Otis Faculty Development Grant Report
April 12, 2013

Siri Kaur
Assistant Professor, Foundation, Fine Arts, and Digital Media
Academic Mentoring Coordinator

In Spring 2013 I received a Faculty Development Grant in support of framing costs for four large-scale photographs that will be exhibited in the 2013 California Triennial of Photography at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego.

The Triennial is a highly prestigious exhibition showcasing the best in contemporary photography in the state of California. I will present four 50” x 65” images from my most recent series, *Half of the Whole*, an exploration of deep space through a telescope lens. In this body of work, I manipulate the color and depth of the celestial forms, playing with photography’s uncanny ability to dislocate space and time. The large scale of these works contributes to their impact, as their scale is so much larger than the viewer, creating an awareness of the physical sensation of looking. The Faculty Development Grant funds allowed me to archivally mount and frame these large images.

Participating in the Triennial advances my career, and also enhances my teaching since I plan on sharing the project with my students. I will give a talk about this work to several of my photography classes in the Fine Arts and Digital Media departments. I think it is important that our students know about their teachers’ work as artists outside the institution since it sets an inspiring example. I would love to present at Academic Assembly or any other Otis venues.

I am very grateful for the financial assistance provided by the grant; the show would not have been possible without this generous help.

Please see attached images and reviews of this work.
All images from *Half of the Whole*, 2007-2013
Rose (Darkroom Experiment #2)
50 x 65'', c-print, 2012, edition # 1 of 3
Desert (Darkroom Experiment #1)
50 x 65”, c-print, 2013, edition # 1 of 3
Black Hole (Darkroom Experiment #2)
50 x 65”, gelatin silver print, 2010, edition # 3 of 3
Clouds (Darkroom Experiment #1)  
50 x 65”, c-print, 2013, edition # 1 of 3
Kate Johnson and Siri Kaur
GARBBOUSHIAN GALLERY
427 North Camden Drive
January 15–February 12

At once minute and cosmic, the spacey photographic investigations in this exhibition play with both scale and trajectory, exerting a subtle push-pull on the viewer’s vision. The artists practice the chemistry-and-glass wonderment of early photography, perhaps all the more poignantly for having learned the lessons of Hubble, Google, and Adobe.

For the series "More Than or Equal To," 2010, Kate Johnson enclosed her camera in small mirrored funhouses, producing images of kaleidoscopic infinities. Yet visible on almost every pane is the black spot of the camera’s aperture, impounding light and drawing our vision back to earth. Indeed, this indefinitely redirected gaze is ultimately trapped, resting only on the seams between the panes of mirror—as in Untitled #16, where a beige exterior space breaks through—and on the matte fact of the photo-object itself.

Siri Kaur’s photos tend toward another possibility: that of interior reflection propeled outward. Though a couple of Kaur’s images are actual astronomical photographs made through a telescope (Defunct Russian Spy Satellite Gemini Arrangement #224RZ with Horsehead Nebula Barely Visible in Background, 2009, for example), these seem closed and timid compared with the lyric series “Darkroom Experiments,” 2009. Film grain and chemistry become stars and nebulae; in Clouds (Darkroom Experiment #1), photo wizardry thrusts us into the middle of a brilliant stellar wash. Another perceptual meditation, the diptych On the Left, Aurora Borealis, White Horse, Yukon, March 31 2008, 235 AM. On the Right, the Way I Wanted It to Look, 2008, seems to say it all.

— Travis Diehl

All rights reserved. artforum.com is a registered trademark of Artforum International Magazine, New York, NY
GALLERIST STEPHEN COHEN has put together a smashing group show. *Falling from Great Heights* is a troika of pictorial artists who cast a spell of color, shape and ethereal light that incant a phosphorescent and delightful display of lustrous images.

Siri Kaur’s dabs of mesmeric color compliment John Knuth’s dense Polaroids of smoke and mirrors. Heather Rasmussen’s handmade paper sculptures are stacked, scattered or crumpled into formations that replicate found images on the Internet of actual cargo accidents.

The three Los Angeles artists, grouped together, offer up an exhibition that showcases their individual, distinct styles yet at the same time reveals their mutual fascination with photography as a vehicle to abstract locations and space. Each artist’s work transcends the materials used to dislocate the viewer by means of manipulation, scale, and movement. All of them engage with the sublime, the beauty and fear of the spectacle of nature and the unknown.

*The show, at the Stephen Cohen Gallery on Beverly Boulevard, opens on March 28 and runs thru May 11, 2013. A few images from the exhibition appear on the following pages.*
On a crisp spring morning the early fog lifts like a fine vapor, ascending to the clouds, so that the city below the Griffith Park Observatory gains definition. Through the clunky and rusted metal binoculars perched along the perimeter, Los Angeles lays below with each neighborhood, area, and zip code appearing as one giant artery bifurcated by grids and momentarily reconnected by a freeway on ramp. The Hollywood sign now feels like a natural part of the hillside with tundra and dirt securing its position deep in the roots. The sign is a reminder that celestial stars, not the figurative kind, are still shining even though we cannot see them. Siri Kaur knows this, and it is often the stars that exist in her imagination and in the universe of her darkroom that inspire her practice, which fuses scientific inquiry with photographic exploration.
"I wanted to make photographs that are about the experience of looking."
By connecting her camera to the Meade Telescope at the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Tucson, Arizona, Kaur contained the vastness of the uncertain universe within the frame of her camera. The telescope thereby became an extension of her camera, leaving Kaur to determine the F-Stop, shutter speed and focus to properly capture the wonders of the sky. “I wanted to make photographs that are about the experience of looking,” she declares with a smile, while surveying the landscape below as her hand rests across her forehead, shielding her eyes from the rays of the sun. (Half of the Hole) is a body of work about the reflexivity of looking. First, looking through a telescope to view stars as they existed millions of years ago. Then looking at those images through the refracted lenses of the telescope and the camera. Thus, the stars are viewing Earth as it existed millions of years ago. They never will see each other in the present but only as a series of missed glances. Kaur calls this phenomenon “photographing geological time,” and in looking to the past, the uncertainties of the future seem less foreboding. Kaur then manipulates the images in her micro-universe of the laboratory where the images change in color and scale to the point where dark holes and dying stars can be contained in one’s hand. The manipulation of scale allows the work to fill the expansive bare walls of a gallery or inhabit the inner sanctum of a domestic space. The images are souvenirs of a universe inspired by astronomy that do not intend to make any scientific claims, but rather convey the “perceptual experiences” and influence of the galaxy.
Beginning with the subtractive printing methods of traditional photography, the images taken with the Meade telescope bend and become an abstract representation of a known subject. Playing with the subtleties of color, celestial furies are reborn with palettes of majestic pink, lush purples and cool blues that were inspired when looking through the lens of the telescope. Part science and pure imagination, the works in (Half of the Hole) are experiments in photographic technique and color theory, and assign humanity to one of the greatest uncertainties that surrounds us all of the time. As Kaur points out, Black Hole is the magic of illusion that while “you can’t actually photograph a black hole because it’s theoretical,” there is a great sadness in viewing a ring collapse on its own shadow and disappear into an abyss. (Half of the Hole) is about the power of the gaze—while we’re looking out to the sublime and the vastness of space our gaze is charged by an unseen, yet recognized, sense that we are also being watched.