

Raphaël Zarka

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View of "Padova." On floor: *Padova (réplique n°4)* (Padova [replica no. 4]), 2008. On wall, from left: *Mystery Board no. 5*, 2008; *Mystery Board no. 4*, 2008; *Mystery Board no. 3*, 2007; *Mystery Board no. 2*, 2007; *Mystery Board no. 1*, 2006; *Changer en île* (Change into an Island), 2005.

Raphaël Zarka's name has been cropping up everywhere since the appearance of the series "Riding Modern Art," 2005, which appropriates footage of skateboarders gliding across civic architecture and which astutely gratified both popular nostalgia for modernism and the fashionable coveting of subculture shenanigans. The new works in this exhibition, then, can be seen as the maneuvering of a young artist as eager to show an interest beyond skateboarding as he is cautious of bumming out the audience such work brought him. While the title of his first solo show in Paris, "Padova," doesn't exactly evoke "backside smith grinds," the sculpture in the room—a narrow plywood-and-marble rail—does. This incline is, in fact, a replica of Galileo's design to gauge the acceleration of rolling bodies. It thus has the handsome air of an anachronism, while appealing to the skaters' obsessive (and formal) search for skateable terrain. Less skateable, *Changer en île* (Change into an Island), 2005, a lambda print of an ancient Sicilian quarry, captures a heap of giant carved blocks, drolly inexplicable even as they suggest an impenetrable history of scrapped forms. Zarka's vision remains intriguingly distant from the mystery of this pre-urban detritus. In the series of "vectorial drawings" "Mystery Board," 2006–2008, a similarly esoteric history appears in signs that mutate over the sixteen frames of each board. Organized like alchemical charts or, less mystically, like storyboards, they remain rather coldly trapped in their own configuration, for all their abstract playfulness. Zarka, who will exhibit at Galerie Michel Rein later this year, seems suspended at the crest of his own transition. But where there's no real momentum yet, there is "skaterly" promise, so far as skateboarding carves out a heterodox vision of urban space—a heterodoxy that, extended to other scenery, could be equally productive.

—Joanna Fiduccia

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