

Michael Kagan

How We Remember

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The fact that Michael Kagan's exhibition, "How We Remember," is hung as though in a place of worship speaks to the reverence from which this body of work was conceived. Six Titan rockets are displayed in trio across from each other. With anticipatory thrust, they begin with the Gemini mission. This depiction arises from enamel silk screen on linen with oil paint on top. A sextet of identical images all squeezeed differently. Fragmented by the happenstance of mark-making, signifying the astonishment of their creation. A famous NASA saying goes *let's light this candle* in preparation for the immanence of a launch. Words given flight. The rockets themselves represent candles - six rockets in a confluence - one for each of the Apollo missions that landed on the moon. Almost like a Yahrzeit candle that is lit on the anniversary of someone's death in Judaism. Godspeed Ed White. Godspeed Gus Grissom.

The largest painting mounted lonely on a center wall is an astronaut from the iconic Apollo 11 mission, painted starkly in a mythic at-the-ready pose. It was the Gemini missions which ultimately led to Apollo. People had died in both the Gemini and Apollo programs and so they lit candles for the lost souls, to remember those who came before us. The rocket paintings hang on both sides of the astronaut, faceless sentries standing guard. The man inside this space suit represents the folly and glory of human achievement which collectively brought us to this lunar surface.

The writer Bruce Hainley once described a classic American male archetype as that of the "wounded quarterback," a sidelined hero who through no fault of his was denied the pinnacle of his potential greatness. Something about the Buzz Aldrins of the world register in this spirit, by the miracle of actually landing on the moon their wings would henceforth forever be clipped. As private industry now casts our eyes to the heavens again, we look back - not anachronistically - but as a placeholder for aspirations yet to materialize. As Arthur C. Clark, author of "2001: A Space Odyssey," once explained *The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.*

- Bill Powers