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“Altman Siegel joins the gallery migration south,” by Sam Whiting, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, pp. E1-2, March 31, 2016

Altman Siegel, a prestigious gallery for conceptual art and large-scale painting, will announce Monday that it has joined the great San Francisco dealer exodus from downtown to Dogpatch.

Owner Claudia Altman-Siegel is trading the cachet of the fourth floor at 49 Geary St. for a tin-sided warehouse in the Minnesota Street Project, a three-building cluster that is transforming the visual arts landscape.

Altman-Siegel will close her 1,900-square-foot gallery north of Market in late August. In September, after a major build-out, she will open in 5,000 square feet south of AT&T Park.

“I have a young gallery, but I always have this dream and vision of having a big gallery,” said Altman-Siegel, standing in the shell of her new gallery. “This is the perfect space for that kind of thing.”

Formerly the parking garage for an electric company, it is one short block from 1275 Minnesota St., cornerstone of the project. It opened in mid-March, attracting 6,000 visitors on the first weekend alone to its 13 galleries.

The upcoming project at 1150 25th St. is about half the size of 1275 Minnesota St. But it will be divided into only three galleries, each with 40-foot ceilings and multiple skylights.

“There is so much natural light and so much huge dimension that it is easy to imagine doing super-ambitious art projects here,” said Altman-Siegel, who arrived seven years ago from New York, where she had been the senior director of Luhring Augustine, a blue-chip Chelsea gallery dealing in contemporary art.

Accommodation struggles

When she opened at 49 Geary, she was able to introduce young New York talents such as Sarah Vanderbeek and Matt Keegan to a San Francisco audience. Having come from Manhattan, Altman-Siegel’s problem with 49 Geary was not the price but the size and access. The freight elevators could not carry the huge works she wanted to exhibit, and the stairway was too narrow.



Claudia Altman-Siegel.

“I had several shows where I had work that my artists literally couldn’t get their work into the building,” she said. “In my current show, I had to have a painting unstretched and then stretch it in the space because I couldn’t get it up the stairs.”

With her five-year lease at 49 Geary coming due, Altman-Siegel was just starting to look around when she was approached by arts benefactors and real estate investors Andy and Deborah Rappaport, who have put together the Minnesota Street Project by buying or leasing buildings between 23rd and 25th streets.

When finished, in the fall, the complex will contain a warehouse chopped into 35 artists’ studios and two warehouses for galleries, one of which is attached to an office building with space to lease to arts organizations.

The fundamental aim of the Minnesota Street Project is to keep the visual arts in the city by keeping rents below market value, and there have been more applicants to this deal than the project can handle. The Rappaports have been careful to curate the right mix of dealers, and Altman-Siegel is the first to be invited to 1150 25th St.

The corrugated exterior will be left as is, maybe painted. Inside, the Rappaports will provide a Sheetrock envelope, open to the rafters. The gallerists will take it from there. Altman-Siegel plans to divide her space into one extra-large gallery and two smaller ones. The walls will be 15 feet high, leaving 25 feet of air space above that.

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“The ceiling and beams and everything will be left raw,” she said. “The inside will be a white, perfect, clean, highly-finished box, and then when you look up you’ll get a sense of this industrial, original building.”

The floor will be left concrete, and the double-wide roll-up doors will be left in place. The gate in back will open onto Indiana Street so trucks can pull right up. They can also pull off I-280 at the Cesar Chavez/25th Street exit, making the Minnesota Street Project convenient to the Peninsula, where all that new tech money sits waiting to be invested in art.

In an effort to draw this audience, gallerists have banded together to form the DoReMi Arts District (Dogpatch, Potrero Hill, the Mission.) A free glossy giveaway map has just been printed, marking 62 locations, with the Minnesota Street Project as its southern anchor.

Dwindling galleries

When Altman-Siegel first came to San Francisco, in 2009, she wanted to be near other galleries so collectors would find her. That meant 49 Geary, the marquee gallery building at the corner of Kearny.

But 22 galleries have dwindled to nine. In the past year, three galleries have closed on the fourth floor alone, Altman-Siegel said, with her gallery about to become the fourth. That leaves only K Imperial Fine Art, Scott Nichols Gallery and Fraenkel Gallery, which is a destination for photography and continues to expand on the fourth floor.

“My biggest hesitation is that 49 Geary is such a venerable destination for art, and people are familiar with it,” Altman-Siegel said. “It feels like a risk to be moving away from downtown. That being said, I think that this neighborhood is more fun and exciting, and it feels more creative and native to what I’m doing.”



The warehouse that will house Claudia Altman-Siegel’s new gallery in Dogpatch