

The Vanitas of Vegetables

Life is short — and then an artist shoots you right in the seeds

MUSEUM | At first glance, Ori Gersht's "Pomegranate" recalls the lush, precise still life painting of Dutch masters. Intent on conveying every drop of dew clinging to the apricot, every crunchy ridge in a cabbage, they painted life at its luscious peak in order to tweak the 16th-century viewer's conscience, from which the inevitability of decay and death was never very far away.

Gersht, however, speeds up the process. With a gun.

The London-based, Israeli-born artist, who has two moving-image pieces on display in the Hirshhorn's Black Box, doesn't wait for nature and entropy to take their course,



RED MENACE: "Pomegranate" echoes a classic still life, but technology intrudes.

or even leave the squishy fate of the title fruit to one's imagination. He shoots it, and in the moment the bullet hits the pomegranate's

skin and its brilliant ruby seeds are loosed in a starburst, you actually feel for the poor, surprised thing, its time cut so abruptly short.

Of course, it had already been plucked; time, nature and the human hand are recurring themes in Gersht's moving and amusing work. In "The Forest," a 13-minute work, stillness and tension alternate as a camera pans a treescape, and huge, healthy-looking trees begin to topple with comic poignance. Are they sick? Are they being interfered with in some way? Do they make any more sound, to twist the philosophical question, than we do during our threescore and ten?

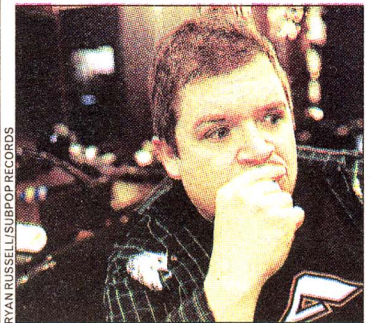
Gersht's moving-image works wink at art history, but they treat life, death and manipulation with appropriate gravity.

ARION BERGER (EXPRESS)

→ *Hirshhorn, 4th Street & Independence Avenue NW; through April 12; 202-633-1000. (L'Enfant Plaza)*

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