

JOSEPH SACCIO AND GERALD SALADYGA

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What do conversations in heaven sound like? And can you hear hell's voices there? The nineteenth-century poet William Blake thought that the dialogue between the two places offered evidence that "Without Contraries is no progression."

Here is an encounter between a pair of artists to which that same claim would apply. The obvious differences of media are the least of it. What matters most to the artists emerges in the contrast of each, and would not be as immediately available from either artist on his own.

Joseph Saccio's recent work furthers the paradox of dead trees reanimated, as in *A Thousand Cuts*, where the edges of the wooden arcs slash across the wall, mocking the saws that severed them.

Colloquy for Clint is a cascade of sectioned branches, remnants of a last pruning. This is a puzzle with all its pieces yet there is no way of assembling it.

April is the Cruellest Month, with its Frankenstein assemblage of root masses and cot-

ton batting and Elmer's Glue, resembles a creature on the edge of malevolence, or something else quite amiable in an effective disguise.

It is in the *Tempietto*, a work that has occupied Saccio for ten years, where the gravitational center of the conversation between these two artists rests. At first, it reads as a moldering testament to the domesticated classicism that contrived those mock ancient follies in the gardens of eighteenth-century British aristocrats. Yet its reference is purer than that. Here is Bramante foiled, with the splendor of that Renaissance architect's memorial to St. Peter's crucifixion reinvented as an executioner's shack.

Given this, one finds a special coincidence in Gerald Saladyga's *Triptych* of crosses, rendered in what would have been the actual shape of

Joseph Saccio, *A Thousand Cuts*, 2010, wood.

that Roman capital death instrument, a horizontal bar atop a vertical one. They are arranged above predella panels that read like small star charts at its base. Gold leaf bands at the panel's edges are halos reduced to lines.

Saladyga's *Tau Cross* is a girdered architectural mass, bearing down on what is an enlightened draftsman's rendering of a concrete foundation. It is a charged summary of Zurbarán's seventeenth-century painting of Saint Serapion hanging from the weight of his own death.

Balanced against this heaviness is a gallery wall with the sixteen panels of *Hours of the Virgin*, grief and solace rendered as test pattern bands on a digital altar screen.

This is the first showing of these pieces since Saladyga painted them in 1993 and 1994. It's about time. —Stephen Vincent Kobasa