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REVIEWS



CURTIS MITCHELL

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Much recent art that poses as a critique of commodity culture instead reinforces our collective fetishization of the object world. By fabricating slick, seductive, high-gloss objects, artists with ostensibly subversive intentions play into consumerist demands so adeptly as to collapse opposition into identification. At the other extreme are found-object artists who salvage old, often decrepit items. Such work falls into an adjacent trap, appealing to those drawn to the "nostalgia" of objects with a history.

Between these two in strategy, but with an end-product entirely off the scale, are the works of Curtis Mitchell. Mitchell takes brand-new objects, including furniture and domestic items, but also sewer grates, chunks of sidewalk, and throw-aways, nearly destroys them, and then sets about "repairing" them. Mitchell's hilarious attempts to reconstitute these objects have included unrolling and then rerolling Saran Wrap and aluminum foil, and reconstructing a cracked mirror with

caulking and horsehair.

Mitchell's strongest works in this show, however, are not objects as much as quasi-installations. *Thursday '92*, (all works 1992), an accumulation of cut-up snapshots mingled with empty cigarette packs, flattened beer cans, cracked beer bottles, and tangled stockings, eases down a wall and out onto the floor. The photographs, many depicting generic vacation-land vistas, complement the detritus of couch-potato existence. *History of Spring '92 (Repaired Wall)*, the show's pièce-de-résistance, patches together more photos and scraps of printed wallpaper on a precarious armature of two-by-fours, the whole stretching along one wall of the gallery. The piece evokes both the striking collages of the *affichiste* artists of the '50s and '60s, and a domestic interior buckling under an earthquake—or perhaps a riot. An implied violence pervades these works, which suggest the simmering claustrophobia of domestic confinement, while alluding to the escapist fantasies of the happy-go-lucky tourist (the photos themselves are photo-store rejects, contributing to the pathos). These two forces collide only to rupture and scatter into anarchistic heaps.

Several other, less striking pieces reflect the artist's penchant for grotesque humor. The bedraggled carpet of *Repaired Rug* is glued together with hair and dirt, the unseemly underside of tidy homes brought out from under the rug. The contents of a cracked and recaulked fish tank in *Repaired Water and Aquarium* include lard, urine, and cobalt-blue toilet-bowl cleaner—products meant to diminish or eliminate life's less appealing by-products—engaged in a losing battle with entropic waste.

At the root of Mitchell's unlikely and at times off-putting creations is a concern

with how we both place excessive value in and squander material possessions. Mitchell's time-lapse, artificial destruction of spanking-new objects provides a memento mori for all those toys under the Christmas tree. From there it's one short leap to what we're doing to our own bodies and to the planet itself—more than a bit of remorse is implied in Mitchell's pathetic repair jobs.

—Lois Nesbitt