

# Sculpture

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**Curtis Mitchell**  
Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

In previous shows, Curtis Mitchell has filled velvet bustiers full of lard, defiled the length of a pristine, white column with inky handprints, stained white tablecloths with coffee or wine and covered a bed with hundreds of seemingly used condoms. In his fall solo show at the Andrea Rosen Gallery, Mitchell expanded his construction of wreck and ruin in and around the home.

Six of the 12 works exhibited were wall pieces. Two such works, each dubbed *Untitled (Tap Water)* (1990), are enormous sheets of paper, one black, one blue, attached to the wall. Water had been drizzled onto the paper, causing discoloration and buckling. The resulting pseudo-paintings are reminiscent of those of Clyfford Still in their grand scale and broad gesture. Mitchell lives at a visual counterpart to Abstract Expressionist painting by wetting paper, effectively mocking the self-proclaimed sublime representation of the lonely painting process characteristic of such artists as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.

This ironic tone was continuously evident throughout the exhibition. Mitchell's work plays within a Minimalist framework, but here Minimalism's clean, abstract forms come into focus as recognizable objects: a

sidewalk grate, a roll of dirt-encrusted industrial matting, a stack of beer bottles.

*Untitled (Beer Bottles)* (1990) consists of broken green beer bottles housed in water-soaked cardboard trays. The levity of this dilapidated monument to that favorite of American beverages was juxtaposed with two adjacent curtain pieces. Mitchell desecrated a luscious white velvet curtain with a gruesome brown stain, which suggested long strands of stringy hair. The other window adornment, a mere remnant, was stained and burned. Left in tatters on the wall, this truly disturbing piece sparks a narrative of domestic destruction.

Mitchell does not interpret; instead he duplicates, for example, a wall of peeling paint in *Untitled (Stripper)* (1990). This piece was made from a hinged wooden screen painted in a way that promotes peeling and flaking. *Untitled (Subway Stripe)* (1990), a chunk of dirty concrete with an orange subway stripe on the gallery floor, was not found but made from scratch; even the dirt, used in several pieces, was concocted from one of the artist's many recipes for soil. By creating each piece from only new materials, there is no question of nostalgia, of trying to capture the richness of the used or worn. As he fragments the urban environment and

transfers it to a gallery setting, Mitchell preserves one's perception of the original object, presenting it free of personal or, worse yet, artistic subjectivity.

Mitchell's use of the urban environment is unpretentious. Instead of trying to impart a false spirituality onto urban objects, he works simply to duplicate them. The distinction between duplication and replication is crucial to this work, for Mitchell seeks not to render likenesses but instead to recreate reality. The results are obsessively reproduced facsimiles of the detritus of urbanization.

Creating something worn typically panders to pedestrian notions of the artistic and nostalgic. Mitchell, however, presents a panorama of urban wreckage with ice-cold accuracy in which the ho-hum aesthetic of the decrepit is used to create a pop art without cartoons or commercial logos.

—Liz Markus



Curtis Mitchell,  
installation view,  
1990. Photo: Peter  
Muscato, courtesy  
Andrea Rosen  
Gallery, New York.