

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Wolin, Joseph R., "Damian Ortega, "CAPITALLess" Time Out NY, October 15 - 21 2009, 53

## Damián Ortega, "CAPITAL Less"

★★★★★

**Gladstone Gallery**, through Oct 31  
(see Chelsea)

Mexican artist Damián Ortega has carved and sanded five stacks of bricks and mortar to appear eroded, like fragments of ruins or weathered rock formations in the desert. These sculptures—each titled *Building*—also resemble models of futuristic apartment blocks à la Moshe Safdie's



PHOTOGRAPHS (FROM TOP): COURTESY OF LARISSA GOLDSTON GALLERY, NY; DAVID REGEN, © DAMIÁN ORTEGA, COURTESY GLADSTONE GALLERY, NEW YORK

Habitat 67, the cellular compartments in the bricks evoking so many windows. Reinforcing such associations, a video presents an endless vertical pan up the graffiti-covered facade of a severely rundown skyscraper. Titled *Treme-Treme*, it shows the Edifício São Vito, a notorious residential building in São Paulo, Brazil, occupied by squatters.

Ortega seems to want to reflect in some way upon dystopian squalor, but in Gladstone's expensively pristine setting, his sculptures feel like porcelain figurines of big-eyed Dickensian urchins. They are little more than inertly picturesque tokens of poverty and dilapidation for people who never have to experience it.

Similarly, *Nuddle Soup*, a concrete cast of the inside of a ventilation hose, falls flat. Coiled into a continuous loop, it suggests a giant fossilized worm, or an Aztec stone carving of a serpent. The piece transforms empty space into a tangible object in a way that recalls the work of British sculptor Rachel Whiteread, only here, Ortega has created a sort of Ouroboros, the mythical dragon that swallows its own tail. But like that emblematic beast, his sculpture seems to roll on without going anywhere in particular.

—Joseph R. Wolin