

FRIDAY

YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE
TO ENTERTAINMENT

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REVIEW

Size has no bearing on the power of art

By Fred Camper
Special to the Tribune

Just as poet Jean Cocteau is said to have quipped after seeing his first Cinemascope film, "The next time I write a poem, I shall use a larger sheet of paper," organizing a group show—Think Small—around the size of artworks might at first seem to make little sense. Yet the best pieces in this 36-artist exhibit use their small size as a means of both focusing attention and encouraging more active viewing.

It also helps that curator Robert Sill didn't apply "small" too pedantically—nothing was supposed to be more than 12 inches in its largest dimension, but a few exceptions were permitted.

Laurie Hogin, best known for her large, richly colored and sometimes-fantastical animal paintings, is represented here by nine pink panel paintings from a suite of 45 titled "Women's Work." Each shows a rather grotesque rabbit with a different, sometimes contorted facial expression. Because of the small size and single color, the viewer isn't as filled with sensations as by Hogin's larger pictures; the bunny poses are subject to varying interpretations, and the colors can be taken as pretty, or sickly-sweet, or a little of both.

Bill Conger's three tiny paintings show sparse geometric designs against a solid white field. The title, "These Tears Are Just Your Answered Prayers," adds emotional suggestiveness to this painting with two four-leaf-clover designs of red dots at the



A detail from "Women's Work" by Laurie Hogin, which shows the omnipresent rabbit that finds its way into the artist's efforts.

center. I liked the freedom I was given to make of these patterns what I wished.

Pete Goldlust's seven small sculptures of abstracted horror-movie monsters in "Trophy Family (The Fixture Rebellion)" are more determinedly affecting, with many sporting grotesque octopus-like tentacles, but they have only hints of eyes, and their small size make them more specimens to be examined than threats to be feared.

Nicholas Sistler has made a name for himself in Chicago with his exquisite, evocative, surrealist-inspired views of interior spaces. Their brightly colored surfaces are usually arranged to lead the eye into the background and "The Red Bal-

loon," one of three Sistler pieces here, takes the viewer along the floor and lower walls of a room through a partly open door that reveals a yellow glow in the room beyond. It also includes a relatively new element in Sistler's work. Two photographs are shown hanging in the room, one showing a stern adult with an apparently malformed baby and the other of a scarecrow. Sistler renders these in monochrome, suggesting the originals are in black and white but also infecting the room with the messiness of human activity, leaving the viewer to wonder about its unseen inhabitants.

A favorite piece is Anne Wilson's No. 23 from "Colonies," a miniature "settlement" constructed mostly of pieces of lace

Think Small

When: Through Jan. 14; 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday
Where: Illinois State Museum Chicago Gallery, 100 W. Randolph St., 2nd floor
Price: Free; 312-814-5322

she has reduced almost to bare threads. There are no real buildings here, just loops of lace with threads curling around them, and pins adorned with insect-like balls of black lace. It's full of unspecified, get-under-your-skin creepiness because of the imaginary insects, the ways in which the loops seem like fabric holes, and the lace referencing intimate garments.

Sumakshi Singh is represented by two installations that take advantage of the gallery's space. Her "Toward Fracture for Containment" presents itself as a group of resin water droplets that have condensed on the glass of a gallery window. Also included is a clear resin "puddle" implying that water has leaked into the space. On back of the larger droplets are tiny paintings on paper of the cityscape visible through the gallery window—planters, the sidewalk, building facades. Singh fabulously literalizes the idea that art can intensify and refocus daily seeing. The drops and puddle call attention by contrast to the cleanliness of the gallery's geometric spaces, while the exterior views deepen and renew one's perception of the street itself.

Alan Artner is on vacation and will return Jan. 14.