

The New York Times

Allan deSouza

*Talwar Gallery
108 East 16th Street
Flatiron district
Through March 29*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2008

Allan deSouza, born in Kenya of Indian parents, has lived in California for years, commuting between a home in Los Angeles and a teaching job in San Francisco. Partly to pass the time on the routine intercity flights, he got into the habit of taking photographs from the plane windows before takeoff, and in the air, and on landing. Recently a fellow passenger, suspecting him of terrorist activity, told him to stop photographing. His reason? Mr. deSouza couldn't be a tourist because there was nothing photogenic to shoot. So he had to be up to no good.

To the artist the dynamic of the encounter was obvious. The problem wasn't that he was taking pictures of "nothing," but that he was a brown-skinned man of uncertain ethnicity taking them. And this notion of a suddenly significant nothing came to intrigue him. It forms the subject of this odd, beautiful show.

For one group of works, he assembled into symmetrical patterns window shots — of runways, of other planes, of a wing outside a window — taken from planes preparing for takeoff, with the exact identity of the individual shots left unclear. The results suggest game boards and geometric paintings. Only at second glance do overall patterns cohere into outlines of missiles and bombs.

In a second group of collages, made from mid-air shots of clouds and landscapes, the roiling symmetrical patterns suggest firestorms, or exploding mandalas, or painterly visions of heaven and hell, images that are threatening, as the visionary often is. Little did Mr. deSouza's nervous fellow passenger suspect the radical strangers that artists are, and the rich "nothing" they see. *HOLLAND COTTER*