

VENUS

MANHATTAN

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'Where Is Jack Goldstein?' Enigmatic Artist Confounds Venus Over Manhattan (PHOTOS)

"Where is Jack Goldstein?"

It is more than an exhibition title -- it is a tease, a refrain and a haunting melody. Like Twin Peaks mantra "Who Killed Laura Palmer?" the question is not one that lends itself to an easy resolution. Adam Lindemann's *Venus Over Manhattan* gallery is no stranger to mysteries, however. The art space made the news earlier this year when a Salvador Dali drawing was stolen from the *À rebours* exhibition by a thief in polka dots. Yet this posthumous exhibition, honoring what Lindemann called a "mad artist," presents a mystery that begs not to be answered.



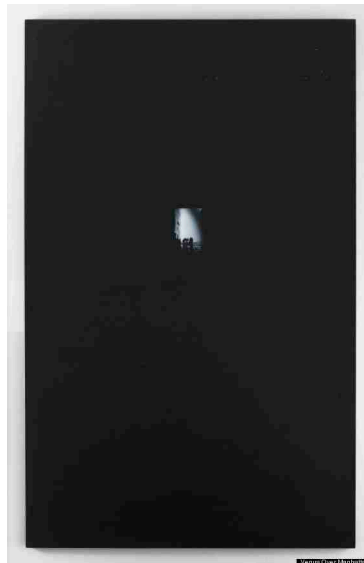
Approaching the glass door of the galleryspace, one is not met with the expected white-walled cube lined with canvases. Instead the viewer is confronted with darkness, broken only by a cabin-like window which peers into a burning house. The artificial installation feels more like an amusement park or cinematic flash-back than a mimesis of nature. Campy yet eerie, the burning house installation is complimented by a rollicking film reel's creeks and clicks.

In the adjacent dark room Goldstein's original film clip "Shane" plays on repeat, mostly depicting a German Shepherd's head against a pure black background. Staring into the beast's eyes and panting mouth I found myself physically fearing its next bark, although I knew it was coming. In the corner of the room Adam Lindemann was speaking with a gallery goer. "How did [Goldstein] kill himself?" she whispered between barks. "He hung himself by the neck," responded Lindemann. The dog barked again.



The main gallery is blanketed in shadow and accompanied by a blasting Patsy Cline soundtrack; Goldstein, Lindemann later explains, always played Cline while painting. Patsy has never been creepier, the old-time crooning mocking the rising tension in the paintings and those attempting to decode them. Along with the burning house and barking dog, the weather-disaster paintings remind us of our first time's home alone, when the smallest aberration triggered fears of disaster. Large scale paintings in black, white and the occasional flash of red consume the walls, depicting cosmic explosions and heavy storms with a naive eye.

Goldstein's intensity recalls staring out the window as a child, paralyzed by how big the sky was, how terrifying the dark was. At some points it is hard to decipher whether the paint is mimicking nature or riffing on it. His world is nearly humanless; if paint is worthy of depicting flashes of lightning, there is no medium insignificant enough to be on par with human life. The only humans on display take up a tiny square of a large black canvas, as if viewing their shadowed outlines through a peephole.



Lindemann gathers the crowd to finally speak on behalf of the gathering's unrepresentative host. And yet nearly nothing was revealed; the talk only heightened the mystery surrounding Goldstein's life and legacy. He was in the first graduating class at CalArts, was David Salle's roommate, had a few years of success before receding into obscurity and tragically ending his own life.

"Where is Jack Goldstein?" Lindemann asked. "Where is his influence? Where is his presence in the art world?" In a way it's a loaded question; there are many artists who aren't remembered and honored as perhaps they should have been. All this fear, drama and mystery almost feels like a plot device, a glaring MacGuffin. And yet the tension and intrigue in the gallery space is palpable as critics and collectors suddenly eye each other with suspicious glances, shuffling and probing like fumbling amateur sleuths.



Lindemann referred to his choice of lighting and music as "unorthodox," adding that some gallery employees thought the decision "inappropriate." Without the atmosphere the images would depict Someone later approaches Mr. Lindemann with another query. "Why the name Venus Over Manhattan?" Another mystery, perhaps? Yet Lindemann quickly responds, "Venus Over Manhattan is the statue on the roof of the building. It was sort of an homage to Duchamp and the readymade." Mystery solved. I grabbed my coat and exited the building before any more answers could pollute the looming questions raised.

"Where is Jack Goldstein?" is perhaps an exhibition that relies as much on shadows and absence as on the art itself. Yet the thoughtful homage will shake, frustrate and transport you to the haunting flashbacks of youth when every question felt like a deep, dark mystery.