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'Slough'

The official greeter for this delightful, sprawling show, curated by artist Steve DiBenedetto, was Fabian Marcaccio's construction of a head vomiting flowers (2008-9). It vividly introduced the primary conceit behind the more than 40 works in this show: out of rot springs life; out of old art comes new.

Erkennbares Blumen Still-Leben (Barely Recognizable Flowers Still Life, 1977/79), which both recalls the artist's garbage assemblages and parodies the old-fashioned still-life tradition. To the life of the Roth were two Warhol "piss paintings," which explicitly link excretion to artistic creation. Meanwhile on the back wall was Malcolm Morley's huge painting *The Theory of Catastrophe* (2004), featuring a monstrous traffic smashup. With Morley the theme drifted from natural decay to man-made destruction.



Dieter Roth, *Schlecht Erkennbares Blumen Still-Leben*, 1977/79, paint, graphite, and cardboard on wood, 22" x 17". David Nolan.

The show sounds unbearably solemn, but in fact it was so varied and, at the same time, so conceptually unified that it came together as a fascinating exploration of the creative process, played out in painting, video, assemblage, photography, and sculpture. Hermann Nitsch's large painting dominated by a menacing red blot might have skewed things toward violence, but Markus Lüpertz's *Landschaft Schwarz* (Black Landscape, 1998) looks back to an almost Gothic juxtaposition of nature and brooding darkness. Vito Acconci's four photographs documenting *Seedbed* (1972), a performance in which the artist masturbated under a ramp at Sonnabend Gallery, could be viewed as a portrayal of the site of an obscene event that would become a cleansed space where life could begin again.

This was not a summer show of miscellaneous pieces but a meticulously staged demonstration of an idea. The mix of artists—living, dead, young, old—enacted the vitality of the compost heap, of the grave festooned with blooming lilacs.

—Alfred Mac Adam