

ART REVIEW: Toni Ross Melds Stone and Straw in “Permanent Transience”

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by Eric Ernst

In the current Parrish Road Show exhibition, “Toni Ross: Permanent Transience,” at Marders in Bridgehampton, Toni Ross continues to expand upon the vocabulary of site-specific land art in her use of the post-Minimalist ethos of melding together elements of installation, process, and some of the theatricality of performance art.

Rising in the immediate wake of the ascension of Minimalism and Conceptual art in the late 1960s, land art (or Earth art as it is also known), evolved as a result of the emergence of the environmental movement coupled with a reaction by artists to the proliferating commercialization of the art world writ large.

At the same time, artists were also searching for new venues where the display and experience of the creative process would allow the viewer to transcend the physical and atmospheric limitations of traditional galleries or museums. As the seminal land art sculptor Robert Smithson once noted, “a work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge, and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world.”

This desire to create both concrete and conceptual connections outside the rarified environs of a structured exhibition space echoes throughout Ross’s installation at Marders. Using three existing large boulders, the artist then fashioned cube-like geometric constructs, using bales of hay, that partially envelop the outside stones.



*Untitled works by Toni Ross in The Parrish Road Show off-site exhibition
“Toni Ross: Permanent Transience.” Photo by Eric Ernst.*

The effect is a fascinating visual relationship wherein the artist is able to conjure dramatic juxtapositions drawn from the works’ diverse elements. These pieces also create a feeling of intersection in which the dissimilar components establish their compatibility regardless of their different physical characteristics.

Even more striking is the mysterious sensation of motion Ross is able to evoke, as if the boulders were either retreating into or exiting from their hay bale containment. As a result, the works rather eloquently embody the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich’s observation that what he called “dynamic art” can create a moment establishing “a movement which our eyes cannot catch although it can be felt.”



Detail from a series of untitled works by Toni Ross in The Parrish Road Show off-site exhibition "*Toni Ross: Permanent Transience*." Photo by Eric Ernst.

The air of mystery that the artist generates is further enhanced by the construction of the hay bales themselves, with the different crosshatching of each bale creating an organic tableau of intersecting and contrasting frameworks. This aspect of symmetrical abstract imagery is further emphasized by the artist's use of what appears to be burnt areas of the straw to fashion horizontal and vertical "lines" across the surface of the piece. These geometric elements form a visual sensibility reminiscent of the works of Mondrian and other painters associated with the De Stijl movement of the early 20th century.

In addition, by cutting rectangular holes in the hay-bale cubes, Ross underscores the sense of enigmatic structure in these pieces by hinting that something lies within, that the space inside contains something more than simply a hollow void.



Detail from a series of untitled works by Toni Ross in The Parrish Road Show off-site exhibition "*Toni Ross: Permanent Transience*." Photo by Eric Ernst.

BASIC FACTS: "Toni Ross: Permanent Transience" is on view August 20 through September 5, 2016 at Marders, 120 Snake Hollow Road, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. The site-specific installation exhibition is part of the Parrish Art Museum's off-site "Parrish Road Show" exhibition series. www.parrishart.org

"Toni Ross: Permanent Transience" is the second off-site exhibition in the 2016 series for the Parrish Art Museum. The first, "Bastienne Schmidt: Archeology of Time," was on view from August 7 to 24, 2016 at the Sag Harbor Whaling and Historical Museum. Click [here](#) to read a review.