

Art in Review

Lisa Ross

Traces of Devotion

Nelson Hancock Gallery
111 Front Street, No. 204, Dumbo,
Brooklyn
Through May 8

Nelson Hancock Gallery is fairly new. It has been in business for just a year and could not observe its first anniversary with a more beautiful and auspicious show than this one of photographs by Lisa Ross.

Although based in New York, Ms. Ross traveled far for these pictures, to the Taklamakan Desert in Xinjiang, the region in western China. The area is home to the Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking people who largely practice Sufism, a mystical, pacifistic form of Islam.

Sufi devotion focuses on generations of saints, "Friends of God," and specifically on their burial sites. Such graves dot the Taklamakan, indicated by the most fragile of markers: dried branches staked vertically in the ground or piled up to serve as prayer huts. What makes the markers visually distinctive is the way they are ornamented by visiting pilgrims with amulets, dolls and ribbon-like strips of bright-colored cloth, brilliant against a landscape of unbroken sand-brown.

An awareness of transience lies at the heart of all devotion, and it finds an apt emblem in these grave markers, bent and tattered by the wind. Ms. Ross's photographs hint at a less elemental source of destruction, too. The Chinese government, intent on making the area accessible to the rest of the country, is building new roads. And as they pave the desert, they suppress the religious traditions that have, against all odds, flourished there. Politics is its own functionalist faith, a powerfully coercive one. In time, and not much time, it could transform Ms. Ross's exquisite anthropological images of living monuments into documents of relics.

HOLLAND COTTER

Alan Gussow

Oils, 1950-1980

Babcock Galleries
724 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street
Through April 28

An artist, writer, teacher and environmental activist, Alan Gussow (1931-1997) saw nature as his prime subject. Closely observing its phenomena and moods, he conveyed them in Abstract Expressionist-de-

blue and brown with touches of yellow and lavender, evokes the murmur of a forest. GRACE GLUECK

Al Hansen

Andrea Rosen
525 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through April 29

The sexy girl popped up everywhere in the 1960's. She appeared as Tom Wesselmann's "Great American Nude" series, Andy Warhol's Marilyns, Michael Snow's Walking Woman, Mel Ramos's soft-core pin-ups and Roy Lichtenstein's love-sick comic book heroines. As a voluptuous silhouette called Venus, she animated the collages of Al Hansen (1927-1995), surveyed in this compact retrospective.

Hansen was an early Happening artist, but he is best remembered for collages using chocolate candy bar wrappers. Noticing that the word Hershey contained two feminine pronouns, Hansen began in the early 60's cutting out and pasting up the wrappers' silver-on-brown letters into densely patterned collages shaped like curvy female torsos. He created all-over fields of typography on wood panels as well, but the female silhouettes, tattooed with words like "Her," "She," "Hey," "Yes" and other permutations of the letters from the wrapper, remain his most exciting works. With delightful exuberance, they reflect the erotic extroversion and vulgar commercialism of the decade of the sexual revolution.

Hansen also constructed totem-like, faux-primitive sculptures of female torsos by gluing together hundreds of filtered cigarette butts or wooden matches. And he made sculptures of miniature towers and of an ocean wave out of matchsticks. These sculptures call to mind that species of folk art known as Tramp Art. Hansen was an urbane descendant of Kurt Schwitters and a clever Pop artist, but there is also an outsider aspect to his work. It could be mistaken for the art of an ingenious, slightly crazy street person.

KEN JOHNSON

Andy Warhol

Warhol's World: Photography and Television

Zwirner & Witkin
32 East 67th Street
Through April 29

This exhibition of 313 previously unexhibited and unpublished photo-



Nelson Hancock

A photograph by Lisa Ross of a Sufi burial site in western China.

record one version of that ever-shifting accidental community of the rich, famous and otherwise interesting and the people they attract. Warhol was in both camps, as much a fan as a star, which made him uniquely equipped to capitalize on the momentary intimacies of parties.

He loved beauty, as repeated images of Debbie Harry, Bianca Jagger and Jean-Michel Basquiat attest. But strangeness was also fine. Halston is shown chatting with an exquisitely made-up woman whose large, gesticulating hand rears between them as if from a hidden grave. Not only does it seem to belong to a third party, it suggests that she might be a he.

Nearly a tenth of the images include Warhol himself, looking more or less ill at ease. The best show him in some degree of drag, when he, too, was at his most beautiful.

ROBERTA SMITH

ment of light through an opening which is fundamental to the me-

A photograph of the big, e trapezoidal window at the Wl Museum of American Art evok camera's physiognomy — spec ly, the lens. So does a triptyc voted to a hexagonal window house that Konstantin Melniko in Moscow in 1927-29.

These photographs are perm with an air of preciousness that least interesting aspect of pl raphy, Modernism and archite separately or in combination. extremely well done, they prov less is not always more and su that, whether artistic or docum ry, Ms. Lambri's vision need panding.

ROBERTA S

Gianni Motti