

ArtPace
445 N. Main Ave.
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Visitors to "Current," a site-specific installation by San Antonio artist Rebecca Holland, may have arrived with a "What is art?" skepticism that contemporary trends have helped to intensify. "Where is the art?" was the more pressing question as they stepped into an empty gallery that echoed footfalls and glowed with an initially indeterminate luminescence. Art, and other answers, were manifestly revealed as the eye traveled across the concrete floor and white walls to the shimmering spectacle above.

With delicate and obsessive industry, Holland applied a micro-thin skin of silver leaf (approximately 9000 small square sheets) to the 30-by-50-foot ceiling. Complicated with beams, pipes, and a rough surface that lingered

from the foundation's former life as a Hudson automobile showroom, the ceiling's erratic plane was unified by the silver leaf, which was laid out in a faint but apparent grid.

Holland's masterstroke isn't so much "object" as object lesson, quietly indicating a personal phenomenology of art as well as an open relationship with the physical and historical contexts that host her specific practices. Part Christo, part Agnes Martin, the intervention acknowledged the quirky peculiarities of the site while simultaneously imbuing it with a consciously abstracted sense of order contained in the grid's subtle frame. It's no small task for these two perspectives to coexist, but Holland's choice of silver leaf is an effective medium. It reveals as it covers, a new pattern illuminating older ones. Usually obscured by white gallery paint, the grain of the wood planks that originally supported the poured concrete ceiling were once again made visible through

the silver's reflective qualities. The nook-and-cranny patches that pockmark the surface were given extra relief by the thin material, which bounced information about depth and shape back to the viewer's eye.

An uncanny, vertigo-inducing inversion also occurred as natural and artificial light played across the surface. From deep blue to white, the color and sheen changed dramatically throughout the day, and what was once the sole privilege of the shiny, concrete floor was here also the purview of the neglected and previously unremarkable ceiling.

At its worst, contemporary art has a short memory and a self-limiting habit of ignoring the surrounding world, even as it encumbers it with additional phenomena. The beauty and generosity of Holland's "Current" was its instructive willingness to share the stage with the stage itself.

John Ewing is a writer living in San Antonio.

Rebecca Holland

"Current" (Installation view), 2000. Silver leaf applied to concrete ceiling, 576" x 348" x 192". Courtesy of ArtPace.

