

KANTOR GALLERY

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ART REVIEWS

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Compact Construction: I am tempted to say that **Henry Vincent's** smallish paintings of familiar Los Angeles buildings are accidentally interesting, which is to say their humor caught me totally off guard. Silhouetted against the inevitably blue sky are views of the Pacific Design Center, the facade of Nate 'n' Al's restaurant, a flag flying off of the top of Museum Square on Wilshire Boulevard and the seesawing letter R of the Roxy.

Though painterly, and occasionally exaggeratedly so, the works at Kantor Gallery fall flat. They are remarkably, even proudly, dull. Offering neither a complete view (which might be historically interesting) nor a detail so small as to be indistinguishable from an abstraction, these architectural part-images function so obliquely they almost don't function at all.

Yet they do have something to say, and contemplating their weird reticence suggests that these are cues, prompts or notes, scripted in pictorial shorthand. What these signifiers signify, however, are less the sites they depict than the photographs upon which the paintings of those sites were based.

Certainly Vincent has some interest in kitsch, and the pompous curves of the Forum, the Chinese-style letters of the Formosa Cafe's sign and the much belated Modernism of the PolyGram building are duly noted. But this isn't quite the point.

Like Judy Fiskin's tiny photographs of vernacular architecture, Vincent's work is about modes of vision and methods of classification. Photographs document effortlessly; paintings don't. In fact, the very concept of a painting that resists its aesthetic mandate is funny, as John Baldessari's "Painting That Is Its Own Documentation" will attest.

Vincent's paintings are likewise funny, but not at all ironic. They sneak into a broader discourse than that to which they play at belonging.

■ *Kantor Gallery, 8642 Melrose Ave., (310) 659-5388, through April 27. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

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