

2 blossoms at the Rose

■ Modern sculptors' two- and three-dimensional pieces and Robert Smithson's photos grace Brandeis museum



Rona Pondick's "Red Bowl" (1993), full of plastic heads with bared teeth (top), and David Smith's untitled ink and egg tempera (1952) are featured at the Rose Art Museum.

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Living Arts

By Christine Temin
GLOBE STAFF

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ALTHAM - Sculptors draw. They also take photographs. The interplay between their work in two dimensions and three is the subject of a pair of fine exhibitions at the Rose Art Museum, the larger a sampling of the Rose's permanent collection, the smaller a solo show of photographs by Robert Smithson, a pioneer Earthwork artist in the 1960s.

Art Review

In "Contemporary Sculpture and Sculptors' Drawings," Rose curator Susan Stoops offers a choir of sculptural voices, minimalist to funky, and explores themes including the grid, counting and ordering, and building by increments. The works strike up enough of a conversation with each other - and with you - that you don't feel the

A choir of sculptural voices at Brandeis

■ ROSE
Continued from Page D1

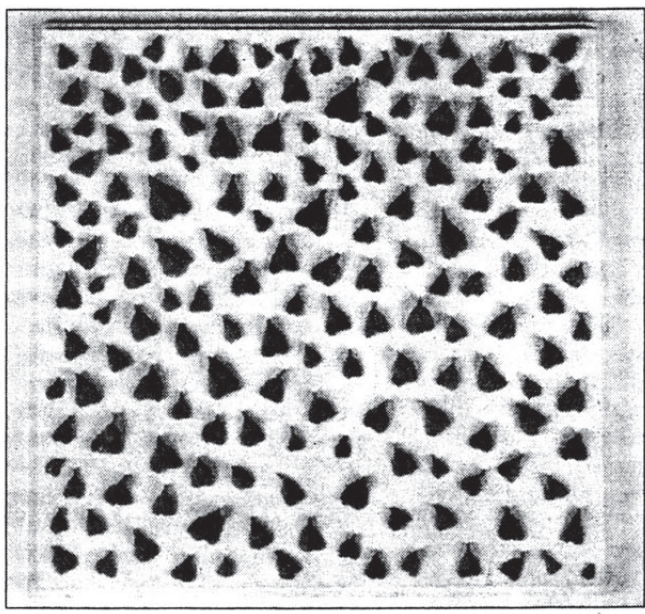
need of wall text or catalog to explain what's going on. The purist approach, letting the art speak for itself, works well here.

Consider, for instance, the sly play with angles in works by Joel Shapiro and Sol LeWitt. Shapiro's "Untitled (Jerusalem I)" drawing is black lines leaning this way and that, all interdependent save for a single stray off to the left, tilting precariously in the direction of its brethren. LeWitt's "Incomplete Open Cube," one of his white-enamel-on-aluminum pieces that tend to look like playground equipment, is missing some of its limbs, teasing your eye to fill them in.

Spare black-and-white works on paper by various artists are some of the strongest pieces in the show, and none is more potent than Richard Serra's "St. Louis VI," a rugged wall of black oil stick, listing and lurching, its tilt contradicting the settled stasis of the paper's rectangle. Serra's drawings share the majestic tidal-wave quality of his sculpture. Carol Keller's little untitled ink drawing is the opposite. A quivering vertical with a thin stream of ink trickling from its bottom, it looks as if it's bleeding to death.

Like other contemporary artists from Mario Merz to On Kawara, Jonathan Borofsky is obsessed with numbers. In "Organic Loop (31 Numbers)," he bends steel wire into numerals that hang on the wall in a lopsided circle, angled every which way, their significance scrambled. Joseph Kosuth's "Here Is an Example" also short-circuits the meaning of common symbols: The words of the title are spelled out in blue neon, but the promised "Example" fails to follow.

Jackie Winsor, Jackie Ferrara, and Carl Andre all nod to architecture, building a fence, a wall, and a box, respectively. Their materials are mundane - ordinary wood for Winsor and Ferrara,



Hannah Wilke's "Needed-Erase-Hers," a work of kneaded erasers on wood, can be read as anatomical or botanical.

cast cement for Andre - and so is the positioning of their work, directly on the floor, without the intervention of pedestals.

Hannah Wilke's "Needed-Erase-Hers" is on a pedestal, but a low one that only enhances its vulnerability. You look down on the piece, which is a flurry of erasers kneaded into bulbous little shapes you could read as anatomical or botanical.

The show gracefully mixes big names with local artists who can hold their own in this company. Mags Harries is one. In Harries's drawing "Emerging/Submerging," verticals create a thick forest in which an apparition of gloves, one of her signature subjects, appears to advance and retreat simultaneously. There's also a strong contingent of young artists who trained at Boston art schools, including Sheila Pepe, Bethany Bristow, and Oliver Nikolich, whose "Preserving What Is Mine - 337015398" is a wall's worth of singed pho-

ROBERT SMITHSON: SLIDEWORKS
and CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE AND
SCULPTORS' DRAWINGS
At: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University,
Waltham, through Dec. 20

tographs curled into airtight glass jars, and steel trees with barren, broken branches, evoking lost landscapes and lives.

There's a fair share of goofiness here as well, a favorite example being Rona Pondick's "Red Bowl," which looks like an innocent bowl of apples from a distance. Up close, it turns out the apples are heads with open mouths and bared teeth: You can almost hear the chattering and cackling.

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Most of the works in "Contemporary Sculpture and Sculptors' Drawings" were made after the death in 1973 of Robert Smithson, an artist who profoundly affected those who came later. He is best known for his 1970 "Spiral Jetty," a 1,500-foot stone and soil walkway coiling into the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Few people, though, saw "Spiral Jetty" in person: Most know it through photography and film, important transmitters of Smithson's art. Among his other achievements, Smithson challenged the traditional encounter between art and audience in gallery or museum.

His scale veered from very big to very little, with his Slideworks - actual slides - in the latter category. They not only documented the Earthworks he created with the aid of bulldozers and dump trucks; they were also intended as art in their own right, as tiny, humble, and portable as the Earthworks were mammoth, grand, and fixed. The 62 photographs at the Rose, most not previously published or exhibited, are not only made from the slides, they're also a documentation of them. And there is further documentation in a

Continued on next page



"Photo-Marker" (1968), one of 62 photographs by Robert Smithson in the "Slideworks" show at Brandeis University.

Smithson bypassed tradition

Continued from preceding page

particularly lovely catalog, edited by guest curator Carlo Frua, which juxtaposes photographs of Smithson's transformation of landscapes both industrial and wild with his own words, cryptic and elliptical. Like his art, his writing bypassed convention.

Playing with time and transience, Smithson would deploy mirrors in the landscape and photograph the results. Or he'd photograph a landscape, put the photo in the landscape, and rephotograph the whole thing. He played tricks with those landscapes, "planting" trees upside

down, rearranging rocks, using the mirrors to create shafts of light when the sun wouldn't oblige.

In addition to the photographs, the Rose show includes Smithson's 1969 "Closed Mirror Square," a heap of rock salt with a mirror embedded in the top. In this disquieting marriage of nature and artifice, salt has been removed from its customary context, transported into an otherwise pristine gallery, sculpted into a Euclidean form, and treated as a setting for a mirror that invites you to peer down into it, like Narcissus staring into a glassy reflecting pool.