

Helwaser Gallery

Helwaser Gallery

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Baracks, Barbara. Art Forum, Dec. 1976, pp. 67-70.

...naturally gathered in study
...posed at P.S. 1 Hall seemed on
...ception in discipline and dis-
...stance by covering a room's
...boards with the best Palmer
...handwriting. To tell a pictographic tale
...of more detail than possible. The most
...abstract information at Sonja's hand
...words its variations, greater pressure to
...pencil has delineated lines on some
...drawings, and sometimes sawtooth
...evidence reveals the pencil actually
...wasn't lifted from the paper at all.

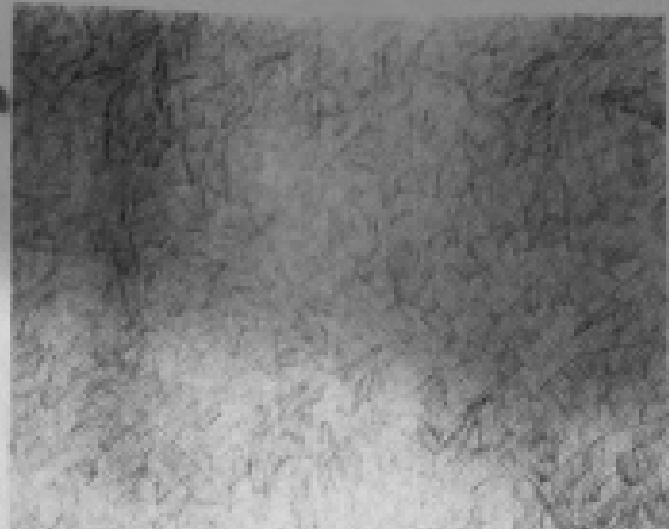
In her earlier monochromes, not on
...exhibit here, Holt applied tiny paral-
...lar brushstrokes onto canvas, wood
...panels and Plexiglas, and directly onto
...the wall. She grinds her own pigments,
...omitting commercial additives such as
...size and stabilizers, resulting in an un-
...predictable surface, with patches al-
...tered in tone or texture.

Modulating accented units through
...pencilled forms or irregular paint intro-
...duces figuration or programmed acci-
...dents to the kind of intense repetition
...found in On Kawara's date paintings or

...to LeWitt's series of wall drawings. Not
...load. But the insistence of Holt's state-
...it dissipates the picture to a shag.

...to come across as a...
...ground is anyone not willing to move in
...and on it. RICHARD RUSCHNER's
...foot platform began a few inches off
...the ground at its west end and rose,
...assisted by a drop in the plate level, to
...21" at its east end. Five feet wide and
...scooped on top of a four-inch deep soil
...bed, the structure stood like an aircraft
...launcher or diving board, fairly remote
...from the recessed office building with
...which it shared the northwest corner of
...the plaza.

Viewed up its 21" from the low end, the
...step of soil evolved like a green thumb
...against the East River masonry a few
...blocks away. Seen on-ground level from
...any other angle, the maze of pine sup-
...ports took precedence. As its every five
...feet provided the basic supporting
...posts. Longitudinal runners and trans-
...verse ties linking parallel posts were



Barack Holt, Untitled detail, 1976, granite on paper, 6 x 21"



Barack Holt, Untitled detail, 1976, granite on paper, 6 x 21"

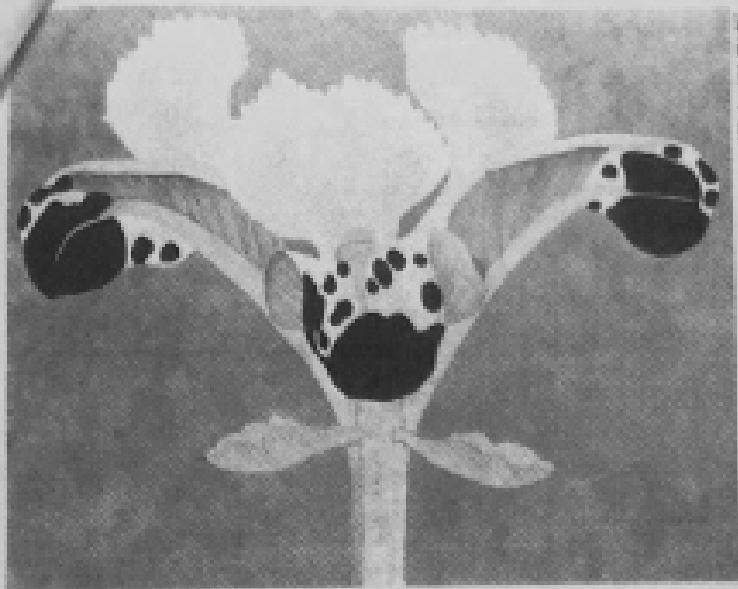


Photo: Andrew Ross/Photo: 1978, © 1978, Robert Morris

laid out on the ground surface, and diagonal struts provided reinforcing support. Ducking under the struts, I walked along until the sloping roof made further progress impossible. The crossbeams and posts had entrapped me.

