

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Martin Roth, *In November 2017 I collected a plant from the garden of a mass shooter. (detail)*, 2018, mixed media, dimensions variable.

NEW YORK
Martin Roth

YOURS MINE & OURS
54 Eldridge Street
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A scraggly, drought-resistant shrub native to Nevada grows in the middle of a small gallery in Chinatown. This plant—the desert holly—is the unlikely centerpiece of Austrian artist Martin Roth’s installation here, *In November 2017 I collected a plant from the garden of a mass shooter.*, 2018. Framed by the artist’s belief in the restorative power of nature, Roth takes an unusual approach to gun reform by offering an oblique portrait of Stephen Paddock, who shot and killed fifty-eight people in Las Vegas last October.

A defining characteristic of Roth’s practice is what he calls a collaboration with plants and animals. The unassuming installation space feels meditative. Pamphlets about gun-reform activism are stacked neatly against one wall. The desert holly is contained in a cubic glass terrarium. Wall-to-wall carpeting, rendered in a loud paisley print, lines the floors—a replica of the carpet on which Paddock stood at the Mandalay Bay hotel moments before the killings. Into the carpet pattern, Roth has added his own illustration of the shrub: an emblem of healing sewn into a relic of national tragedy.

Descending a set of stairs into a bunker-like room, one finds a re-creation of Paddock’s backyard, where three shrubs are planted in gravel and bathed with an eerie sepia glow. The confrontation of Paddock’s domestic life and the senseless violence he wreaked is harrowingly paralleled. For all Roth’s sanguine efforts to reevaluate discussions surrounding gun violence, his aestheticization of a crime scene and the singular, empathized focus on Paddock, rather than his victims, could easily be construed as crassly opportunistic. Yet this fuller exploration of Paddock’s humanity demands that the viewer see him more clearly. Gun violence has become a human issue—and in an age of such uncertainty, a more human approach is necessary. —
Keegan Brady