## 'Protoplastic' exhibit has allure and grace that bypass tradition

By Fredric Koeppel

Special to The Commercial Appeal

The exhibitions at Tops Gallery tend to be spare and primal, as befits the ambiance of the small cunningly remodeled industrial space. The current exhibition, "Protoplastic" by Igor Siddiqui, is

no exception.

Siddiqui, born in Croatia in 1974, is an architect and designer who is principal and co-founder of ISSSStudio, and assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin. The everyday materials he employs in this exhibition are both humble and technologically sophisticated and tread the line between what is permanent and what is disposable, symbolizing these notions in a culture where such issues are of increased importance.

What was once as ephemeral as thought now achieves (sometimes regrettable) permanence in what we call "the cloud," a word that itself defines the concept of the transitory. Human beings die, and revered institutions fail; e-mail is

forever.

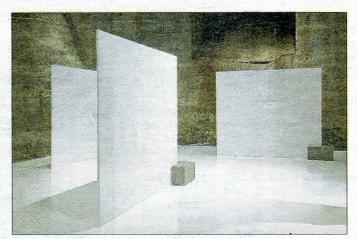
"Protoplastic" consists of six pure white square acrylic panels standing upright, held in place at one lower corner by a concrete base. Hanging from the ceiling is a flexible sculpture made from liquid plastic that the artist cooked in his kitchen. This bioplastic material is nontoxic and compostable — theoretically one could eat it — yet suspended in the gallery it takes on the strange alien aura of an object never encountered on Earth.

The acrylic panels were etched or inscribed with clean formal slightly Art Deco or Industrial Age-looking designs that were digitally produced and rendered by computer-controlled machine; their beauty is elegant, even chilly, while the loose, somewhat flowing hanging sculpture is, paradoxically, warm and earthy. The designs in the panels were used to mold the plastic sheets of the hanging sculpture, resulting in a weird synergy between these very different

It is clever, even witty, that

IMAGES COURTESY OF MATT DUCKLO, TOPS GALLERY

The "Protoplastic" exhibition by Igor Siddiqui at Tops Gallery is made up of acrylic floor panels and hanging bioplastic sculpture.



IGOR SIDDIQUI, 'PROTOPLASTIC'

At Tops Gallery, 400 S. Front (entrance on Huling), through March 29. Open Saturdays, 1 to 6 p.m., and by appointment. Call 901-340-0134 or visit topsgallery.com.

Siddiqui matched the pristine white of the acrylic panels to the gallery's white floor and the color and texture of the concrete bases to the gallery walls, making a sly reference to the site-specific genre of art-making. Lighting is extremely important in this exhibition, with the shadows of the panels and their reflections

creating intriguing patterns. The hanging sculpture, then, is the golem, as it were, in this perfect

sanctuary.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that "Protoplastic" is merely about ideas, though in that arena it is both meditative and provocative. As W.H. Auden says in one of his best-known poems, "This lunar beauty/Has no history," and in that sense these aloof objects are remote in appearance and in precedent, yet they are blessed with a sort of allure and grace that bypasses tradition.

The panels were made in an edition of three, while the bioplastic hanging sculpture is destined, almost inevitably, for the compost **David Lusk Galle** Dobbins: "The Atte Friday. Talk at 11 a created during the in Rome. Call 901-7

A2H Art Gallery, unique three-dime 2007), alumnus of 2014. Hours: 10 a.r Friday. 901-372-04

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D'Edge Art and U "Must Love Art," t Friday, Saturday a dedgeart.com.

**Dixon Gallery an** American Photogr and "Wait Watche through March 30 of self-portrait ph **Eclectic Eye. 242** Color and Shape," eclectic-eye.com.

**Gallery Fifty Six** artist S.E. Harris, Thursday, Friday; 901-276-1251. gall

**Gallery Ten Nine** "Art Madness: Art through March 28. showcase original

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