

Washington City Paper

CRITICS' PICK

Studio + Laboratory and Surface from Under the Microscope

January 16, 2020



Simultaneous National Academy of Sciences exhibits probe both the workspaces and the work products of scientists. Stefanie Bürkle, an art professor at the Technical University of Berlin, pairs artists' studios with scientific labs, in a style that owes a deep debt to Dusseldorf School photographers Andreas Gursky and Candida Höfer. The rooms she documents—always devoid of people—are lived-in yet crisply portrayed down to their reflective tinfoil, their spaghetti networks of wires, and their delicate polygonal models hung from the ceiling. Jeffrey Kent's art, meanwhile, meditates on the story of Henrietta Lacks, the African American tobacco farmer whose unusual cancer cells became a vital foundation for medical breakthroughs after her death—but were taken without her consent and used without familial compensation for decades. Kent's dreamy paintings offer a range of bulbous, cellular forms, many of them heavily impastoed and lacquered, as if they were microscopic samples under slides. Some works feature fields of black, always in the background. *The exhibitions run to Jan. 31 (Bürkle) and March 13 (Kent) at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW. Free. (202) 334-2415. cpnas.org. (Louis Jacobson)*