

# ARTFORUM

JANUARY 1973, VOL. 11, NO. 5

Alan Sonfist

PALEY & LOWE

Alan Sonfist's *Landscape* in comparison with all this, makes him look like a "naturalist." The small section of actual forest he has transported to the gallery floor is presented as if it were a piece of evidence in the Museum of Natural History. There are a variety of reference frames and scales of observation through which we may view it. First we see it in terms of his experience of it. An excerpt from his diary outlines his discovery of the site and details his reactions on various levels while it describes the discrete units he encounters there with charming fulsomeness. Next we have a photograph of the particular site, plus tiny detail photos of each of its recognizable parts, laid out on the gallery floor in the same relative positions they occupied in reality. Further on we have the material itself, positioned identically to its locations in reality and in the photographs. We are able to view it from various angles and perspectives—close-up, distant one-point (Renaissance), and an approximation of aerial perspective provided by our eye level. We may retrace the artist's steps, remembering them from the diary, and ponder, as he did, any given pine cone or twig. Behind the approximately 9' x 14' area in which all this is located there is a large diagram on the wall which renders the directions taken by the artist within the site. It is executed in black and silver tape, the resultant configuration resembling somewhat a painting by Alan Cote. Actually the whole piece is laden with reflections derived from other art—Richard Long's *Walks*, Doug Huebler's *Bird Call* piece, Antonioni's *Blow-up*, some work of Carlo Bonfa and other Arte Povera artists. It had the precious quality of Gilbert and George imitating English gentlemen on a country outing, which seemed somewhat incongruous in the scrawled "unlettered" handwriting of a typical product of the New York school system's ineffective penmanship classes. Sonfist is playing on our nostalgia for nature, but we are all only too aware of being surrounded by a rectilinear prison of glass, steel, and concrete and of how inordinately that makes us love our few trees and blades of grass. Sonfist is offering only a temporary, romantic escape. I, for one, prefer confrontation. The exhibition also includes large charcoal rubbings on canvas which record the surfaces of two trees in Andover, Massachusetts, two small mud paintings, and two beautiful leaf collages which seemed to be in much better ecological-artistic balance than the large work.

—April Kingsley