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ADRIAN PACI

Passages

Peter Blum Chelsea

526 West 29th Street

Through Jan. 5

Centro di Permanenza Temporanea

Smith-Stewart

53 Stanton Street, Lower East Side

Through Dec. 22

Adrian Paci, who was born in 1969 in Albania, trained as a classical painter in Tirana, the country's capital. But after civil war forced him to relocate to Italy in 1997, he turned to video, photography and sculpture to examine the desolation of displacement and to commemorate both the traditions and the hard times back home.

His art has made quietly strong impressions at P.S. 1 and elsewhere in New York, including last year's Armory Show art fair. But his first commercial gallery solo show here — a double header — is a bit too quiet. "Vajtojca (The Weeper)," the most impressive piece (at Blum), is a short video from 2002 that Mr. Paci has already exhibited twice in New York. It shows him back in Albania, laid out as if dead, being mourned over in song and wail by a very convincing professional weeper.

Mr. Paci returns to painting in three works titled "Facade," also at Blum. Using a dry-fresco technique, he paints sepia-toned scenes of Albanian weddings (taken from videos) on large, rough plaster walls held upright by thick wood beams. The handsome results suggest a cross between unfinished houses and rustic billboards and attest to Mr. Paci's skills as a painter.

Equally generic is a new video at Smith-Stewart titled "Centro di Permanenza Temporanea" ("Center of Temporary Permanence") after the camps where Italy detains illegal immigrants. In it a crowd of workers, none of them white, mount a mobile stairway that, we soon realize, is not attached to a plane. Caught in the middle of the tarmac with no place to go, the stoic workers have little but the benefit of expert cinematography. The piece is a poignant one-liner. **ROBERTA SMITH**