



# ALTMAN SIEGEL

GALLERY S/F

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Ebner seems to have strived for an ensemble that would feel like an artwork. It has pleasing internal rhymes such as that between Iran Do Espirito Santo's solid crystal "Water Glass 2" (2008) and Rogan's 2003 video "Glory Glory," in which lemon seeds rise and descend repeatedly in a glass of water, borne by escaping carbonation bubbles.

Ebner's show even leads our viewing angle up and down, with works placed on or near the floor, such as Sol LeWitt's wonderful white electrical faceplate partly dipped in black and Tom Otterness' bronze floor sculpture, "Broken Humpty Dumpty" (1990). Next to the LeWitt, Ed Ruscha's lithograph "Unit" (2004) has us dead level with a purely fictional eyeline.

In the same cluster hangs Lee Friedlander's deflating picture "Egypt" (1983), which sights up at the Pyramids and Sphinx across a trash-strewn slope patrolled by vagrant dogs. More than her fellow artist curators, Ebner seems to have thought contrapuntally about her choices, their aspects and implications.

Jordan Kantor's selection at Ratio3 has a sinister humor to it, turning on suggestions of conspiracy, censorship, surveillance and private versus public memory.

Works by several artists - Grannan, Friedlander, Ruscha, Robert Adams, Trevor Paglen, Bechtle, Garth Weiser, Lutz Bacher - appear in two or more of the exhibitions. But Paglen's super telephoto images of "Detachment 3, Air Force Flight Test Center #2, Groom Lake, NV" (2008) at Berggruen have an impact very different from his time lapse of a naval satellite's night-sky transit at Ratio 3.

Bechtle, who organized the Berggruen show, has placed Paglen's long shots in a sequence with Richard Misrach's views of the Golden Gate from his Berkeley home and two paintings by Tom McKinley that idealize, a little creepily, vantage points of high privilege.

Kantor positioned Paglen's satellite streak between a Vija Celmins print of a spiderweb and a grainy Sara Vanderbeek photo that appears to show a poster winking through fractured plate glass.

"They Knew What They Wanted" challenges the assumption that any given artwork is a distinct thing. The complex of shows argues that artworks are shape-shifting entities that impose and receive influences from their contexts - both the overt and the invisible ones that viewers' memories and art history provide. A discomfiting recognition, but a necessary one.

**They Knew What They Wanted:** Four connected shows of paintings, sculpture, photographs and other works on paper selected by four artists. Through July 31. John Berggruen Gallery, 228 Grant Ave., S.F. (415) 781-4629 [www.berggruen.com](http://www.berggruen.com). Through Aug. 7. Altman Siegel Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 576-9300. [www.altmansiegel.com](http://www.altmansiegel.com). Through Aug. 13. Ratio 3, 1447 Stevenson St., S.F. (415) 821-3371. [www.ratio3.org](http://www.ratio3.org). Through Aug. 21. Fraenkel Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 981-2661. [www.fraenkelgallery.com](http://www.fraenkelgallery.com).