

Galleries

Penone sees the stature in nature

By Alan G. Artner

Art critic

ITALIAN SCULPTOR Giuseppe Penone creates objects that grow in the mind. Their impact at first or second glance is minimal, but the poetry with which they give form has a way of lingering and imparting a stature that was not immediately apparent.

Certainly the idea behind his 10 pieces at the Museum of Contemporary Art has been expressed before. One thinks of Dennis Oppenheim's 1970 photomontages titled "Identity Transfer." The third panel showed him pressing his thumb into soft earth, leaving a fingerprint, exerting dominion, presenting man and nature as one.

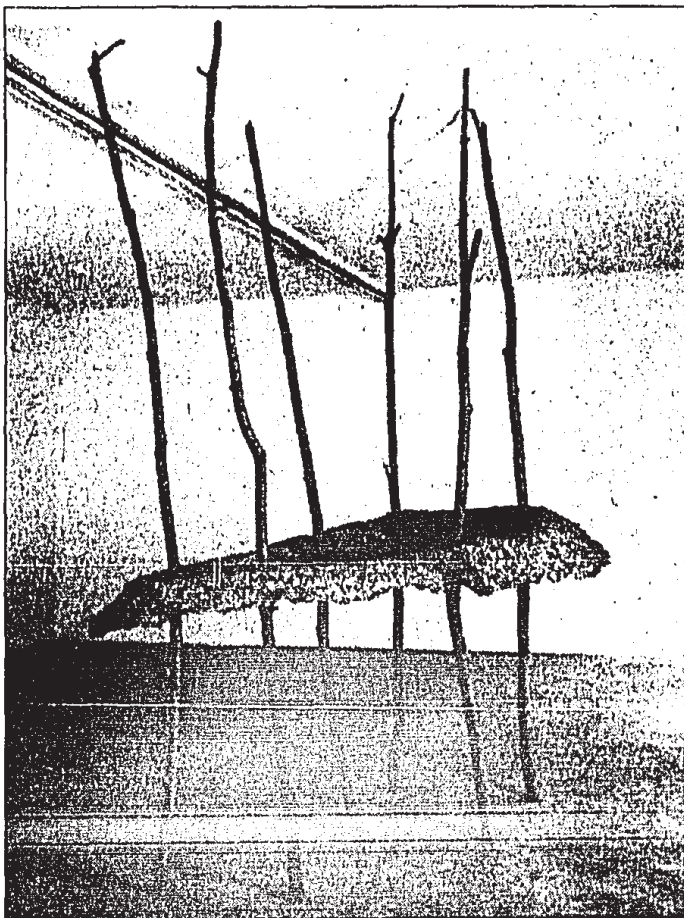
Penone's trail leads to a comparable end, but with a greater degree of artifice. When he recalls a forest, he draws it with actual grasses and bark. When he exhales into leaves, he casts them in bronze, a delicate sculpture the result. He does not move through the landscape as much as take some of it with him, while automatically giving it his mark.

The sculpture brings together two elements in a chain of being; the viewer provides the other links himself. Strongest among them is the idea of a cyclical interaction between Penone and the land. Nature is brought in, the sculptor is drawn out. So it goes, gently, seemingly without effort.

What is it Whistler said about nature diminished by art? That doesn't happen here. In a most delicate way, Penone celebrates the eternal give-and-take of a life spent close to the land. The sequence could not be more simple: Nature enriches. Man recognizes. We all are enriched thereby. [Through Aug. 12.]

MARY AHRENDT, JACK GOLDSTEIN [Deson, 340 W. Huron St.]: Where Ahrendt's old photographs were of a painted figure, her new ones retain the figure but are painted themselves. Thus the artist has moved into an area much favored by contemporary lensmen: the altered print.

Ahrendt's approach is conceptual. The photographs are of her own body parts, as are the painted imprints. How the blurred, often enlarged, image relates to the imprint creates tension. Everything



"Breath of Leaves" by Giuseppe Penone: Celebrating the eternal give-and-take of a life spent close to the land.

else is stripped away. In a reduced palette [black, white and red] one sees body parts striving toward psychological congruence. The record is a stark proclamation of the artist's growth.

Goldstein's large-scale paintings reproduce natural phenomena that have been mediated by photographs. Some motifs are cosmic, others earthbound, but all are particularly concerned with the translation of light. These images are ravishing in a way that is rare in contemporary art. They require no esthetic justification, for they look as direct as the phenomena they treat. [Through Tuesday.]

GLADYS NILSSON [Randolph Street, 756 N. Milwaukee Ave.]: Selections from 17 years of Nilsson's paintings and watercolors amply demonstrate how high seriousness consistently is undercut by a low source. Scarcely one work in the show escapes from having its satiric point blunted by its comic-book style.

The artist's subjects—social ritual, earlier art—are of no consequence. Her graphic treatment puts them all on the same plane

where sharpness of observation counts for less than joke-making and a decorative look. Despite catalogue references to giants of watercolor, Nilsson's stylizations put her closer to the little masters or ornament, particularly those of the *Art Nouveau* period.

Central to her vocabulary are long, sinuous lines suggesting organic growth. Their whiplash movement gives compositions a good deal of interest; nonetheless, it does not carry more than surface appeal. When combined with Nilsson's funny-paper generalizations, the results are self-conscious but agreeable, if inevitably light. [Through June 23.]

ART NOTE: The Seymour Rosofsky Memorial Fund raised \$25,000 at its benefit dinner and auction at the Second City Theater last Sunday. Five paintings from the Rosofsky estate sold for a total of \$22,100. The funds will be used for publication of a monograph planned to accompany a retrospective exhibition opening at the Krannert Museum of the University of Illinois, Champaign, in November.