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Art in Review

Three artists who favor chaos

Tony Feher, Paula Hayes and Curtis Mitchell

Andrea Rosen Gallery
130 Prince Street
Manhattan
Through Aug. 14

This exhibition reflects the current rage for chaos among younger artists: that is, the trend of recycling slightly fatigued, casually dispersed objects and materials. What's intriguing is that, trend or no trend, these three artists are very different from one another.

Paula Hayes is a storyteller with a penchant for dime-store figurines and orientalia. "Small Fears in the Big Picture" features a kitchen cabinet with two tiny Chinese warriors fighting it out in the top drawer. Adjacent items — including scrubbing pads, sponges and a pair of flowered panty hose hung up to dry — suggest that everyday life is more mundane, domestic and not exclusively masculine. "The End," which brings together a bicycle painted white, a sheet, some plastic flowers and one lighted candle, evokes the dead Ophelia but also borrows too much from early 60's artists like Edward Kienholz and Daniel Spoerri.



Curtis Mitchell's efforts draw less from literature than from Abstract Expressionism. Two floor pieces, made of tattered bed sheets scattered with skeins of thread or pieces of cloth and clothing dipped in plaster, have a violent, anarchic flair. They may be simple-minded evocations of Jackson Pollock — a new low for the art of appropriation — yet they also evoke the combination of dreams, turbulent feelings and childhood memories that often trigger creativity. An old club chair covered with short, overlapping strips of red, green and yellow gaffer's tape is visually stronger, and also funnier; its bright lumpy surface seems to honor early Ad Reinhardt.

In contrast, Tony Feher's chaos is actually rather well-organized and instinctively archival and devotional. When he places bright little fragments of plastic on the floor in the manner of Tony Cragg, he includes an announcement that they all came from a beach in Corpus Christi, Tex. The artist's main contribution is a table stacked with glass jars, most of which contain multiples of a single item: marbles, playing cards, puzzle parts, dried flowers or sugar cubes. Mr. Feher seems to draw deliberately on a broad range of casual arrangements, from the homemade altar and the pack rat's closet to certain kinds of folk art. This gives his art a greater breadth than that of Ms. Hayes and Mr. Mitchell, but in the end it is also more familiar.

ROBERTA SMITH