ALMINE RECH

Dylan Solomon Kraus
The Joys of Sacrifice

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Consider that human reality might be an agglomeration of shapes. At first, it might not be the most appealing idea. Our world, after all, is a complicated one, shaped by history, collective and personal experience, and our physical environment. As such, we enjoy an experience of reality that far exceeds the sum of its parts. So you'd be justified to refuse the suggestion to think of our reality in this way, unless you'd been paying attention to Dylan Solomon Kraus's paintings of the last fifteen years.

In his new body of work, there is a small canvas, *The Last Man* (2025), depicting a dark silhouette defined against a hazy sunrise, which is itself composed of a mosaic of galloping horses. Below the sunrise, smooth geometric rectangles suggest a cityscape or mountain range. Like children finding shapes while cloudgazing, these images remind us that seeing is always an act of interpretation. The fact that we see our reality as we see it –and that we agree on seeing how we see it – is so contingent on those biological calculations as to verge on dumb chance. In this painting, as in all his work, Kraus employs shifting signifiers, subtle shifts in light, and the presence of time to game natural vision. The actors in this process are the rods, cones, and ganglia of the retina and optic nerve. Together, they carve forms from a splendour of in-flooding light signals.

In Kraus's work, shadows are crucial. A strangely illuminated darkness provides a consistent atmosphere in which to play this game of seeing. In *City in the Sky* (2025), a sailboat skates over a band of dark water, which ballasts the painting, while a night sky opens and, in it, a city of heaven. *Sun Residence* (2025) could be a keystone for this body of work. There we see an open box in darkness. Polychrome smoke rises out of it before morphing into red and purple shapes, like Tetris pieces or staircases. It seems like a picture of the imagination opening.

In Kraus's paintings, these games carry into visual conundrums, or riddles. When you carry out a visual depiction of the world augmented by such moves, you underline the fact of seeing as an active and creative process. Not a single featured image has been left unmodified, whether human-made or natural. It's as if a stoned teenager had been fiddling with the code that generates visual reality.

A couple of months ago, while spending an afternoon with Katsushika Hokusai's suite of prints, *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji,* I noticed myself transfixed by the canonical image-maker's clouds. In Hokusai's prints, clouds can have an almost digital unreality. In *Tama River in Musashi Province*, for example, a low cloud cover stretches horizontally with an alien, mechanical exactness. His work's brilliance inheres in, among other things, a lush naturalism flipping suddenly into abstraction, so that the mind is compelled to actively parse the constructedness of reality.

Like the naturalistic ambiguity found in Hokusai's prints, in Kraus's work a shape can transform between horse and cloud, tower or mountain. Over and over again, it is suggested that one thing might in fact be another—that precarious optical and cognitive mechanics might be all that separates the world as we know it from the world as an uncanny shadow image of itself.

— Mitch Speed