

**Curtis Mitchell**

**William Eggleston**

**Michael Hurson**

**Kevin Landers**

**Robert Gober**

**George Stoll**

**Daniel Mahoney**

**Hal Hartley**

**curated by: Joe Fyfe**

**Apex Art C. P.**

291 Church Street  
New York, New York 10013  
212 431-5270 ph/fx

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cover: Robert Gober Cat Litter 1989 16.5" x 7.75" x 4.5"  
plaster, ink and latex paint

Thank you: Andrew Freiser, Tamara Gonzales, Michael Hurson, Clare Pentecost,  
Steven Rand, Gregory Williams, and A.

Throughout the century artists have examined the power of mass-produced objects. Duchamp and Picabia in their use of chocolate grinders and sparkplugs revealed in household objects and hardware a vein of sexuality and fetishism. Pop artists, particularly Warhol and Rosenquist, painted consumer goods to replace the mythic grandeur of Abstract Expressionism with the spectacle of American consumer culture. It was as if a



**TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS**

**CURATED BY  
JOE FYFE**

**APEXART**

malevolent Mickey Mouse walking off the screen of "Fantasia" brought down his sorcerer's wand to transform the ironing-board-sized brush strokes of DeKooning's "Door to the River" into Warhol refrigerators and made Pollack's Jungian tangles into Rosenquist's Chef Boy-ar-dee spaghetti and Ford V-8 collisions. The story of this late modernist change of attitude is an oft-told tale, but it was the beginning of a more impersonal, commercial, and perhaps inadvertently alienating address in fine art. Consumer product detritus has been given a second life in Tony Cragg's work; Haim Steinbach has re-investigated the aura of the product in his work. Consumer items that are sentimental and pathetic have been appropriated by Jeff Koons to enact the theater of class-critical bathos. All of this work seems to reify the power of the mass-produced object.

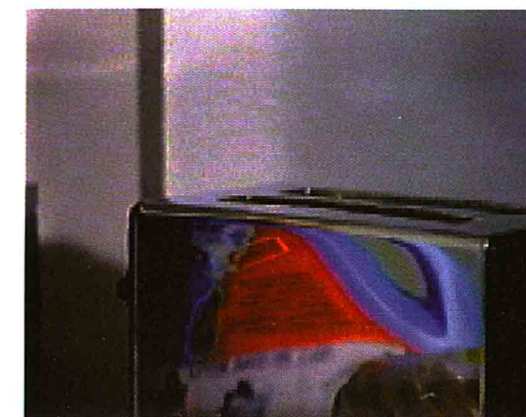
The work shown here can be read as art that attempts to immobilize the power of intimidating graphics and packaging. The authority possessed by these objects has been altered by a seeming degree of tenderness: they are softened,

William Eggleston Untitled (Troubled Water series) n.d. 20" x 16" dye transfer print



quieted versions of the original. There are precedents: Stuart Davis' "Odol," the way Fairfield Porter paints a milk carton, Johns' painted bronze ale cans portraying the humbling process of time. What might be called the aesthetic equivalent of Christian love is at work here.

Deliberate, healing regard for the thing one doesn't like, the principle of loving one's disease.

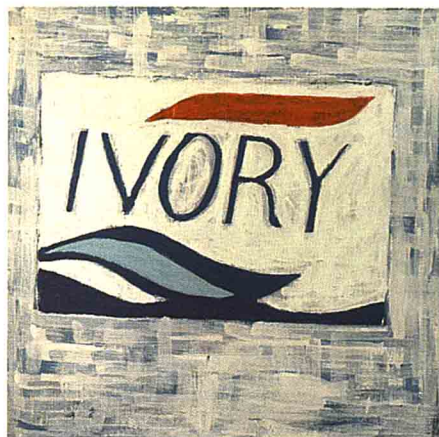


Hal Hartley still from Trust full length feature film 1991

There's a line in Philip Larkin's poem, "Going, Going," which reads, "Things are tougher than we are." The poem laments a future English landscape of "concrete and tyres." Larkin's line, in context, is inflected with irony: he suggests that the oceans and forests can process however much garbage is thrown their way; nature is tough. The line remained with me long after the poem departed from memory and was transformed into: things we humans make are tougher than we are. People in recycling centers tell me Styrofoam is tougher than we are. Apparently most of the products that I consume are tougher than I am, have a firmer identity emblazoned in type across their surface and will keep their form long after mine is rotted away and unrecognizable. The things that are tougher than we are have become the manufactured environment we live in as evidenced in even its most common products.

