

MODERN PAINTERS

April 2008
Volume XX, Number 3
Pg. 81

SAN FRANCISCO
JORDAN KANTOR
RATIO 3 GALLERY

There is something unhinging about sparseness in painting, even after almost a century of endgames, and it is this lingering disquiet that most characterized Jordan Kantor's two-room show at Ratio 3, which included works spanning the past four years. His type of three-chord harshness—pared-down palettes dominated by grays, coupled with a deliberate deskilling and economy



Jordan Kantor, *Untitled (Challenger)*, 2007.
Oil on canvas, 70 x 60 in. Courtesy Ratio 3, San Francisco.

of means—is not entirely surprising coming from a painter who, himself a keen critic of contemporary practices, coined the term the “Tuymans effect” (after the Belgian painter known for his bleached-out canvases and inhospitable imagery). Kantor's work is one of emphatic flatness, its depthless pictorial space underscored by unassuming, antipainterly surfaces entirely devoid of brush marks. But that measured formal language belies another type of depth. Counter to Tuymans's investment in nonrecognition, reliant on both narrative obliqueness and an approach to figuration that nears abstraction, Kantor's paintings toy with an almost overdetermined legibility. His canvases swap visual space for a much more ambiguous conceptual space constructed from superimposed layers of pictorial signifiers, different ways of recording space and conveying information: the halos of light signaling a camera lens in *Untitled (lens flare)* (2008); the successive translations of the work's canvas and frame in *Untitled (correction painting)* (2007); the looming arrow in *Untitled (Pasolini)* (2004), hovering awkwardly between painted image, source photograph, and actual scene. Ultimately this sedimentation of registers doesn't lead anywhere but into an infinite self-referential loop, which, when successful, is as unsettled and haunting as Tuymans's best work.

—YASMINE VAN PEE