

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.freyorris.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.

Mailing it in: To make their installation "Par Avion," which ends today at Frey Norris, Australian collaborators Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro acquired the remains of a small Cess-



Haines Gallery

"June" (2010), newspaper, graphite, PVA glue on paper by Taha Belal.



Individually mailed fragments of a Cessna aircraft from "Par Avion" (2010) by Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro.

Frey Norris Gallery

Some may also see in it a backhanded critique — or even an unself-conscious expression — of art world globalization and the waste, grandiosity and profit-chasing it entails.

Healy and Cordeiro have impaled a nearby wall with folded sheet metal "paper planes" to make "Origami Airplanes" (2011). It evokes dread of death from above — including echoes of Sept. 11 — behind a mask of old-fashioned schoolroom mischief.

Dispatches from Egypt:

Cairo native Taha Belal returned to his home city, having earned art school degrees in the Bay Area, just in time to experience the 1-year-old revolution now indelibly identified with Tahrir Square in the mind of a watching world.

His works on paper at

but they can communicate to any viewer Belal's skepticism toward print media.

Newspapers have an urgency and influence in the daily life of the Middle East that they have largely lost in North America. So Belal's choice to cut intricate patterns from them or collage lattices on them has an edge we easily miss.

The elegant lattices of triangles and hexagons Belal cut from the newspaper in the diptych "June" (2010) evoke Western art's lineage of patterned abstraction and the perforated screens found in architecture of the Islamic world. But neither reference disguises his sense of published news as a screen that both sieves the truth of people's lives and invites the projection of fantasy.

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