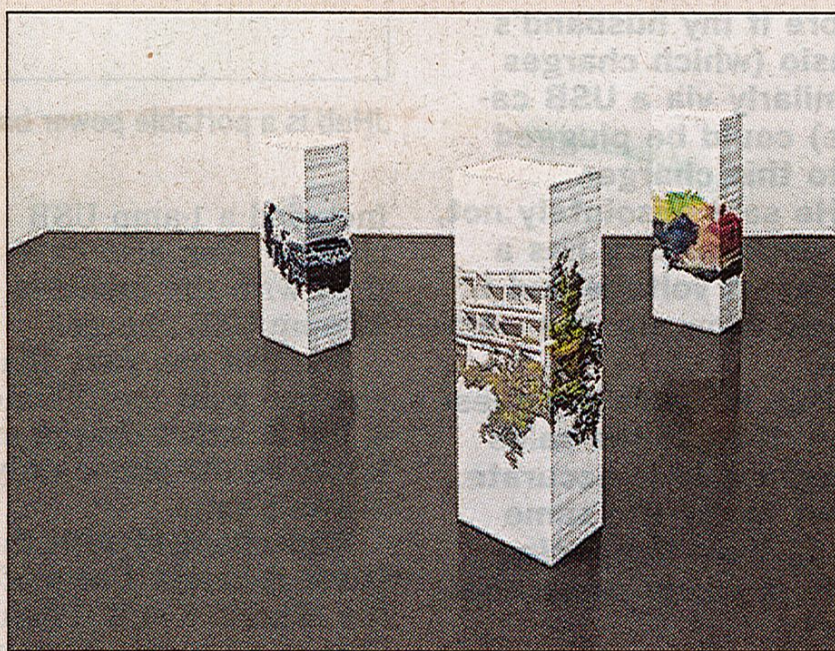




HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART

Shila Gupta created an artwork from a flap-board sign, the kind that once were common in train stations.



HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART

Images emerge on the sides of large stacks of paper in Serbian artist Aleksandra Domanovic's work.

Haggerty explores 'States of Uncertainty'

By **RAFAEL FRANCISCO SALAS**

Special to the Journal Sentinel

What becomes of a national identity if the border of a country, or its language, suddenly changes?

How does one adapt in a nation whose sovereignty has shifted?

What is a border when telecommunications bound right over them?

The Haggerty Museum of Art has organized a suite of shows that explore borders, nationhood and social and geographic instabilities. "States of Uncertainty" frames these exhibits and greets visitors to the museum. The artists represented live and work in countries where boundaries have become fluid.

Shila Gupta's artwork "24.00:01" is made from a retrofitted motion flap-board, the kind of mechani-

cal signs once common in train stations and airports. The artwork signals arrivals and departures of a different kind. The piece elicits the physical and mental state of transition, as if we are waiting to go somewhere. Text shuffles and snaps into place, seeming to cohere and then confounding. "TMIE FLIES BY" and then "NTAION FLIES BY" and then "A NTAION FLIES BY."

As I watched text clatter into new iterations, I became expectant, waiting for some kind of truth, for confirmation, for the next ride out.

I was reminded of the profound uncertainty of passing through a security checkpoint, in a liminal space between borders. We are vulnerable, without shoes, holding our pants up with our hands, our wallets stuffed into a jacket pocket to be X-rayed by strangers. We are homeless and at the mercy of the state, open to interrogation and search.

Gupta also created a monumental drawing of a flag called "Untitled (There Is No Border Here)." It is constructed flat on the gallery wall with yellow safety tape but appears dynamic and billowing, a heroic gesture, a claim staked. Layers of meaning quickly unravel as we approach the work. Printed on the tape itself are the words, "There is no border here." We see, too, that Gupta has embedded handwritten poetry into the flag.

"I tried very hard to cut the sky in half, one for my lover and one for me, but the sky kept moving and clouds from his territory came into mine . . .," she writes.

In Israeli artist Yael Bartana's film "A Declaration," we see a close-up of the Israeli flag on the invisible border between two cities, Tel Aviv and Jaffa. A muscled man rows a boat across an expanse of water to plant an olive tree on an outcropping. We might see that as an act of rebirth or reconciliation, but the symbol is ambiguous, embraced by many cultures. We are left wondering who it's for and what its fate will be.

Serbian artist Aleksandra Domanovic has stacked several thousand pages of paper. Images emerge on the sides of the paper monuments. The images, drawn from the Internet, are of once-grand Yugoslavian tourist destinations. The installation describes the "symbolic elimination of the state of Yugoslavia," referring to the destruction of the country's Internet domain.

Emilia Layden, associate curator at the Haggerty and curator of the show, has collected a group of artists who have found ways to express an increasingly pervasive condition. We are hurtling toward new definitions of boundaries, borders and country. Many of our nationalistic tropes may be left behind.

Other exhibits concurrent with "States of Uncertainty" are Mila Teshaieva's photojournalistic exhibit as well as works displayed from the Haggerty's permanent collection that reflect on the body, the self and communities.

The cycle of exhibits runs through May 31 at the Haggerty Museum of Art, 13th and Clybourn streets. For more information, go to marquette.edu/haggerty.

Rafael Francisco Salas is a painter, an associate professor of art at Ripon College, and a regular Art City contributor. Salas has work on view currently at the Portrait Society Gallery and Walker's Point Center for the Arts.