

the difference between sudden early afternoon and sweltering sunset: moodily change with the scenes.

It's unfortunate that Connor's work so readily invites such comparison, for she seems to aim at more than imitation or pastiche. Her pictures describe a world filled with relics. She attempts modern pastorals of wrenched bodies with a self-consciously archaic style: Gilded trees perform an ancient dance; pieces of leather are laid on walls of rustic collages, and Connor's antiquated manner stresses the irreflexivity of their vision from our experience.

Too often, though, the images and not the worlds they create seem out of place. Connor's technical and formal effects have deflected her from a more complex historic. When she asks more of herself photographically, she shows how far her means—she might go: she can make boulders in water look as flat and weightless as fly paper; she can be explicit and disjunctive when she photographs a filed painting of a leaping, curving trout; she can, with just-possible a nude to a painted crucifixion and make Jesus appear to dance in contrast to the woman's scriptural wilderness.

Transformations, inventions and abstractions like these are more pertinent to photography's recent concerns, as are some of her subjects—like a glowing pyramid of tin cans or a park bench. A stunning, balanced Central American hillside seen from high above; problems in teaching contemporary photographic landscapes like Joe Deal, Nicholas Hiron and Robert Adams; despite the self-focus, haze. And when serpentine branches turn a tree into an Air Hoyerdan about the glowing chain-link fence that surrounds the low preserves a lens into with the cultural present.

Connor's best pictures tell of a truly fabulous created world and suggest that her style could evoke the conditions that accompany a more inventive manipulation of ordinary appearances, description and experience, her work approaches but they will yet achieve fabrication, exhilaration, ecstatic flights of artifice. She seems to grope for the distance that marks such semantic art (see Riboud).

Right now, though, it's an interesting experiment in romantic expression: the Muses, in as stylistic objects. To succeed, it needs better, more varied, more hyperbolically photographic artifice, and a more thoughtful selection of things in the world that will specifically articulate the ideas that concern her. The landscape and conventions of pictorialist photography, no matter how expertly handled, aren't enough for modernist romanticism.

—Barbara

Italo Scanga at the Clocktower

Italo Scanga's exhibition at the

Clocktower spanned work of eight years. The installation suggested a European church with side chapels, and you had to kneel to see some of the pieces properly. Included were an early set of narrative sculptures, many of his blown-glass vessels, several religious statues—hacked, painted and supported in uneasy postures behind glass—and a selection of his paintings done over religious prints. Reed-wrapped farm tools leaned against some of the paintings. The practically useful was connected with the spiritually suggestive; the rake, its tines wrapped in reeds, managed to evoke both the notion of a transcendent cultivation and the martyrdom of those Christians killed with farm tools.

Seven small sculptures, his most recent work, were displayed upstairs on two rough wood shelves resembling mantelpieces. This setting made the pieces accessible. You wanted to handle them—but gingerly, as you might china, or an icon. The sculptures looked made at home, made at leisure of things at hand. In his small pieces Scanga uses cork as a core into which thorns, horns and bones have been thrust. Other elements are glued on. Five of the pieces are set on little marble bases, presumably to make them important and official, but the bases make them look garish, like trophies.

Compositionally, these sculptures refer to early Constructivism. Scanga appropriates the Russians' strong diagonal moves off a right-angled grid, and suggests their centripetal spin. His sculptures are flatter and less geometric than their Russian predecessors, and, of course, Scanga's raw materials work against a strictly formal reading: a thorny branch can't be seen as just a line, a rough piece of cork as a plane, or a bone as a cylindrical volume. Each piece includes a small wooden cross, explicit or not, which acts as a compositional locus. Although we try to reduce the crosses to pairs of intersecting lines, they keep asserting themselves as symbolic. This is Scanga's intent: "I use religious imagery as a reference point to heighten the feeling of cultural ambivalence now that politics has taken the place of folklore and religion."

The pieces evoke homely habits of Christian belief. We see the materials for their associations with our mortality, and sort the perishable from the enduring. Cork, the bark of a tree, is a material once alive but now dead, a wood which will not burn, matter with volume but little mass; it is mysterious in its contradictions. Bits of cloth are impaled on the thorns. The interpenetrations begin to seem violent, no longer just functional ways of joining things. The marble or bone in every piece, a white, cool element, extends this play of religious associations.

