

Art in Review

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Indirect Object

Mitchell-Innes & Nash
534 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 10

Three of the four artists in "Indirect Object" were also part of the 2008 Whitney Biennial, a show that focused on a tendency in new art to abandon formal wholeness, polish and conceptual resolution — qualities that traditionally set art objects apart from other objects — in favor of accumulation and accident, with meanings deferred.

The historical roots of such work lie in assemblage, from Cubism to Happenings, hooked to Conceptualism. The results — materially concrete but porously organized — are made up of archives of images and ideas that seem to be in the process of being sorted out in front of you, with you invited to participate in the sorting. Process seems to be the point.

For "New Seizure #1" Amanda Ross-Ho lines up found pictures of ordinary things — workbench tools, for example — on a plain Sheetrock panel. With its perforated surface, the panel looks like a standard store-bought Peg-board. But the holes have been hand-drilled. And the panel, instead of being attached to a wall, leans against it. Deliberate and casual meet in work that looks solid but is unfixed.

Frances Stark's work operates in a similar way with different kinds of clipped images: words. Those in "An Unfolding Soft Secretary With Finials" are harvested from junk-mail fliers, disposable things that Ms. Stark didn't toss out but didn't keep intact. Instead she has incorporated them almost invisibly into a collage that looks like a cross between a cleared tabletop and a Japanese calligraphic scroll: ordinary and precious, and unreadable.



MITCHELL-INNES & NASH
Amanda Ross-Ho's "New Seizure #1," with magazine and Internet pictures on a wallboard panel, at Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

Two pieces by Matt Mullican are part of a long-term project, "Learning From That Person's Work." One is a collage of colored-ink abstractions, the other a big tangle of words written in a kind of bubble script. Technically they are both by an alter-ego persona called That Artist, who manifests himself when Mr. Mullican is under hypnosis. Whatever the source, they are part of a vast body of art produced over decades, which Mr. Mullican considers an encompassing vision of a utopian world. Significantly, it seems to be a utopia without definable qualities and without specific goals. It is an inventory of idealism that keeps growing larger and has no known point of closure.

Cady Noland, whose art wasn't in the 2008 Biennial but whose influence was, also works assemblage-fashion with found images, though her art is conceptually more focused than that of the other three artists in "Indirect Object." In "Bernard, Patty, Weed and Tanya" news images of the young Patricia Hearst, her former boyfriend Steven Weed and her bodyguard and future husband, Bernard Shaw, are silk-screened on an aluminum sheet. In "Standing Cowboy" (1991) a Marlboro Man shape is cut from wood. The first piece has the slick look of commercial design; the second resembles a giant cookie. You think: Political art. Then you think: Joke. Then: Same thing. This is art about social pathology, but its take is oblique: diagnostic, not prescriptive.

The story of Ms. Noland's career is as enigmatic as her art. In the 1990s she simply pulled up stakes and left the art world behind. Whether she left art behind too, no one seems to know. But indirectly she is still highly productive. A whole generation of younger artists carry forward her spirit. Her cumulative work seems to grow bigger the more we see it. **HOLLAND COTTER**