



Preface to the catalog for the exhibition
"Mutation(s)", Centre d'Art Contemporain Hangar 107, Rouen,
March/April 2023.
Simon Grainville

"However, some men, some writers, have put their trust in this city, which is still ours, believing they could read their destiny in it, and they had to decipher it if they were to gain any knowledge of themselves." Pierre Sansot

Olivier Catté is one of those who find the human element in the depersonalization of metropolises, the fragility in the rigor of urban planning, the accident in the orderly layout of cities. From cardboard, an emblem of consumption and industry, he creates maps that reveal the abstract landscape of the city. The cardboard that the Rouen-based artist recovers from the streets in the form of remnants, he models, turning it into an organic, living material that conceals neither its traces of wear nor its experience. It is precisely these characteristics that serve as tools for Olivier Catté, enabling him to build cities with scratches, scrapes, cut-outs, lacerations, ink and paint sprays, like a second skin that retains the memory of architectural mutations. Far from being static, Olivier Catté's cities evolve, grow and metamorphose like a body of concrete, glass, metal and asphalt, metabolizing space in all directions. His encounter with the New York megalopolis in 1999 led to an initial series of works in which the skyline is presented head-on in its most iconic dimension. The very image of the world-city, skyscrapers stand out in compact masses overlooked by the Empire State Building. The artist also knows how to get up high and observe the play of light, shadows and cast shadows within an increasingly dense and labyrinthine urban fabric. At the heart of the maze of interlocking blocks lies a suffocating claustrophobia that fades as these masses collapse into planes offering viewers an overview of the city's fabric. Far from limiting himself to the simple question of building geometry, Olivier Catté integrates more evanescent elements as his work progresses: his Chinese residency in Zunyi in 2016 marks a return to more organic forms. In the spirit of Shanshui landscape painting, mountains and forests compete with industrial zones for canvas space. The grayish smog that fogs the polluted sky forms clouds and wisps that cover the city and circulate within it like the city's sick breath. Without passing moral judgment on the balance between nature and urbanization, Olivier Catté is the storyteller of a modern landscape in which the very matter of his works is inscribed.