

## Jordan Kantor

RATIO 3 GALLERY

How much do we have to know about the backstory of a work of art in order to understand and appreciate it? Jordan Kantor's enigmatic paintings seem to pose this question explicitly, by challenging viewers' expectations about the mediation of images. At a moment when eye-

candy art has been in the ascendancy for some time, the relative inscrutability of Kantor's canvases is pleasurable, in a slightly masochistic way. His paintings demand our commitment but give us something in return by requiring us to be actively responsible for interpreting them.

The larger pictures in the show are based on carefully chosen photographs. These range from an image of the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini lying dead in the street to spectacular shots of the catastrophic explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*: streaks of white smoke across a deep blue sky. Another is based on a negative image of four people trying to observe a solar eclipse by looking through metallic filters. All of these selections remind us of how much any single image omits and of what a photo-



Jordan Kantor, *Untitled (Challenger)*, 2007, oil on canvas, 70 x 60".

graph fails to do. In *Untitled (The Bar)*, 2007, Kantor works with an x-ray photograph of Edouard Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882, riffing on traces of the French painter's first ideas, hidden from view in the finished work—Kantor imagines that the girl once wore a tie, for example, instead of a demure ribbon around her neck. What if these elements had prevailed, instead of those now enshrined in art history?

Kantor observes, wryly, that the eye sometimes makes judgments that later prove incorrect. What seems at first to be a diptych of surgery taking place in an improvised field hospital is actually a faithful rendering of the way the painting's source photograph spreads across two pages. The line that suggests a separation between two stretched canvases turns out to be a trompe l'oeil version of the shadow created where the two curving pages meet. These kinds of sly fool-the-eye effects appear most frequently in the smaller, more abstract paintings in the show. In *Untitled (Grid and Keys)*, 2007, a scattering of irregular rectangles of white against a dark background is a disquisition on the way paintings are physically constructed; these are the shapes of the wooden keys used to keep a stretched canvas's corners tight and at right angles.

In another small work, *Untitled (Correction Painting)*, 2007, Kantor "corrects" a slightly warped support by superimposing a perfect white rectangle on the canvas that covers almost the entire surface, leaving a tiny dark border of shifting width to reveal the structural imperfection. There is a strain of didacticism here, which, were it not tempered with humor and—dare it be said—a measure of romanticism, might doom Kantor's project to failure. But what allows the work to retain its considerable authority is the degree to which it cedes ultimate power to the viewer. What do we see, and what then do we know?

—Maria Porges