

Curtis Mitchell

Esso Gallery, through Sat 13
(see Chelsea).

Curtis Mitchell burst onto the scene at Andrea Rosen Gallery in the late '80s with his own kind of process art. The New York native took such found objects as Sheetrock scraps, rugs, plush chairs and snapshots, and wore them down by rubbing them with dirt and bits of glass. Sometimes he even broke out the toxic chemicals or aimed a blowtorch flame. As a result, ordinary prefabricated materials became, strangely enough, both abject and magical.

Mitchell's latest series, titled "Meltdowns" and "Photo Events," continue in this vein, although he has abandoned objects for large-scale images: The new pieces are forged on photographic paper and packed with visual information. "Meltdowns" includes big, exposed prints that Mitchell treated with chemicals from top to bottom to create

gorgeous matrices of light drips and streaks, which inevitably evoke the tranquil paintings of Pat Steir. "Photo Events" is a group of C-prints that are displayed on the floor atop a rubber mat. The works are black except in numerous places where Mitchell walked across them, the soles of his shoes having been caked with mud mixed with household cleaning agents. It turns out that the paper was laid out for days in such locations as the bathroom of the Getty mansion in France, the backyard of a friend's country house in Provence and a beach on a remote island in the Pacific. The photographs provide lyrical records of his most banal movements; these abstractions are paired with small photographs of the exact sites where the action took place.

The results are beautiful. Mitchell's sustained ability to transform everyday objects and activities into visually engaging work—while using low-end materials and methods to do it—

solidifies his status as an artistic alchemist with few contemporary peers.—*Franklin Sirmans*



Curtis Mitchell, *Meltdown #1* (detail), 2002.

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