

HALSEY MCKAY GALLERY

ALEX DODGE - *SOUNDS OF SILENCE*

July 27 - August 28 | 79 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY

For all further information please email ryan@halseymckay.com



The show borrows its title from the 1966 song and album by Simon & Garfunkel. The song is said to describe a general inability to communicate:

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
No one dare
Disturb the sound of silence

The world was a different place when Simon wrote these lyrics, but they almost seem to anticipate a strange landscape that would emerge some 50 years in the future—a vast expanse of interconnection governed by online platforms. With a little effort, we can even entertain a further Cassandraic allusion to generative AI:

And the people bowed and
prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said “The words of the prophets
Are written on subway walls
And tenement halls
And whispered in the sounds of silence”

The show comprises a body of human-scale still life works on canvas that, like earlier work by Dodge, are indirectly suggestive of the human figure through draped textiles and garments. Each piece is a poignant meditation on forms of vacancy in muted tones—a kind of incomplete presence or “Sounds of Silence,” as it were. The vacancy of personal loss, of walled gardens, of statistically generated text, of disposable technology and culture is echoed in the quiet forms draped on tiled interior surfaces. These surfaces are a recent addition to Dodge’s visual language, but in these works, the tiled spaces are no longer pristine but patinated with actual soil collected near his satellite studio outside Tokyo, Japan. Rich with volcanic ash, the earth-scrubbed surfaces are a reminder that the virtual can never be extricated from the physical completely.

Signature to Dodge’s works is the use of stenciled and computer-generated imagery to create deposits of oil color on canvas with visceral effect but exacting precision. The works embody a fundamental and haunting technological contention: that the devices and platforms we use promise a more accessible, optimized, and convenient world, but in doing so are also vastly reductive and marginalizing. The beauty and allure of pure geometries is timeless, as is the idealism or heuristic clarity they infer. A world thoroughly reduced statistically or algorithmically is one that we can all uneasily feel is eminently upon us—a kind of copacetic vacancy; everything in its place but something crucially amiss. The vast and emergent complexity of natural or non-computational systems and the meaning we find in navigating them is at odds with a technological compulsion. Dodge’s work pursues an ongoing integration between these forces, arriving at objects that traverse or reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable. His view of virtual systems is that they represent a way of seeing rather than an end in themselves. The virtual, like other paradigmatic shifts before, enables us to see our place in the universe more clearly, but in so doing it remains crucially important to not mistake a mirror for a window.

Dodge’s work is included in major private and museum collections throughout the world. He splits his time between New York and Tokyo, Japan.