



Creative Arts Workshop

Sumakshi Singh's "In the shadows of Pink" (2003), in acrylic on polymer clay, at Creative Arts Workshop.

## Yes, the walls are alive. No, you're not hallucinating.

By Judy Birke

**NEW HAVEN** — To the casual viewer, as well as to the astute art critic, a quick glance into the street-level windows at the Hilles Gallery of the Creative Arts Workshop on Audubon Street might seem to confirm the notion that there is no exhibit on view there. That's because the presentation is almost invisible from the outside. The only thing one initially encounters is a great span of seemingly empty white walls.

### ART REVIEW



Joseph Woolridge's "Dream Cage #1" (2003) in oil on canvas.

sprouting embodiments reminiscent of natural formations, surprisingly fascinating and irresistible, inviting closer inspection and contemplation.

The installation by Sumakshi Singh, one of the two winners of CAW's 2003 national juried exhibition, "Paying Attention," is a challenge to conventional ideas about art. It quickly begs the question, just what in the world is this about?

Singh creates microenvironments — organic-looking, podlike pockets of polymer clay and paint, sometimes containing fungi, plants or moss — and adheres them to what she calls "sterile urban spaces." These tiny growths inhabit corners, cracks and crevices as well as flat areas of the gallery in conjunction with nondescript smudges and smears that have been left on the walls over time. There are also stitches, evidently sewn to the wall, and mothlike, winged things that — courtesy of Singh — appear to have found their places splattered against the windows.

By blending the so-called living organisms with

See CAW, C2



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2004

## CAW: Yes, the walls are alive. Ceiling, too.

Continued from C1

the anonymous scars on walls that have served as backdrops for other cultural experiences, Singh creates a dialogue between the old and the new, the living and the inanimate, the intentional and the accidental, the imaginary and the real, the language of nature and the language of art. She comments on their migration into each other's domain, where they assert themselves as mutual sources of creativity.

Singh's inquisitiveness and her desire to explore all sorts of possibilities results in an interesting installation deserving of the effort that is necessary to fully appreciate it.

Paintings by Joseph Woolridge, the other winner of the 2003 exhibition, are on view in the second-floor gallery space.

### IF YOU GO

**Show:** "Sumakshi Singh & Joseph Woolridge"

**Place:** Creative Arts Workshop, 80 Audubon St., New Haven

**When:** Through Fri., Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

**Admission:** Free

**Info:** (203) 562-4927

Woolridge is totally different from Singh in all aspects of aesthetic and medium except one: Both seem to be considering issues of containment and liberation.

Woolridge's presentation is somewhat uneven; the chair pieces achieve the most success.

In each of these canvases, chairs — singly or in groups — become stand-ins for, one might guess, a human counterpart.

They are cast in odd and precarious relationships to each other, incongruous juxtapositions and alignments that suggest the uneasy complications of life. They are variously shattered, wedded, on the road to calamity, ready for inevitable collapse, possessed of a momentary balance, drifting, suspended, passive, explosive, shifting perspective, fading into undifferentiated spaces. The extreme verticality of many of the canvases tends to compress the space, perhaps to heighten the intended emotional impact.



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Sumakshi Singh's aluminum and polymer clay "Reflections" (2002).



Joseph Woolridge's "Organic Box #4" (2002) in oil on canvas.

Judy Birke of New Haven is a free-lance writer and art consultant.