

# Art in America

## Daniel Rich at Sunday

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P.C. Smith, writer



Daniel Rich, *Nitzan, Israel*, enamel on panel, 2005

Daniel Rich's landscape painting has moved from cool abstraction toward increasingly precisionist-type scenes with historical overtones. Raised in Germany, where he was born in 1977, Rich began his U.S. art-school career in graphics, with silkscreen as his medium of choice. His earlier geometric abstractions were derived from photographic or schematically drawn aerial views of sites like a runway for Air Force One or a nuclear waste dump, and were executed in a silk-screenlike process of filling in masked-off shapes with uninflected colors.

In the six enamel paintings on view, easel-size wood panels from 2004 to 2007, Rich uses the same technique even more elaborately and painstakingly in landscapes with buildings or machinery. In *Gaza*, raised-edge, layered-enamel shapes in subtle, closely related colors are particularly effective in describing the extensively pocked surface of a shelled building, responding to the randomness of ruin with a contrary, illuminating exactness. These paintings might be regarded stylistically as something between Charles Sheeler's industrial landscapes of the '30s and Allan D'Arcangelo's far more expansive highway images of the '60s. being of a younger generation, Rich instead regards graffiti and skateboard-stencil culture as his influences.

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Rich's subject matter is also a generation removed from the focus of those earlier artists. *Nitzand, Israel* shows a prefab building suspended in the air by a crane, and other works share a similar sense of dislocation. In *Aceh after the Tsunami* only a modern mosque is left intact in a field of rubble. In *U.S. Base Entrance, Baghdad*, a cement wall displays the graffitied messages "Where is Kansas?" and "Here Bitch!", among others. As his titles suggest, Rich uses news photos and image-searches the Internet, finding his material in a variety of locations – for example, in soldiers' blogs. So far, he has eschewed human figuration. His graphic technique makes the compositions seem esthetically fine rather than banal, with carefully mixed neutral colors helping convey a drab, mournful tone. One could, in some cases, learn the specific events from which images were derived only from the press release. A tightly composed view of the tail of a fully intact and shiny-new American Airlines plane at an airport, for example, turned out to represent the aftermath of an incident in which an air marshal shot and killed a passenger claiming to have a bomb.