found again in *Looking-Glass iPad, Kindle & Nook*, composed of three "e-readers" (digital tablets) of different brands with a fixed image of the first page of *Alice in Wonderland*. Harvey has not only engraved this page on a reflective surface but has reversed the direction of reading, which puts us de facto on the other side of the mirror ... Another optical distortion is visible with *TV Stone Mountain* which combines a painted mountain landscape and a piece of ulexite, a transparent stone, also known in the USA as "TV stone". The magnifying effect that this stone imparts is echoed in *Inside Out Mirror Balls*, a painted diptych showing a distorted reality. The undeniable humour that runs through Harvey's work is evident in *Mushroom Landscape with Mushroom Clouds*, a work consisting of dried mushrooms and traditionally used by amateur painters when painting landscapes. Carrying on this tradition, Harvey simply paints them white and delivers a dreamlike version of clouds which reveal their unexpected terrestrial side.

Ellen Harvey lives in New York. Her most recent solo museum exhibitions have been at the Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington), Bass Museum (Miami), Centre for Contemporary Art (Warsaw) and the Whitney Museum (New York). She also participated in the inaugural exhibition at the Turner Contemporary in Britain in 2011 and her work was shown at the Whitney Biennial in 2008.