

ARTnews

CURTIS MITCHELL

Andrea Rosen

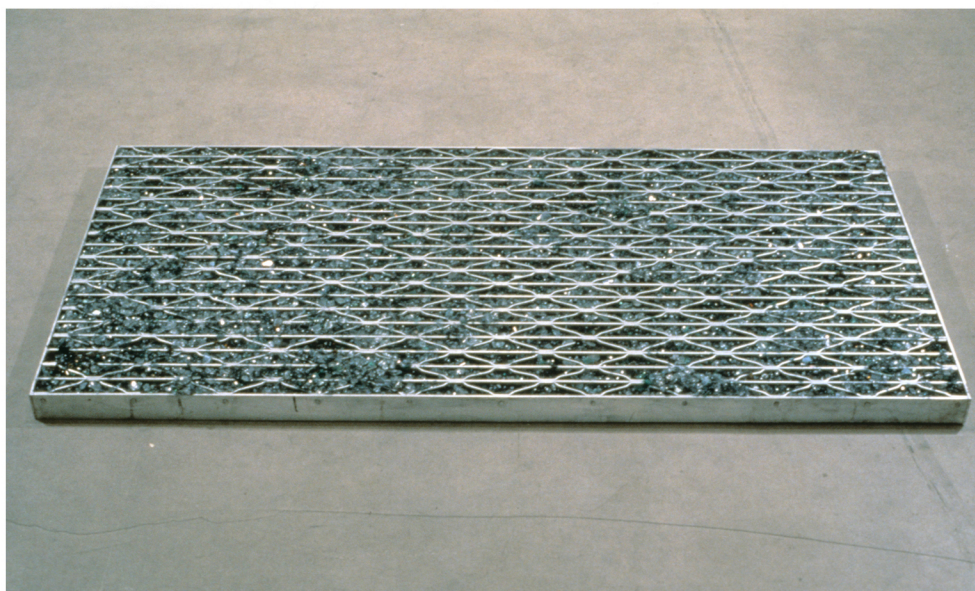
Dirt and destruction are Curtis Mitchell's favorite themes in engaging Conceptual works that have much to say about process, ecology, and contemporary esthetics. For example, Mitchell's sidewalk grating filled with broken glass and reconstituted dirt is actually quite attractive when encountered as a single object on the gallery floor. The metal of the grating forms a pleasant decorative pattern—a series of symmetrical, flute-edged ovals undulating amid a grid—and the multicolored glass glitters like a genie's treasure trove of jewels. Seen in true context, however, both grating and glass would be just a slice of urban blight.

There are two great 107-inch-square sheets of paper hanging from binder clips, one black and one midnight blue. Each has been treated with tap water, and the resultant bucklings and wrinkles make for elegant abstractions. Yet there is a certain irony here, and we might well wonder at our ability to respond to nuances created by such mundane means.

In many of the works, Mitchell does violence to his materials. For example, for each of the two versions of *Untitled (Voided)* he hung up an Oriental rug, doused it with turpentine, and set it on fire for 15 seconds. Then he had it cleaned several times so that much of the pattern disappeared to the extent that it was ultimately random and uncontrolled. And there are wonderful burned and stained drapes, still proudly hanging despite the indignities visited upon them—perhaps a humorous, if oblique, metaphor for human beings and the way we persevere.

The artist tips his hat to Yves Klein and likewise questions our own values and sensibilities. Even during a time when artists using unusual materials and methods have become commonplace, Mitchell still manages to come up with a few new surprises.

—R. B.



Curtis Mitchell, *Untitled (Sidewalk Grating)*, 1990, mixed media, 36 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 72 by 3 inches.
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