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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Christopher Cook

Concrete Firmament

May 13 to June 19, 2010

Reception: Thursday, May 13, 6-8 PM

Mary Ryan Gallery is pleased to announce "Concrete Firmament," Christopher Cook's third solo show at the gallery. Continuing to work in liquid graphite (graphite powders, oil, and resin) on aluminum panels or coated paper, in this new sequence of images Cook explores the formal and psychological qualities of road tunnels. In doing so he is also able to reconsider an earlier fascination with worlds within worlds, and encapsulated space.

These 'graphites' contain both photographic (or cinematic) and painterly elements, often in the same image. Cook's method lends an enigmatic air to the everyday, allowing him to suggest the proximity of apparently unrelated emotions, such as fear and nostalgia. The same method also emphasizes the connection between our experience of the world and the means by which we form such experience.

Certain works in the exhibition were made in response to video footage shot by the artist on Italian major roads (autostrada) between Florence and Bologna, and between Lucca and Genova, during the spring of 2008. The film reflects upon the road journey between churches decorated with powerful image sequences: for instance, from the mosaics of San Vitale, Ravenna to the frescoes by Fra Angelico in the monastic cells of San Marco, Florence. "Driving back through tunnels after one visit, I discovered that some of the orange-lit tunnels were resonating on physical, intellectual and emotional levels. They rhymed profoundly with the deeper nature of some of the Italian churches I'd just visited, with their domed spaces, golden light, velvety shadows, and perhaps also in their intimation of a different sphere of existence." The graphite works, by contrast, expand upon what is experienced in passing--illusory fragments of the journey transformed into complex energized spaces. These static tunnel images become meditative and also hallucinatory, imbuing them with a strong psychic implication which reflects Cook's sense that they "are both stressful and enchanting."

Cook speaks of the potential - and the necessity - for intense experience to compel the human spirit to actions that can transcend instinct, and he finds this potential both in tunnel-travelling, and in the act of transformation that occurs in making art. "Wild World," (2009) a work on paper, the viewer's gaze is lead through a slick, metallic tunnel toward lush, windswept greenery. The dualities present in this work - light and dark, hard and soft, interior and exterior - create a dynamic that not only conveys the magical sense of encapsulated space, a realm 'out-of-place', but also of consciousness moving towards a fierce, intrusive light.

Please contact Jordan Karney for more information at 212.397.0669 or jordan@maryryangallery.com

Christopher Cook studied English and Fine Art at the University of Exeter and then went on to receive an MA in painting at the Royal College of Art. He has regularly exhibited throughout Europe and has shown his large-scale aluminum pieces at the Diboll Gallery in New Orleans and the Art Museum at the University of Memphis. Cook was recently the subject of a solo show at the Today Art Museum, the leading contemporary art institute in Beijing, China. He has been invited to numerous Artist Residency programs, including the Eden Project in Cornwall, England. His works are in the collections of the Allen Memorial Art Museum, British Museum, Cleveland Museum of Art, Fitzwilliam Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Yale Center for British Art.



Wild World, 2009
Graphite, resin and oil on coated paper
28-3/8 x 40-1/8 inches