In *Untitled*, 1978, a cork is pierced by a stick and so made into a buoy or a net float; thorns stick in a vertical column made of corks; a fish's backbone swims under a cork plane. The

sculpture invokes the importance of the fish in Christian tradition; irresistibly we invest Scanga's imagery with Western culture's central religious myth, vitiated though it may be.

—Wade Saunders

Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe at Miller

One room of the gallery was devoted to Mapplethorpe's photos of the many aspects of Patti Smith framed singly, double or triply in his characteristically fancy frames. They are square in format, blown up from 2½-inch negatives to 20 by 16 inches. The largest room contained their Smith's drawings and four photo/drawing/poetry collaborations by the two artists. A small room featured a movie of a dive made by the photographer but it was on the TV when we were there.

These facts inform their work. We all know that Mapplethorpe is an accomplished photographer and that Patti Smith is a rockroll musician and a poet and a success and famous. Some of us know all along that she draws. Those same people generally know that Patti and Robert lived together for a long time on 23rd Street and that through the vicissitudes of love, separation and renewal they have remained intensely and inseparably linked. It would be ludicrous to say that the double-exposure back-slapping or what I've heard referred to as egg-type. They are not Paul and Linda, nor are we doing with two little people who have to hang together or fall apart. Both Mapplethorpe and Smith are men the tops of their professions and certainly don't need this kind of type to fight attention.

To have successfully vanquished the forces that conspire to tear people apart is in itself an accomplishment. Very few relationships survive fame, especially those formed before fame. It is their deep bond that is on show here, that puts questions of what is good or bad art to the side. This is not to side-step the issue. Smith's drawings are extremely intimate evocations of the same obsessions that charge her poetry—a species of homage fixation that revolves around Picasso, Riboud, Jane Bowen and Mapplethorpe himself sketched in a personal scrawl done in colored pencils. As enigmatic as her better known work in music and poetry, The Mapplethorpe photos are pretty straightforward portraits sometimes obscured with pabble-glass or gauze: all but one in black and white. They are all "classic" photos. His portraits, I must confess, never give me the charge that his ECM high icons do. For this we must turn to the four collaborations in the show where we get to see the mutilated genitals and swollen testicles (yes that are his signatures).

It isn't, however, of too much importance what one says about these

works, how they stack up as art. Their friendship is the masterpiece. What's on show, the works, is documentation or artifact; its importance is that it was made by these people. Two works nearby: Mapplethorpe photos are always beautiful but a Mapplethorpe photo of Patti Smith is, well, history. By the same token even if Patti had no talent for drawing (it's only gravy that the drawings are fine) the lovely drawing of Riboud in the show would be something to have: the way a Vertais of Riboud would be something to have. Smith in approaching Riboud, is in itself company (Picasso, Farin, Lador, etc.). She holds the Riboud franchise for her generation.

My favorites in the show were a collaboration consisting of a Mapplethorpe photo of a pair of clamped and bleeding testicles with Smith scribbling and writing around it, the drawing Riboud 1, and the photo of Patti holding her necklaces: "Various Riboud, Smith, Mapplethorpe: we are dealing here with a network of homage and swapped identities, like Plaf and Cocteau; people who would die within minutes of each other."

—Rene Ricard

Ray Johnson at Brooks Jackson Iolas

In Ray Johnson's recent show at Iolas, his first in New York for some time, the master of the throwaway gesture presented a series of whimsical silhouette portraits with collaged elements. Much of the traditional art world (and sometimes beyond) was represented including Lawrence Alloway, David Soudon, William Burroughs, Craig Corbome, Gertrude Stein, among living artists you could find Willem de Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Louise Nevelson, Andy Warhol, while Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Joseph Cornell added a touch of surrealistic class.

Johnson treated the simple black-and-white silhouettes representing objects on small square masonite papers which had been colored a variety of grays and banded and rubbed to give a low-thru texture. Over the framework he added a wide selection of funny little images directly onto the surface of the paper raised on little blocks or hanging from little hooks. The additional material was drawn from Johnson's little, Surrealist-inspired stock of pictures: two-headed snakes, tentacles, snails, Sheryl Temple, Mickey Mouse, to name but a few.

The resulting portraits, combining the shadowy presence of the subject and the persistent, object-like presence of Johnson's turning commentary. Some of the associations seemed oblique and personal in the extreme, others were made available to public understanding. One of the wildest combined the profiles of those two modern tastemakers, Craig