

JOE SOLA

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BLACKSTON

by brian boucher



NEW YORK John Baldessari, coming down the mountain, bearing two stone tablets. Detailed Vietnam War scenes, lovingly painted on toenails. The chief executive, presenting a business card: “President. United States of America. Washington, D.C.” Such are the droll scenes in the faux-naïf paintings and drawings of Los Angeles artist Joe Sola, as seen in his recent show “The Senior Discount,” which also included a short video (all works 2010 or ’11).

Sola has exhibited widely since earning an MFA from L.A.’s Otis School of Art and Design in 1999. He has often trained his eye on the media, masculinity, violence and the art world. For his 2005 video *Studio Visit* (not in this show), he surreptitiously recorded curator-guests’ reactions as he asked if they’d like to see a new performance and promptly dove out a window. The pane was breakaway glass, and Sola landed safely outside. It’s an abject Hollywood update of Yves Klein’s *Leap into the Void*.

This show included the laugh-out-loud 7½-minute video *some blood of an artist*, in which an impassive man successively happens upon the same dead body (played by Sola) in several homes, and subjects each corpse to comically horrible abuses. In a *Chien-Andalou*-meets-Black-and-Decker moment, he drives the blade of a power saw into Sola’s eyeball. At another point, he sews bits of the dead man’s skin onto a flag to form the words “Das Kapital.” In reference to filmmaker Bruce LaBruce’s declaration that capitalist conformism alienates straight men from their anuses, the man then drives the flagpole into Sola’s behind.

Combining Sola’s penchant for brutality with a jape about abstract painting is *hand with spork*. In the canvas’s bottom third, a checkerboard-tiled floor, all its edges wavering, admits no spatial

recession; it meets a yellow wall that fills the rest of the canvas. In the absence of the title, one could almost miss the tiny severed hand lying on the floor, clutching a plastic utensil.

Two paintings depicting ATMs also harbor references to abstraction. Except for the emerging greenbacks and an abandoned coffee cup, the 30-by-34-inch oil-on-canvas *atm* could be a geometric abstraction featuring pale horizontal bands of blue, pink and yellow, with an off-white trapezoid floating in the blue zone. The slightly larger *Boardwalk*, otherwise dominated by blank pink, brown, yellow and red shapes, also depicts a cash machine spitting bills, this time onto a vacant walkway formed by one of the shapes. A chuckle gives way to awkward questions. What is the meaning of this unrequited generosity? And hey, where'd everybody go?

Two small Prismacolor-and-graphite drawings offer funny, ambiguous commentary on America. In one, a Pilgrim's hat hangs on the logo for the celebrity gossip channel TMZ; whether it be to undermine the Pilgrims' putative purity or proclaim the American-ness of celebrity dish isn't clear. And in a drawing that could easily be mistaken for a talented kid's notebook sketch, Captain America stands proud and muscular, but his shield seems to be melting, becoming flaccid. It wouldn't seem to provide much protection.

Photo: Joe Sola: Boardwalk, 2010, oil on canvas, 30 by 40 inches; at Blackston.