

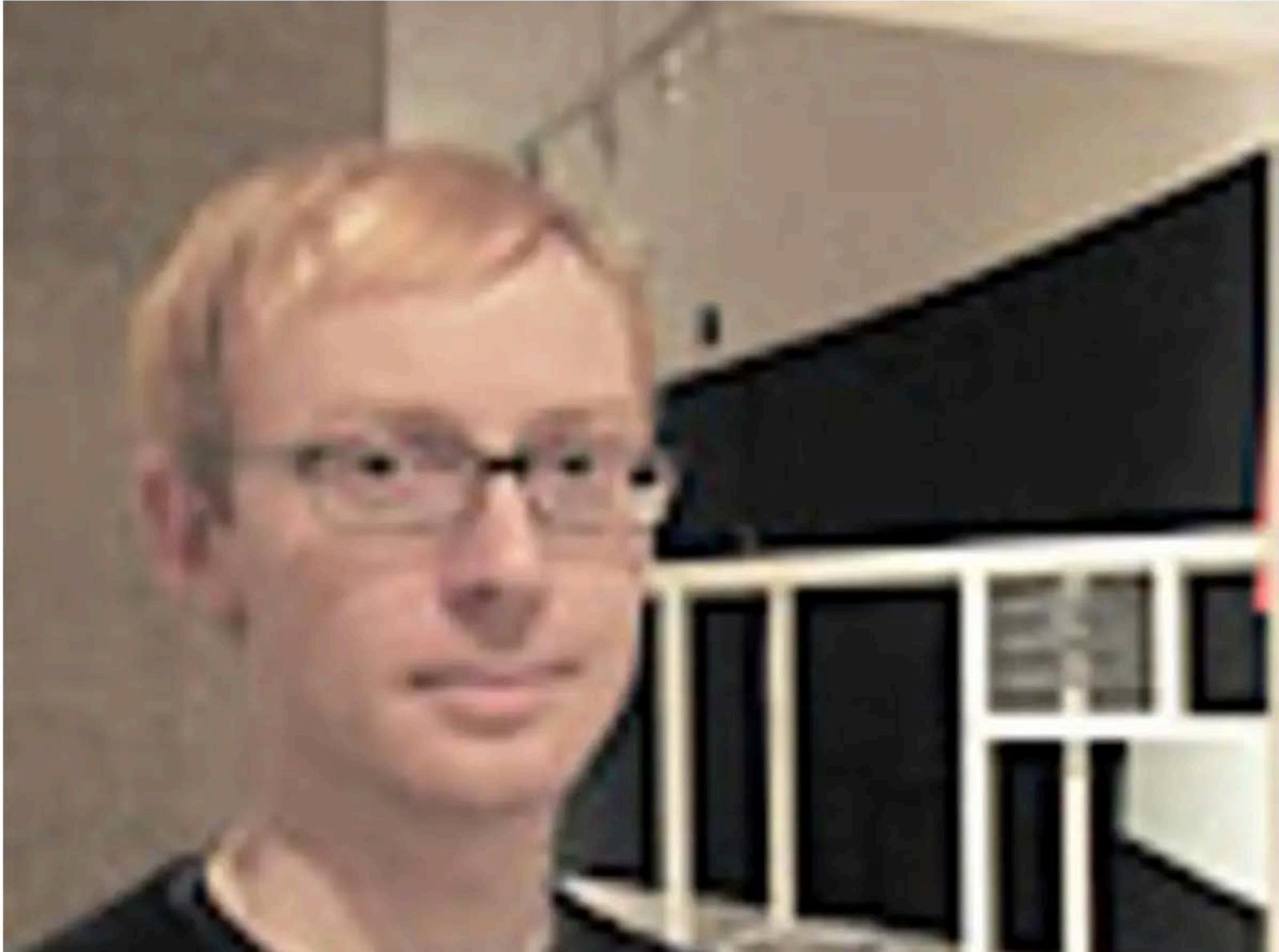
# Elegant vision of the urban

NICK HACKWORTH | **EVENING STANDARD** | Tuesday 15 February 2005 01:00 |



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**In his first major UK solo show, Toby Paterson, winner of Beck's Futures 2002, has transformed the Barbican's awkward Curve gallery into a quietly beautiful, elegant and thoughtful installation.**

The subject, as with all of Paterson's work to date, is modernist architecture and urban planning, with its connotations of failed utopianism and its aesthetic of regularity and repetition.

Here he focuses on three cities - Coventry, Rotterdam and Hamburg - that were almost completely flattened by bombing in the Second World War and so were reconstructed from scratch. But the work is not a dry dissection of maps and topographies, nor a tedious investigation of the social ramifications of such environments using clumsily wielded video vox pops, but a powerful, extended visual meditation.

Along one of the long, curving walls, Paterson has painted a bold, abstract mural of large amorphous-coloured blobs set against a dark background, its irregular style softening the general prevalence of straight lines.

Occasionally, along the length of the mural, appear images of modernist buildings, some painted straight on to the wall, others framed paintings on paper.

On the floor of the gallery, meanwhile, sit a series of tall, rectangular, white, wooden frames that hold an odd collection of works. Some are small, accurate models of buildings, such as the Shell centre in Hamburg in plastic; others are visual thoughts abstracted from the style of these modern cities, such as a small explosion of green, jagged, rectilinear planes, or a number of Perspex works that, at first glance look like models of cities but, on closer inspection, are revealed to be looser and more fantastical.

The entire installation coheres to form a sophisticated, primarily visual response to the environments created by modernity, including, of course, the labyrinthine space of the Barbican. It successfully conspires to take the mind of the viewer for a walk through such spaces. ■