

# LAWEEKLY

## Art

### Jacob Kassay at L&M Arts: 27-Year-Old, \$290,500-Painting Superstar Is Actually Pretty Good

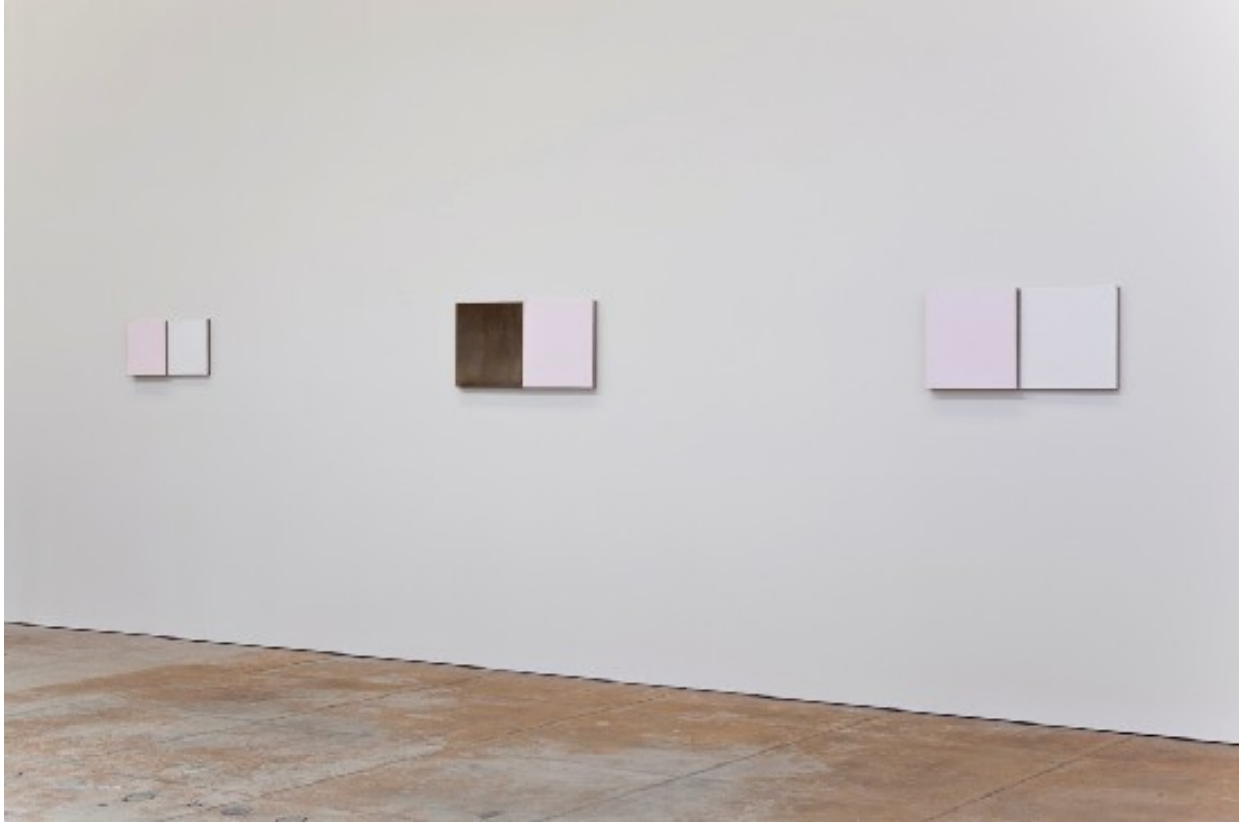
By [Catherine Wagley](#) Fri., Jul. 22 2011 at 1:57 PM

It's not helpful to know an artist's work has sold in the secondary market for nearly \$300,000 before you've seen it in person. Nor is it helpful to know the same artist had collectors on a list somewhere, waiting for the silver paintings he's become known for in the five short years he's been exhibiting, or that people leaving New York auction houses know he's "very hot" even if they don't know what his work looks like.

All these things are true of cool 27-year-old minimalist Jacob Kassay, who made his West Coast debut at L&M Arts in Venice last night, in a compact solo exhibition that continues through September 2. But, as it turns out, they don't matter much when you're standing in front of his work.

Last night's opening had far less star-studded pizzazz than others, like Barbara Kruger's or Paul McCarthy's, that L&M has hosted since introducing its L.A. space in August. James Franco wasn't there, at least not when I got there, and you'd never know Kassay had something of an art star status.

Instead, the crowd largely consisted of artists and museum people, which meant the mood was understated and casual in its professionalism. Since L&M has that great, inviting courtyard between its two renovated buildings, hardly anyone actually socialized in the galleries. In the opening's final stretch, if you were among the few who still actually wanted to look at Kassay's paintings, you could pretty much count on a private viewing.



**Photo: Josh White/JWPictures, Courtesy L&M Arts, Los Angeles.**

**Kassay's small paintings made of acrylic and deposits of real silver.**

Kassay's new work doesn't have any of that flashy, brazen bigness it's easy to expect from young market heavyweights in a post-Jeff Koons market. Instead, it feels quiet and introspectively obsessed with art history. It fits nicely in L&M's charmingly angular space, where Kassay's small monochrome paintings hang on the two longest walls. These monochromes have deposits of silver embedded in their surfaces, which gives them an almost imperceptible texture and an occasional glint, but certainly doesn't make them shimmer and shine.

Rather than an attempt to make bling classy, the silver seems like a way to personalize the trappings of the minimal art of the past. The color fields of Barnett Newman or the deliberately underwhelming canvases of Robert Ryman seem to be influences here. Sometimes, doing something small your idols would never do -- Newman would have flinched at silver -- makes it okay to be like them in bigger ways.

I don't know why or how Kassay stumbled into his weird market position, though Sarah Douglas at ArtInfo fleshed it out as well as anyone could. I do know that sort of premature market clout seems wholly incongruent with the discreet work on view at L&M. There, Kassay's just a young painter trying to hold his own in a vast world of visual ideas, and doing a pretty good job.