

SECA ART AWARDS

A search for patterns in the light — and in the dark



Light and darkness are at play in Jordan Kantor's candid art, which x-rays paintings and renders photographic effects through oil on canvas. | JORDAN KANTOR, UNTITLED (LENS FLARE), 2008

NEGATIVE LIGHT: BEYOND THE CANDID CAMERA WITH JORDAN KANTOR

In Jordan Kantor's paintings, meaning is candid. When the word "candid" entered the English language in the 17th century, it was closer to its Latin roots, meaning "bright," "light," "radiant," "glow," or "white," with whiteness symbolizing purity and sincerity. Later, as the word approached then copulated with the critical language of photography — that crazy new field of "light writing" initially accused of everything from demonic possession to being a potential assassin of traditional visual arts like painting — "candid" gave birth to its common usage today, meaning "frank," "blunt," "severe," a harsh snapshot, brutally honest vision. So severity in art became intertwined with truth.

Kantor's local gallery, Ratio 3, with its emphasis on projects' overall coherence, is a welcome home to his current trajectory. His pieces for the SECA Art Award exhibition are alive with many truths at once, their

spaces equally negative and positive. The three *Untitled (lens flare)* paintings and *Untitled (HD lens flare)*, all from 2008, make you step back, only to feel as if you are standing closer than before. *Untitled (Surgery)* (2006–07) and *Untitled (Eclipse)* (2008) glow with negative light. This work is in stride with Kantor's participation in important group shows at Galeria Luisa Strina in São Paulo ("This Is Not a Void," 2008) and New York's Lombard-Freid Projects ("Image Processor," 2007) that dealt with our unstable relationship with images. It confirms that he is a photographer who just happens to use paint. I see aspects of Linda Connor's slow, large exposures here, as well as Cindy Sherman's foxes-in-the-head-lights humans.

Kantor isn't hardened by academia, though he has a PhD from Harvard and teaches at California College of the Arts. The brilliant can-

didness in his pictures is tied to an aesthetic understanding of human desires and scientific pursuits, but also to a humanistic refusal to be neutral. If you spend enough time with his work, you start to see that it is candid in its celebration, not just in its criticism. It reminds me of the ending to poet James Wright's "A Christmas Greeting," from *Shall We Gather at the River* (1963), where the dead and the living ask the same questions: "Charlie, I don't know what to say to you," the poet pines to someone he might have known or just imagined, "Except Good Evening, Greetings, and Good Night, / God Bless Us Every One. Your grave is white. / What are you doing here?"

(Ari Messer)