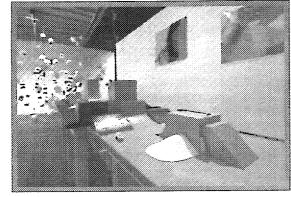
section of a tree that has been offset on the page. This repetitive, tight linearity and regimentation is further animated and embellished by Mukherjee's use of water, obsessively applied in tiny drops all along the line.



Roland Seto, Fingerboredom, 2005, wood, metal, fiberglass, 3' x 18' x 4', at Armory Northwest/965, Pasadena.

By touching a wet brush into the deep chroma, the artist forces it to open up into a myriad of small, decorative blossoms of variegated color. This patterning and the way the translucent acetate picks up and illuminates the color leads to all kinds of visual suggestions. Most have to do with nature: cross sections of polished petrified stone; verdant landmasses seen from space; the whirling night sky caught in a time lapse photograph; strands of DNA. But they also improbably suggest exotic fabrics, tied and dyed by hand then dotted with round mirrors, as well as whirling and frayed flags or banners.

Though completely beautiful, the multiple associations are oddly disconcerting and, in the end, divisive. It's difficult to find our bearings in this abstracted territory of light-infused invisibility and ambiguous bold color. It's a task made even more daunting by the sheer visual bravado of the work's scale. However, this is not true of the three smaller works in the upstairs gallery. Here, the artist's use of sharply incised folds and rich color act in concert and so create a sense of centered calm.

That's not to say these smaller works leave all visual ambiguity behind. While they each suggest an abstracted topographical landscape, they also tantalizingly seem to be flipping their vantage points on what emptiness can suggest back and forth, over and over. The large patch of inky black denseness in Black Gold could be a sucking vacuum in the earth after a mining operation or a desolate obsidian island seen from far above, complete with three dark volcanoes and a radiantly alive gold sea. Then again, it might be a patch of the night sky, pulsing with black holes glimpsed through a hole torn from a sun drenched wall. In Star Valley, the burgundy red veins that form a deep V-shaped cleft frame a white blank of space that might be seen as a patch of daytime sky haunted by the memory of three bright stars. From yet another vantage point—looking down say—the V could be a harboring cove at the edge of a strangely empty sea. In that cove three invisible points are busy sending out radiating arms of energy, as if holding on tenaciously to the shelter and solidity of the nearby landmass and staving off the insistent pull of the vast emptiness beyond.

It is these suggestions of tender narrative

that I miss most from the visual opulence of the massive work in the downstairs gallery. While all the same elements are used, only the

smaller images allow the viewer to intimately engage and ponder the dualities created by Mukherjee's shifts in perspective or the presence of folded, creased and emptied visual space. Frankly, these are so eloquent and diverse, they deserve our focused attention.

-Suvan Geer

Sandeep Mukherjee: New Work closed in December at Sister, Los Angeles.

Suvan Geer is a contributing editor to Artweek.

'Hands On' at Armory Northwest/965

ou've done it, or at least wanted to do it. I do it regularly, when no one is looking. During my BFA at the San Francisco Art Institute I once

spent an entire day at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art with the sole intention of doing it to every work in the museum-and my success rate was pretty high. It is not so much that I like to cause trouble, but I often cannot control my urge to break common etiquette and reach out and touch art. Sometimes I do it just to see if I can slip one past a museum guard. Other times, my incredulity compels me to test the legitimacy of an artist's claim, such as the time I gently kicked Tara Donovan's four-foot cube of toothpicks to test whether or not her statement that it was held together by only friction and gravity was true. It did not collapse, fueling my suspicions about the cube's construction. A friend of mine once sat on a Robert Morris sculpture after mistaking it for a bench (honest mistake). And on more than one occasion, I've seen Carl Andre's Plains momentarily reduced to nothing more than expensively tiled floors as less circumspect gallery goers wondered past the markers that delineated floor from art (ignorance is bliss). Whether deliciously surreptitious or by wholehearted mistake, touching art is generally considered taboo. Hands On, at Pasadena's

Armory Northwest annex, openly invited visitors to cross the do-not-touch boundary that separates the viewer and the viewed.

