

Nick Angelo

Edifice

July 16th - August 15th, 2025

Many ravers have a similar memory, a zeitgeist recollection of low-end pulsations traveling through space, concrete, and rock. Disorientating color lights, phase-shifting frequencies, and hallucinogens in the bloodstream are all familiar echoes. Yet, those memories are often accompanied by a persistent sense of aesthetic and even social fatigue. A gnawing sense that the scene was better before.

Entering the gallery and exhibition *Edifice* by Los Angeles-based artist Nick Angelo, one confronts a series of large images whose materiality touches the viewer at the subliminal smell of plastic vinyl. The smell fades over time, as it does with machine-produced printing whether on paper, canvas, or PVC sheeting – complementary to the transient musk of polyvinyl chloride (“vinyl”) records.

In *Edifice*, Angelo maps the relationships between libidinal cultural and subcultural formations and their feverish capture by finance capital and real estate. Inspired by watching from a distance the evolution of Southern California’s Coachella Festival in the late 1990s to the present, Angelo diagrams a history and its chaos, a history of hippies, rave culture, festivals, and art institutions. Three of the pieces in *Edifice* deploy a tension between images depicting a linear history of institutions and architectures. The images of that history are then encircled in an “image cloud” mined from spectacle culture. A fourth banner features only a diagrammed linear narrative. Inversely, a fifth banner contains only an “image cloud” absent any central historical schema.

The work not so much analyzes relationships but dryly “acknowledges” them. Unable to find annotations on the gallery walls, viewers can turn to the exhibition’s supplement, a half-letter ‘zine that provides a key to the five pieces. While the ‘zine gives clues to the pictorial content of the images, the relationships between images and an analysis of those relationships remain elusive. The artist’s statement for the exhibition in citing Stuart Hall and his praxis of conjunctural analysis directs us towards the discursive labor of excavating the history of the present. But it’s a labor only alluded to. The gallery has no soundtrack.

The fact that several images still retain the watermark “Getty Images” points to their dubious provenance. Many of the works’ materials are purloined. The watermark also denotes that these images come to us via a commonplace image-search, and that they are self-consciously the work of an image-bandit. The combination of materials and the diagrammatic marks in the compositions clue us into the artist’s process of online research, computer-assisted layouts, and then fabrication through commercial banner printing. Covering the walls like fabric tapestries, the individual pieces amplify the process by their scale – the online research and digital composition executed by an artist huddled close to the computer screen. In their final state, the images push the viewer back into the room. At close inspection, the banners exceed the field of vision. The background fades. But from a few feet away, the pilfered images blur against the supporting colors. The muted tones of the foundation imbue the content with an ambivalence and acts like an unresolved but disagreeable agent swallowing the smaller images, forcing us to gauge our attention as well as our distance. Instead of serving up dayglo colors, the artist has chosen background colors that prescribe the critical distance necessary for decipherment.

Angelos himself explained to me, “I am critically detached from this work.” The admission conceals the fact that Angelo has himself experienced the ways capitalism captures popular politics and underground cultural forms invented for counter publics and their reproduction. That includes the abduction of street culture or of harm reduction and its exigencies.

The theme of theft, the capture of rupture for the continuation of accumulation has a general gravity at this moment. In our conversation, Angelo cites as an example the position of an intergovernmental institution like the United Nations where contested politics of social justice provide the political-economic levers for a content within a modernist exteriority (*pace* Felicity Scott). This is the paradox that has come to define late neoliberalism. It is a contradiction that becomes an object of scrutiny in the very moment when neoliberalism bleeds out into corporatism from above and Christian Nationalism from the middle. Both of which can now execute long-gestating designs to proscribe the symbols of neoliberal cooptation.

At the front lines in their crusade against a stranger named “Cultural Marxism,” the right has aimed state violence at the autonomy of the poor, migrants, trans people, and Palestine solidarity. It’s a battle intended to dismantle the administrative state on the whole and to give birth to a new order free from all contradiction. We know in our bodies that each of the fronts in this class struggle extend far into the past, like a distant throbbing vibrating through steel and concrete. Yet, the conjunctural break has resulted in a shattering crisis, awkwardly compelling many a counter-cultural protagonist to defend the neoliberal order with its free trade, international “rule of law,” corporate unionism, and value-form participation. History leaps from conjuncture to conjuncture at an accelerated rate. In this neofascist moment, “Why are we turning back the clock?” is a popular refrain. It’s a loop that betrays our cosmopolitanism with its hallucination of an eternal march forward of capitalist progress.

The work of decipherment remains front and center in the artist’s provocation. Naming the moment requires us to read both together, continuity and rupture. The extent to which the site of reception both necessitates and resists that work, this then pushes to the center the edifice under scrutiny here in this space. With this audience. At this moment.

Edifice is not a riddle to be cracked or a puzzle to be solved. There is work to be done. Work it.

-Dont Rhine