But walking up the ramp transforms the roof into a platform, prisoner into potential conqueror. Halfway up the sod, however, the platform shook spasmodically, despite its steel reinforcing, under my footstep. In going any higher I'd be closing off the option of blandly jumping off the construction should all else fail. Though the platform's end lacked a Minotaur, a piece of laboratory cheese, a swimming pool, or a breathtaking view of New York, I took my eye in my hands, made the ascent, then reentered posthaste.

Mazes—from experimental lab to Robert Morris' *Labyrinth*, 1974—generally compel spatial involvement. Once you're in, fear, boredom, hunger, or intellectual curiosity reach the way out. Fleischer's mazes are known for short-circuiting such pressure: the maze-knower has the option of moving across rather than with the maze pattern, to save environment without adrenal assault. His *Sod Maze* at the 1974 *Movements* exhibition in Newport, Rhode Island, let me view through low winding hunchbacks of sod in the garden of Chelsea-wal-Mart, 196 Bluff, 1972, as

Rehoboth, Massachusetts, was grown out of soft walls of Sudan grass, in which the maze was created by preventing grass growth with strips of masonite and plastic. Escape from *Sod Maze* gave the pleasant vantage of height; escape from *Bluff* involved the mild adventure of thrusting one's way through this artificial wild of Massachusetts. In either case, the escape began with the anticipation of passage through a maze.

But Fleischer's very recent work escapes preconceived notions of a maze. *Sited Work*, exhibited this autumn at the "Sculpture Street" show of the Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, was a maze as loose in its demands as *Sod Construction* was tight. Pairs of photographs were exhibited at over twenty different sites; one photograph was of the site itself, the other photograph of another location or object elsewhere in the world. The mazes' worldwide instances were proffered in 1990s, but linked in the mind. Compare this with *Sod Construction*: a vertical maze, like ocean liner, rigidly walled by bars on the bottom and gravity on top, offering no options beyond a self-made dare.

In their extreme approaches, both these pieces are the special kind of maze which doesn't appear to be a maze until the participant is already in its tolls. Unfortunately, exploring *Sod Construction* in functional Ham-

manthrop Pizza felt tantamount to public exhibitio niam. Maybe after its three-month stand Fleischer will find means to reassemble it in other surroundings.

BUFFIE JOHNSON'S ten paintings of *Andra Zane* are barely so many flowers strewn along the path of her years of research into a prehistoric goddess who has left her mark throughout ancient mythology. Johnson has left similar marks on her paintings of pods and flowers, in the resonance of some of their lines, such as *Peasibee* and *Circus*, and in her positioning of their seeds to the picture plane so that *Foldedhead* resembles a curled-up embryo and *It's an altar*. For many years she worked as an Abstract Expressionist and painter of large murals; her oil on linen, plant series, begun in the late '60s, reintegrated her painting and philology.

Her 1975 Palm Beach Gallery show of over 40 paintings revealed the working method of a material conscious of degrees of scale. First she makes a small oil study, later expanded to a medium-sized painting, often painted once more as a large-sized work. This metamorphosis wasn't traced at the *Andra Zane* show. Each painting—from the intimate *Peasibee* (I'm told its large version was excluded because I couldn't fit through the door) to the 82 by 71" *Ephesus*—was presented as an integral work

without alternate sizes.

Unlike Chaeffler's *The White Trumpet Flower*, Johnson's flowers never leap festively into the picture. They maintain the poise of portraiture, full-face, three-quarters, profile. Various textures, spriggy, or lavishly petalled, their exotic structure and fine detail are riveterlike, a world apart from most Photo-Realists.

Through her attention to the object's detail, she leads us into metaphorical perception in which a substance is the emblem of more subtle realities. Behind the recede of plant life and, she seems to be indicating, revelations involve history. The muted colors often used are part of this perception, around and inside of which she sometimes presents a flourish of bright color, like the gift of insight and recognition. All the paintings are carefully shaded in background and on the object's surfaces, creating a personal depth similar to good backlighting in three-dimensional space. Her range of tones is achieved by mixing colors on the palette.

In *The White Goddess* a warm pink field surrounds the light pink flower painted in delicate strokes; toward the flower's core a thicket of white stamens is topped by yellow anthers. *Opium's* yellow pod capped with a jaunty orange top shaped like a pagoda roof is sombered by the brown windowlike holes through which the pod's spores will be expelled. *It's a pale brown and beige ruff* reflects some our roundly swarmingly forlike structure garlanded with violet color in the shape of a horseshoe. Out of the magenta ring of tiny carpeles rises a staminal pod of yellow edged in cerulean blue. The flower is virtually a design for an altar, on whose shrine Johnson might place the Great Goddess of *Circus*, already half-forgotten by 1,500 B.C. at the invasion of the patriarchal Mycenaeans. One of her roles was lady of the Plants.

This brackets the borders of political art on the one hand, and hermetic symbolism on the other. But at the heart of the matter, the issues of implications in the paintings themselves stop short of overreaching. You can say I better with *Flowers I can recall*; technique is there.

—BARBARA BARRACKS

CY TWOMBLY, Leo Castelli Gallery
updown; BRUCE BOICE, Sonnabend
Gallery; ROBERT STACKHOUSE,
Sculpture Now; LARRY ZOR, Andre
Emmerich Gallery updown

CY TWOMBLY's new works were