

Review

Christos Dikeakos: History and Mystery

AKAU, TORONTO FEB 6 TO APR 11 2009

by RICHARD RHODES



Christos Dikeakos *Former Gestapo Headquarters, Berlin 2000*

Close Move

The Vancouver artist [Christos Dikeakos](#) is as much a historian as a photographer. As a first-generation member of the Vancouver photoconceptualist scene with [Ian Wallace](#) and [Jeff Wall](#), Dikeakos has explored the archaeological space of photographic imagery. For him, the process of looking at a subject overlaps with looking back. He uses his camera to open vistas onto the history of place.

The modest collection of proof prints gathered for this Toronto exhibition all date from the beginning of the decade or earlier, but they serve as a fresh reminder of Dikeakos's place within the Vancouver School. This is photography in dialogue with urban space, and in Dikeakos's case, it is a photography that puts civic ghosts in the midst of the present, like the abandoned suitcases on the grounds of a demolished train station site in one image or the Douglas fir stumps on the margins of a family beach in another. His impetus has been to show the prehistory of place, to track the entropic gestation of non-sites within cities caught up in the paradox of neglectful development. So, yes, remember the travellers as you look at the dishevelled needle park of the train station site. See the sunny, snow-capped mountains on the horizon and remember they have come to what once looked like paradise.



Christos Dikeakos *New Attikis Freeway, Athens 2002*

The advent of digital imaging has let Dikeakos construct his images the way a collagist does. In a panoramic image of Berlin, official signage and long lineups announce the museumification of the former Nazi Gestapo headquarters, a new place for the recreation of old torture and oppression. To underscore this Disney-flavoured take on dark

20th-century history, Dikeakos has inserted a young family on a day-trip outing into the foreground of the photo. It looks like a natural scene but as you take in the image, the pieces cohere not as a picture but as an essay that leads both backwards in time and forwards beyond a subtly absurdist present.

Dikeakos's Greek heritage has given him an appreciation for the long-haul curves of history. He has done extensive projects near the Acropolis in Athens that document the current state of once-Bacchic sites, places with a mythological hold on Western history but with only a vestigial presence in the present-day city. In the Akau show, the largest panoramic images revisit the outskirts of Athens. *Olive Orchard*, from 2002, shows an olive grove that has become a dumping ground but which, thanks to digital technology, has foraging sheep that make a bridge to the shepherds of the past and give a new context to the detritus. *The New Attikis Freeway* is another vision of a vanishing place that shows condo proliferation from the growing city encroaching the small field of a truck garden. Soon literal trucks will be rolling through, and the image wants us to mark an awareness of the end of agriculture in a place that has an identity tied to the bucolic.

Dikeakos's work is about these changing identities of place. His photographs are both documents and memorials. They underscore the evaporation of local identity in the face of globalization and the mystery of its continuity. (1186 Queen St W, Toronto ON)

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Christos Dikeakos *Olive Orchard* 2002

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