

VENUS

MANHATTAN

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The New York Times

‘Where Is Jack Goldstein?’



Jack Goldstein, who died a suicide at 57 in 2003, was one of contemporary art’s mystery men. He made his mark in New York in the late 1970s as one of a group of artists working with media-inspired imagery, some of whom were associated with a

career-sparking show called “Pictures.” Certain careers, like those of Robert Longo, David Salle and Cindy Sherman, zoomed ahead in the 1980s. Goldstein’s, despite his often acknowledged brilliance as a painter and video artist, never quite did. In the 1990s he more or less disappeared, personally and professionally — drugs were part of the story — with a brief uptick in visibility at the end.

The show at Venus Over Manhattan, a gallery owned by the collector and writer Adam Lindemann, makes a strong case for a continued interest. The images in several of the 13 paintings here were lifted from photographs of lightning strikes, unexplained explosions or aerial bombardments. The colors are penumbral — this is a world that lives by night — and the acrylic surfaces sprayed-on smooth. Most of the painting was done by assistants under his manic direction; a hair-raising account of working with him told by one of those assistants, the artist Ashley Bickerton, serves as the show’s catalog essay.

Individually, the paintings are beautiful, cold, coruscating things. What's striking, though, is how the show's installation amplifies the theatricality of Goldstein's end-time vision. The darkened space, with pictures spotlighted, has the atmosphere of a bunker, or a cave from which you glimpse distant catastrophes, or catastrophic celebrations.

A mood of unease is increased by a piped-in soundtrack of loved-'em-and-lost-'em Patsy Cline songs, music that Goldstein is said to have played obsessively in his studio, and by the presence of a single 1975 Goldstein film. Three minutes long, it consists entirely of the looping image of a German shepherd barking furiously at the camera, Cerberus guarding the dark realm where Goldstein felt at home.