Even though most consumer products are rich with aesthetic properties, they are treated as





Daniel Mahoney *Ivory* 1984 20" x 20" encaustic

the opposites of fine art. They are hidden after purchase, not displayed. Conventionally, when the guest enters the house the cleanser or floor wax or whatever has a label or a

brand name on it is quickly shoved in a cabinet or drawer like a family secret hidden from strangers, unacknowledged, unseen when present. These are things, *pace* Johns, the mind knows but ignores. Think of them as the twins of repressed anxiety. In these works, a certain passivity in their representation weakens their aggression with consolation and acceptance. In a reversal of the postmodern practice of appropriating the commercial world's mass address, which deliberately manipulates viewer response, the works chosen here use the same commercial objects to elicit individual intimate response.

The reparative element is present in Daniel Mahoney's "Ivory." Mahoney (1959-1988) was a friend of and artistic influence on Robert Gober and Michael Hurson. He was an extraordinarily gifted painter: the fluid, "soapy" quality of his paint, his light touch, his airy color are all present in this oddly poignant painting. A personal subtext of this exhibition is an explication of "Ivory."

Robert Gober's sculptures appear in the tangible world while diffidently remaining apart as mental constructs, phantoms and symbols. The cast of the Fine Fare Cat Litter bag, a container become

solid, nudges its hand-painted sentimental cat image toward a tombstone visage. It's hard to imagine an object more disregarded: bulky and inconvenient, hard to store. Like unwanted children, these perky, ghostly plaster presences hug the walls of some Gober installations as if waiting to be picked up.

Curtis Mitchell's work accelerates the natural destruction of manufactured objects. Though most of his work flip-flops between the threatening and the comic, as if made by an angry clown, this is an uncharacteristically gentle six-pack of broken beer bottles (two Becks, two Heineken, two Rolling Rocks). By sequentially arranging the bottles, Mitchell references minimalist serialism. This miniature architecture of refuse transmits a literally busted self-containment, refusing to access meaning beyond the unusual consoling act of placing worthless broken bottles back into a beer carton, to protect them from further harm.



Curtis Mitchell *Untitled* 1990 10" x 9" x 6" beer bottles, carton

William Eggleston claims that he is "at war with the obvious." Some of his images portray overloaded electrical outlets, bases of statues, the space under a bed. He is



George Stoll *Untitled* 1995 5"x21"x7" mixed mat.



Kevin Landers *Untitled (Chips and Chip Rack)* 1996 5' x 3' x 1' wire, tape, styrofoam

tional cafeteria, a pattern of empty lemonade containers can be discerned through a pile of transparent garbage bags tumbling down the front of the picture plane.

What constitutes a household includes the domestic environments of the marginalized. Where the institutionalized population (the incarcerated, the mentally ill) are obliquely alluded to in the Eggleston photograph, Kevin Landers works with his neighborhood on the Lower East Side, a matrix of the illegal drug business, the homeless, the poor, and the aesthetic demimonde. The streets form a living room here and the bodega proprietors function as concierges. In Landers' chip bag rack reproduced in colored duct tape the vibrant formalities of Peter Halley's paintings are married to junk food packages.

Last year George Stoll showed a group of wax Tupperware objects. He has also replicated packaged toilet paper and paper towels. "Untitled" consists of two handmade versions of "Castaway"

to the American South what Atget was to Paris: a recording sentinel. He also shares with Atget a pre-occupation with the mysterious life of common objects. In this photograph, probably taken behind some institu-

brand toilet paper, one wrapped and one unfurled. Utilizing the classical statue, the Nike of Samothrace, or "Winged Victory," as an iconic armature, the sculpture indulges in the fantasy connotations of the word "Castaway": a billowing sea breeze blows its wrapping loose, exposing its paper epidermis.

In this sequence from Hal Hartley's film, "Trust," through the female character's interaction with an array of household objects, a suburban kitchen is freed from its prison of function. In this cinematic poem, appliances and products collide in ardent disarray like graceful animals sprung from cages.

Finally, in Michael Hurson's work, a high-wire wit and deep melancholy activate the key props in his drawings and paintings, which constitute an ongoing comedy of manners. In "An Ordinary Man," a mixed-media drawing of a Coca Cola Classic can, a crumpled veteran of the soft drink wars stands at wheezing attention, his top popped.



Michael Hurson *An Ordinary Man* 1994 13.75" x 9" pencil, conté, ink on paper

These works, in considering common products as symbolic vessels of anxiety, attempt to heal a clanging consumerist century. They might be seen as agents of repair, turning the gallery into a white cube full of poetry and sympathy.