As the heavy-handed title suggests, this exhibition, which consisted of fifteen Southern California artists, was designed around work in which the viewer was expected to actively participate or-at least on some level—physically engage the various installations. Although I completely understood that it was not only expected but also necessary for me-or somebody else, but I happened to be the only one in the gallery—to interact with the work on display, at times I was confused about what I was supposed to do, and I consider myself to be one who more likely than not will pick at, touch, or crawl around an art object if given the opportunity. At other times the work simply did not generate enough interest to gain my involvement. Artwork typically has a hard enough time maintaining a viewer's eye for more than a few seconds and any work that requires more than a brief acknowledgment in order to be understood makes a demand that is seldom met. It is not my intent to excuse lazy or apathetic viewers (myself sometimes included) but an artist must realize what he or she is up against and prepare or persuade accordingly.

R. Asher's installation was comprised of a low, painted platform, which was covered in sand and accompanied by a portable stereo that belted out the theme song from the 1980s film Footloose. Presumably at some time, participants danced on the platform, gradually wearing away layers of paint. But the presence of the sand was very confusing. Was it an afterthought added as an abrasive to more quickly facilitate the erosion of paint? Nonetheless, the sand was distracting and for the most part it covered nearly all of the worn paint so that it was almost impossible to observe any record of the installation's use. Asher's Footloose (2005) is also endemic of the overuse of puns as titles throughout the exhibition. Another example is Roland Seto's Fingerboredom (2005), a scale model of a skate park intended for use with miniature skateboards known as fingerboards. I tried to imagine that this work

held some sort of cultural relevance, that it was somehow an important simulacrum of the counter-cultural experience with a veneer of affinity for the packaged idol, but in the end I decided it simply is what it is, nothing

As I tried my hand (literally) at each of the installations, I tried to recall other hands-on works that have piqued my interest over the years in order to find a frame of reference for my lack of enthusiasm here. I

remembered Chris Burden's The Other Vietnam Memorial (1991) which encouraged viewers to

turn the giant copper pages of a massive Rolodex containing millions of Vietnamese names; the experience was overwhelming, both physically and emotionally. I thought back to Dread Scott's, What Is The Proper Way to Display A U.S. Flag (1989), which included an American flag laid on the floor and required those with an answer to his question to walk across the flag in order to record it in a ledger. I also recalled Michael McMillen's Central Meridian, The Garage (1981) which, though not necessarily intended to be interactive, over the years has taken on endless additions of band stickers, notes, and other bits of ephemera left by visitors to this full-scale re-creation of a musty garage at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The premise for Hands On was not necessarily a bad one, but the quality of the work in the exhibition simply did not meet the title's challenge. On my way home, with my fetish for making literal contact with art frustrated, I stopped by LACMA and added my own contribution to McMillen's Garage only to find that it had been deinstalled. So I settled for running a finger along David Smith's Cubi XXIII.

—Tommy Freeman

Hands On closed in December at Armory Northwest/965, Pasadena.

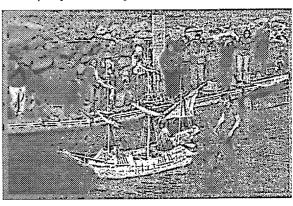
Tommy Freeman is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

Michael Arcega at MCA San Diego

sublime feeling of intellectual overload occurs while walking around Michael Arcega's exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary

Art, San Diego. Arcega, who works with diverse and often unique media in a traditional and historical way, constantly

Michael Arcega, El Conquistadork, 2004, manila folders, manila rope, wood, nylon, glue, fiberglass, foam, epoxy resin, metal, 120" x 157" x 60", at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.





COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: |DsHands On|DS at Armory Northwest/965

SOURCE: Artweek 37 no1 F 2006

PAGE(S): 17

WN: 0603204370020

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher: http://www.artweek.com/

Copyright 1982-2006 The H.W. Wilson Company. All rights reserved.