

ARTFORUM

San Francisco

Chris Johanson

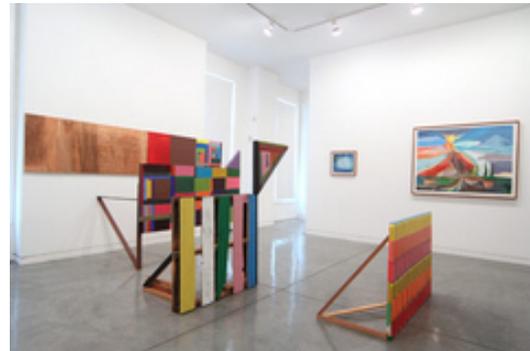
ALTMAN SIEGEL
49 Geary Street, 4th Floor
June 2–July 30

As a barometer of culture (or perhaps of the artist’s psyche), Chris Johanson’s current show reports clear skies. A small, washy acrylic on paper is emblazoned with the word SUN, which is inscribed repeatedly in yellowish hues. Like a mantra from a Mel Bochner painting, the term starts to become abstract, though only just—on the opposite side of the gallery is another, similarly scaled piece that offers the term EASY LISTENING, floating among jagged blue forms, affirming an easy vibe. Johanson, who has deep roots in San Francisco (though he currently splits his time between Portland and Los Angeles), doesn’t go for ironic affect, and the majority of this show maintains the naive exuberance that has typified his work since the mid-1990s. His first show in the Bay Area in three years—and his debut at Altman Siegel, a spiffier setting than his Mission District roots—is a welcome return.

The major development here is the inclusion of unabashedly fauvist landscapes. One is *Today* (all works 2011), a wonderfully gloppy panel painting with squeezed-straight-from-the-paint-tube intensity in both materiality and tone. It more than affirms the show’s sunny disposition. Equally appealing is *Contemporary Flower Painting #3*, which is a geometric field of color that plays like a low-res still of a Pipilotti Rist–tweaked vision of a tulip farm.

The placement of sculptures, often scavenged shipping palettes turned on their sides with each vertical slat painted a different vibrant shade, creates a chromatically therapeutic obstacle course. Facing the gallery entrance is the barricade-like *Restorative Moon Sculpture #1*, something of a brown fence with an attached white circle, offering one of the few visually subdued moments in the show. Another is *It Is Good to Think Good Thoughts for Everyone Not Just You*, a small, sober text painting of dark blues, with the phrase DAY TIME COMES AGAIN TOMORROW confidently articulated in the center of an otherwise dark, cloudy composition.

— Glen Helfand



View of “This, This, This, That,” 2011.