

Melendez, Franklin. "Too cool for school," San Francisco Magazine, July 2011



THE TALK

ART



Let it Calm You, 2011 (left) and Wednesday Before Sunset, 2011 (below) are two of Chris Johanson's more contemplative pieces, some of which will appear in his new show.



Too cool for school

Art superstar Chris Johanson, the reluctant poster boy for the Mission School, has a new show—and for the first time, it won't be in his old home. For years, his skateboarding-, tagging-, and street culture-inspired work showed locally at the Jack Hanley Gallery, in the neighborhood that nurtured his aesthetic iconoclasm. This time, though, the celebrated artist is at the august Altman Siegel in the august compound that is 49 Geary. (It was Johanson's debut at the 2002 Whitney Biennial and solo show at the now legendary Deitch Projects that catapulted him to the national—and eventually the international—spotlight.) But Johanson is no sellout; he's just more grown up and, as his new drawings suggest, happy to take a wry jab at his respectability. Finished with his signature Crayola palette, Johanson's work at Altman Siegel reflects his move from adolescent malaise to bouts with drugs and depression to his new focus: the existential questions of adulthood. His geometric paintings also suggest a new interest in 20th-century abstraction, but filtered through his outsider lens into playful assemblages on found scraps of wood, particleboard, and other salvaged materials. The artist may be a little older and more artistically mature, but it's clear that the streets are still alive and well for him. ■ FRANKLIN MELENDEZ THROUGH JULY, ALTMAN SIEGEL, 49 GEARY ST. SF, 415-576-9300, ALTMANSIEGEL.COM