

TIF SIGFRIDS



Review: Joe Sola

Sola unpacks the absurdities of being an artist.

By Anne Doran



West Coast artist Joe Sola takes as his primary theme the absurdity and annoyances of 21st-century American life, with a particular focus on his own existence in the contemporary art world. In 2005, for instance, after training with a stuntman, Sola initiated—and secretly filmed—a series of studio visits with curators, during which he would suddenly (and apparently suicidally) hurl himself out of his studio window. More recently, he's examined the parallels between artists and sex workers in the performance piece, *Talking About My Drawings with Escorts* (2010).

Sola's latest video, *some blood of an artist*, is a meditation on creativity and capitalism couched in the language of horror films. In each of the video's three parts, a casually dressed, clean-cut type (based partly on the protagonist in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* and played by Gagosian Gallery director Dean Anes) makes art using a dead body (played by Sola and a latex look-alike). Pieces of skin are carefully sewn into a flag; blood is used to float a toy boat made from an empty Red Bull can, and brains are heated in a microwave until they explode. (Part of the fun is spotting references, which range from Alfred Hitchcock's films to Jackson Pollock's paintings.) The film is accompanied by a selection of Sola's naively rendered colored-pencil drawings and oil paintings, including portraits of Colonel Sanders and Captain America, an Ed Ruscha–like image of an art-storage facility and a close-up view of toenails painted with scenes of the Vietnam War. Best are surrealist depictions of unattended cash machines spitting out money in empty lobbies. Making humorous art, rather than art about humor, isn't easy. But Sola, between his brisk and mettlesome responses to life's indignities and his own unregulated id, succeeds surprisingly often.

atm, Joe Sola, 2011, oil on canvas, 30 x 34 inches
Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Blackston