



Datebook

On the Waterfront:
MoMA's owner
wants to upgrade
Mission Rock. E4
► New Home E5

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Saturday, January 26, 2012 | Section E

San Francisco Chronicle

E2 | Saturday, January 26, 2012 | SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

KENNETH BAKER *Galleries*

From air and light to airmail

To keep realism in painting from looking rote or academic requires a touch as lively as Ben Aronson displays in camera-assisted paintings at Jenkins Johnson.

"Photorealism" does not fit what Aronson does. He apparently uses the camera as a memory aid, especially in paintings such as "Rome Traffic" (2011) and "Suits" (2011) that picture rapidly changing situations.

But his realism comes alive not from mere plausibility or accuracy but because of the emotional flavors that infuse his reports of light. The camera takes care of the optics, but it cannot

Ben Aronson: Here and Now: Paintings. Through next Sat. Jenkins Johnson Gallery, 464 Sutter St., S.F. (415) 677-0770. www.jenkinsjohnsongallery.com.

register emotional temperature as Aronson's skill does.

The process depends crucially on the economy of descriptive effect he achieves by a relaxed touch and technical decisions such as scraping paint away to define the distant ships and buildings in "Summer Morning" (2011).

The paintings vary in size enough to let us see Aronson shine and to see how his art breaks



Jenkins Johnson Gallery

"Via di Santa Maria Maggiore" (2011), oil on panel by Ben Aronson, 12 inches by 12 inches.

Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy: Par Avion: Sculptural installation. Ends today. Frey Norris Gallery, 161 Jessie St., S.F. (415) 346-7812. www.frey-norris.com.

Taha Belal: The Atmosphere From Before the Step Down Returns to the Square: Works on paper. Through Feb. 18. Haines Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 397-8114. www.hainesgallery.com.

down when the dimensions of the working surface exceed a couple of square feet.

Though he sustains the description of light and air in a large picture such as "City of Angels" (2011), the immensely satisfying relations between brushwork, color and depictive detail that we see in "Via di Santa Maria Maggiore" (2011) and other small works tend to go slack.

Seeing an artist come up against his limits — in this case, at least — leaves a stronger, more soulful impression than merely seeing him in his stride would have.

mail would accept individually, and posted each one to the gallery.

The artists arranged the fragments on site in a roughly airplane-shaped array, provoking first a smirk, then a cringe at the thought of seeing wreckage.

Were Healy and Cordeiro American, we might read their piece as a wry rejoinder to the recent right-wing assault on the Postal Service as a big-government anachronism. But their project counts more as a heavy-weight entry in the history of Mail Art, a tendency with roots in the late 1960s that traces the

