

## Robert Smith

When a young American from Boston decides to live and work in Madrid, he obviously has chosen a situation which will isolate him from his roots and from the U.S. mainstream. Robert Smith, who at 28 has made his home in Madrid after spending a couple of years in Essaouira, Morocco, belongs to no recognizable school and is completely divorced both from the new generation of Spanish artists as well as from his compatriots. I know of very few younger U.S. artists today who have developed such an original and exciting iconography along with such a totally personal manner, and perhaps the reason is just because Smith has willingly separated himself from the informed and inbred North American aesthetic.

Smith's drawing at first gives an untamed impression, yet upon further examination one finds an extraordinary built-in terseness and discipline as one's eye follows the wayward squiggles, hatchings, dots and lines. This individual calligraphy describes first and foremost dream-states of the artist's mind as he conjures up remembered experiences, familiar surroundings, lovers, strangers and often exotic reminiscences. Such an allusive poetic art, aided always by a verbal description or a half-sentence, goads the viewer's own imagination into awakening half-forgotten memories and feelings.

Nothing is excluded as a means: if leaves, grass or flower petals are necessary, then they must be collaged onto the drawing and if Smith wishes to denote a personage, pale, almost undiscernable arabesques scratched into the paper will suffice with his own lipstick mouth pressed to the paper. Delicacy is the great virtue of many of these

works, and often they are so evanescent that just a wash of pale colour denotes atmospheric space. Yet as light and gossamer as some of the drawings seem, there is nothing insubstantial about them and we must go back time and again to look for some additional meaning or sensation that has previously escaped us.

Smith's new environmental constructions and hangings, on the other hand, indicate a stronger and more positive emotional state, often downright aggressive despite their distant and detached colour, and their wide fields of bland texture (usually acres of pale green commercial canvas). The artist himself feels in these works that he has found a stronger and more dynamic identity and experimental as these works are, with their heavy outlines and ironic lace edgings, their collaged popular images and found objects, they indicate an exciting new direction that his work has taken.

Considered altogether, Smith's collages, hangings and environmental constructions are remarkable for their sensitivity and diversity of means, and especially for their poetic content and their sheer romantic appeal.

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