

ARTslant san francisco

They Knew What They Wanted From What Was Available
by Chris Fitzpatrick

They Knew What They Wanted

Altman Siegel Gallery
49 Geary St., San Francisco, CA 94108
July 1, 2010 - August 7, 2010

“They Knew What They Wanted” invokes something in-between a hit-man’s overture and a ‘50s girl-group’s jukebox breakup. But instead the phrase serves as the title of an exhibition that spans four commercial galleries in San Francisco: Altman Siegel, John Berggruen, Fraenkel, and Ratio 3. Each gallery asked a different artist from their roster to select the works from the backrooms, storage shelves, and flat files of all four spaces, yet the results are posited as a single exhibition. While this pretense to incorporeity sits at odds with the distance involved between venues, they are united (however fragilely) by what remains unsold in their inventory. This lends just enough continuity, even if filtered by the curators/artists: Robert Bechtle, Shannon Ebner, Katy Grannan, and Jordan Kantor, whose concerns are diverse.

They knew what they wanted from what was available.

Resembling a wanted poster, the collective announcement for the exhibition posits the four organizing artists as fugitive bandits making off with company property, making the “wanted” of the title and the role of the four artists seem more criminal than desirous. Yet it isn’t an aesthetic or idea that lends much or really carries on beyond the initial promotional

allure. An overall impression is actually dominated by an abundance of landscapes.



The narrow hours of the collective opening reception did make viewing all four exhibitions something of a fast-paced, hit-and-run affair, but this isn’t unusual. San Francisco is a city in which opening receptions and other public programming too often fall on the same dates at the same times, seemingly for no reason. While most galleries in the 49 Geary Street building where two

of the exhibition’s exhibitions take place (Altman Siegel and Fraenkel) coordinate their receptions to occur on the first Thursday of each month, the city’s overbooking implies an overall lack of communication at best. So it was refreshing to



