



ROBERT STRINI *Walking on Glass* 1984

outgrown the toy and abandoned the place is indicated by the fading pictures torn from the shelf wall, the remnants still attached by tacks. Of course all this is an illusion: there is no toy soldier, no stumbling block, no string and no hole. Yet Rizk makes us believe for a moment that what we see is not a flat surface but a view into a very real place.

But Rizk is not painting found settings. These are deliberate theatre pieces, carefully arranged stage sets within the proscenium arch of the picture frame. Rizk constantly reminds us that we are participants in the sophisticated process of painterly illusion.

Michael Laurence

**SAN FRANCISCO**

**Robert Strini**  
Museo Italo-Americano

In Robert Strini's lead and wood construction, *Joystick*, a model of an F-14 fighter, lovingly carved out of dark African wood, is impaled on the apex of a lead pyramid which juts out from the wall. Sandwiched between the pyramid and the plane are an arrangement of bleached wooden bones and a formidable gold-plated cross. *Joystick* seduces us with its materials and elegance, drawing the viewer towards it in admiration of craft – like the weapon of death which it mimics. The masterful workmanship for which Robert Strini's early pieces are renowned is here put to the cause of social commentary, marking Strini's transition to a new and more mature phase of work.

The gold cross which asserts the arro-

gance of *With God On Our Side* is just one of many in Strini's repertory. Some are shiny, black and drooping; others soft, pink and bulging – animated and erotic. His crosses are characters in evolving scenarios, sometimes taking centre stage, sometimes taking a back seat to let other sculptural concerns come to the fore. Strini uses the cruxifix as an armature (Francis Bacon's term) on which one can "operate all types and levels of feeling."

In the construction *Split Decision* the cross is easy to overlook. Two basic tools – a rake and a shovel – spell out the choices. The rake has delicate prongs – wide-spaced fingers pointing towards the heavens. The sharp, tapered head of the shovel gestures downwards. Both are carved from the same piece of white cedar. Like Siamese twins, they share the same body – immaculate and unused. Appended to these metaphoric tools are a pair of lead funnels. Are they megaphones, ready to announce the apocalypse – or simply devices for narrowing thoughts, choices? One has to stand back from the object to recognize the basic cruxiform. *Split Decision* evokes a human presence fashioned out of an unresolved dilemma. In the tension of its ambiguity lies its power as art.

While the human figure is implied in much of Strini's work, most specific figures in the show are cut-outs with photos attached, or silhouettes. One gets the sense that they are just "passing through" like the bandaged dog in *Roma Piece*. Strini thinks of them as "reference points," shadows of an energy which is "much larger." Nowhere is this metaphor more elegant and unified than in *Walking on Glass*, one of the smallest pieces in the show, just 36" tall. A wooden figure of a man, based on the artist's own form, is painted black. Attached to the metatarsus of each of the figure's feet is a cork, which fits into a plain glass bottle with a tapering neck. The figure is stationary, even anchored – yet it implies motion. Strini's *Walking on Glass* figure is like a character out of an Italian folktale, or a Pirandello play: the man who could walk across water in glass boots. It is a magical image, and as simple as putting the cork in a bottle; yet more than the sum of its parts. Confidence and restraint are as potent a technique as dazzling workmanship. In *Walking on Glass* Robert Strini finds his balance, hits his stride.

Louise Steinman

**VIENNA**

**Heinz Gappmayr,**  
**Jiri Kolar**  
Grita Insam

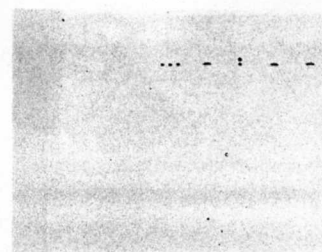
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HEINZ GAPPMAYR *Weiss* 1967  
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