

CHICAGO ART CRITICS ASSOCIATION

Sumakshi Singh at Gallery 400

By Polly Ullrich

"Void," an aptly-named exhibition by Sumakshi Singh at Gallery 400, is an attempt to suggest the breadth of the cosmos through a sharp attentiveness toward its slightest details. A brisk glance at the show by a careless viewer gives the impression of emptiness, that there is nothing there to see, except for dinged-up white walls, a cement floor and a stained ceiling in the gallery. Yet—look closer: see the tattered butterfly wing whirling on the sprayed yellow cobweb at the edge of a sunny window; see the tiny, clay lichens and mushrooms painted and then settled into nooks and crannies by the artist; see the finger smudges, the pokes, the dents, the hairline cracks on walls--all teased out of and carefully expanded from the leavings of other exhibitions. Singh's "art"—such as it is—has an insignificance that suddenly turns on its head and resounds with the infinite.

This is art that is almost invisible, forcing the viewer to wonder, where is it, exactly? Is it the tiny lichens, is it the wall cracks, is it that fluff of dust in the corner? From this point of view, the sprinkler system on the ceiling begins to look interesting. There's a huge crack on a gallery wall with mirrors propped on each end, producing an infinite regression of cracks and imperfections. With these tiny, minimalist and compressed gestures, Singh means us to lose our bearings—we are made to search concertedly for art, any art, within the eccentric leftovers of past activities and empty rooms, and suddenly everything seems potentially to be art. The boundaries and categories that have pinned art to certain media and practices are toppled, and the rest of the world suddenly expands, seems ripe for aesthetic content and teleological meaning.

"Void" is part of a wider effort in other ways as well. It is the third in a six-part series of locally-produced exhibitions titled "At the Edge: Innovative Art in Chicago" at Gallery 400, all of which will be specifically created for the Gallery 400 space. This is the second year of the project, which is scheduled to run for at least three years.

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