

Curtis Mitchell

ANDREA ROSEN

Few artists probe the esthetics of the everyday as cannily as Curtis Mitchell. Yet no matter how distasteful Mitchell's subversive assemblages may appear, they always manage to court esthetic beauty in a back-



Curtis Mitchell, *Repairing Water and Aquarium*, 1992, mixed media, 12½ by 20 by 10 inches. Andrea Rosen.

handed way. Of late, Mitchell has been examining the process of breakage and repair. His work derives its formal potency from a careful balancing act—between fragility and resilience, order and chaos, filth and beauty, accident and intent.

Illustrating this balance were two “repaired rugs,” mounted on the wall. One black, patterned rug features several gaping holes, their edges smoothed over by black paint. More visceral was the crimson oriental rug that existed only as fragments, held together by large swatches of flesh-colored paint embellished with hair and duct tape.

Two fragmented panels of drywall and photo scraps added a more frenetic aura. *Thursday '92* features shattered beer bottles in the detritus. *History of Spring '92* spanned one entire wall of the gallery, its 16 panels festooned with countless torn photos of bland scenery amid tattered patches of striped wallpaper. Dramatically overworked, it seems at once like the sculptural equivalent of static and a metaphorical journal of life's forgotten moments.

The centerpiece of the show was a shattered aquarium that had been caulked and filled with a fetid amalgam of lard, urine, and thick blue toilet cleaner—held in check only by the grace of Mitchell's patchy repair work. While the piece may never make it to Sotheby's, it exemplifies the sense of bodily revulsion and mortal dread that underlie Mitchell's musings.

—George Melrod