

Joe Sola Shows Microscopic Paintings In Dealer's Ear

by Maxwell Williams



When visitors enter the inaugural show at Tif Sigfrids's new Hollywood gallery, they might wonder where the art is. The independent-curator-turned-dealer will be seated at a desk in the middle of the empty space for "Portraits: An Exhibition Inside Tif Sigfrids' Ear" (Oct. 12-Nov. 9). Those brave enough to peer into Sigfrids' head will find six tiny oil paintings by L.A.-based artist Joe Sola, hung exactly as promised.

Those familiar with Sola's work have come to expect this sort of antic, out-of-left-field approach. One video, *Saint Henry Composition* (2001), features a high-school football team repeatedly tackling the artist. Another video, *Studio Visit* (2005), features real reactions from curators as Sola jumps out the window of his second-story studio during a meeting. It's the sort of sacrifice-the-body approach to art-making that Chris Burden took, but with the po-faced, lo-fi irony of a Michael Smith video

"Portraits" is surely a critique of the nature of painting exhibitions, but what is the hypothesis? Maybe that size doesn't matter when it comes to expressionist portraiture, or that most art is only worth a ball of earwax? Whatever the case, the show's site-specific nature is both its advantage and its challenge, binding the dealer to the work in a bizarrely intimate manner

Sola spoke to *A.i.A.* over e-mail this week about what inspired the show and the challenges of installing it.

MAXWELL WILLIAMS This show comes across as both a rare instance of the dealer being physically involved in the work, and a critique of the limitations on the exhibition space, but one that looks inward rather than trying to "break out" of the gallery's strictures. Why does the dealer's ear make a good gallery-within-a-gallery?

JOE SOLA Yes, the gallerist is very physically involved in the work, and I like this idea of [it being] inward-looking. It's as if you have to look into the head (mind) of the gallerist to see/experience the art. I have a video in the upcoming exhibition "Damage Control: Art and Destruction since 1950" at the Hirshhorn Museum [Oct. 24, 2013-Feb. 9, 2014], which opens during my exhibition in Tif's ear. She and I will travel to D.C. for the opening, and she will bring the show with her, in her ear.

WILLIAMS You've done paintings before, but never a show exclusively of oil paintings. Does this count as a painting show? What are the paintings like?

SOLA Yes, this is a painting show. The paintings are, of course, extremely small, and they are expressive with regards to brush strokes and the blending of paint. The paintings are composed almost completely from the tiny granules of pigment. Different colors have different size granules of pigment, giving each painting its own texture. On the checklist for the exhibition, you can actually see these granules of pigment from the macro-photography I did of the paintings.

WILLIAMS The scale of the works is about as small as it gets before entering painting-on-a-grain-of-rice territory. Was it challenging to paint on such a small scale?

SOLA Yes, the six paintings in the exhibition are all around 4/64 by 5/64 inches, and they were painted using a stereo microscope. I had to build my own brushes that could handle such small amounts of paint; single bristles and hairs were far too large. I ended up using a .12-millimeter acupuncture needle, which is the smallest acupuncture needle available. That needle narrows down to a point that was still too large to paint with so I sanded that tip, under the microscope, to an even narrower point to construct the tool I needed.

WILLIAMS What was Tif's reaction when you proposed this show? What will the install be like?

SOLA Tif was very excited about the project. I have known her for many years, and I screened an old British film, *The Rebel*, at an evening she organized at [legendary Chinatown dive bar] Hop Louie. On another night, we showed the videos I have made over the years with playwright Will Eno. The idea for this show came while she and I were enthusiastically talking about the exhibition of art during the opening reception of the L.A. biennial ["Made in L.A.," organized by the Hammer Museum in collaboration with LAXART] last summer. Perhaps the idea came as a reaction to the work we were in front of. About the install, you are not alone in your curiosity. Tif has been getting a lot of emails from preparators and friends asking if she needs help with the install—some people are willing to work for free.