**Rae Hicks**

**Sick Building Syndrome**

L21 is pleased to present "Sick Building Syndrome" the first exhibition of British artist Rae Hicks (1988) in Spain. The exhibition invites us to consider the relationship between ‘structural’ problems and those of a less tangible, but no less immanent aspect in the fabric of our surroundings. The title refers to an actual condition, in which a building’s flaws cannot be addressed by conventional maintenance but instead are born of cynical design. These problems are at best annoying and very often fatally dangerous.

It is not much of a leap to argue that societies where this is prevalent also suffer from an institutionalized, spiritual deficit. Indeed, the artist hails from London, an ideological battleground in many ways, although this is perhaps best expressed by the city’s architectural complexion. This was acutely conveyed in 1987’s *The Black Tower*(John Smith) wherein the city’s sometimes oppressiveness coagulates into a hallucinatory building which stalks the protagonist.

Hicks comments that he once heard the term "sick building syndrome" while listening to a radio segment about a haunted office block. It was suggested that building in question’s tragic history had led to the development of its own "sick building syndrome", thereby positing the sentience of the structure as though a traumatized psyche pervaded.

This idea was the creative trigger for the series of paintings on view in the exhibition. Through layered and impasto painting, Hicks creates scenes in which inanimate forms take on a life of their own and become imbued with a potentially hostile enchantment towards human beings.

The animation of normally motionless elements is both scary and seductive and lies at the core of many conspiracy theories, and yet beyond that, into ancient mythology. In *Stormbreaker*, a road emerges and lifts off the ground to reach pierce a cloud weeping oily tears. While in *Melancholia* the windows of the top floors of lit up skyscrapers transform into penetrating eyes gazing at us from the distance, recalling Max Ernst’s *Ubu Imperator*in their lumbering half-life.

As a metaphor for the post-everything society we live in, the exhibition highlights the strangeness of living in yet out-of-community, on top of each other, in constant friction yet at a sometimes mistrustful remove.

With an urban landscape dominated by towers as backdrop, Hicks develops a work based on the tension, alienation or even the sense of oppression generated in the shadow of these omnipresent giants.

Enrique Suasi