

SOLO EXHIBITION

The Book of Lost Cities John Stathatos

Wigmore Fine Arts, London

14 May - 20 June

John Stathatos's *The Book of Lost Cities*, carries the imaginary weight of a lost history which never saw the light of day. The work consists of ten triptychs, each comprising three illuminated transparencies (an explicatory text on the left, a colour photograph in the centre and a map on the right). Stathatos has shaped a Borges-like celebration of historical fantasy, woven from his fertile imagination, shot through with reverie and drawing on an impressive erudition. A series of convincing images purports to show the remnants of cities vanquished and dismantled by the ravages of time. The contextualisation, by text and map, is constructed around a loose framework of both historical and pseudo-historical reference points. The translucent credibility of these triptychs is seductively enhanced by fabulous names (such as Arkiotis, Firozkoh and Tigranocerta) from the realms of the imaginary, or Bucephela dredged from the archives. These hypothetical sites of vanquished grandeur, untold conflict, and cultural flux, are offered as traces of the real thing. Stathatos's enticing images of distant views of those ruins, adrift betwixt the restless sands and barren mountains, reference the sublime through their contemporary 'picturesque' mien. Stathatos plumbs the depths of our thirst for the exoticism of enigma. Here, hyperbole and pure fantasy coalesce beneath a collaged veneer of historicity. This artifice he weaves may bear fragments of truth, but it is only the viewer's conviction for romance (and his suppression of the desire for the truth), that can prevent the whole thing being torn asunder. More than anything, this show illustrates the transience of human kind in contrast with the persistence of our memory, and the triumph, in the final analysis, of fantasy over fact.

Roy Exley is a freelance critic



John Stathatos from
the series 'The Book
of Lost Cities'