

THE NEW YORK TIMES

NOVEMBER 2, 2001

DIKE BLAIR

By Roberta Smith

Dike Blair

Feature

530 West 25th Street, Chelsea

Through Nov. 10

A member of the original appropriation-art generation, which emerged in the early 1980's, Dike Blair has developed his art quietly and consistently, outlasting some of the moment's brighter stars. He continues to troll the edges of a sophisticated, travel-weary terrain, filling in the background and noting down details while other artists — from Nan Goldin to Karen Kilimnick, Elizabeth Peyton and Wolfgang Tillmans — portray this sphere's habitués.

His watercolors are skillful translations of photographs (his own) depicting nothing in particular; this show includes images of luxuriant flowering plants and more austere fogged-up windows. They partake of a tradition dating back to John Singer Sargent and Charles Demuth.

His sculptures, as he calls them, have more serious postmodern credentials and occupy a blurred category between painting, design and set-up photography. At once contemplative and extremely literal, these low-lying arrangements include contrasting rectangles of carpet, tangles of contrasting lengths of electrical cord, painted boxes that suggest sectional furniture, and slim glowing rectangles hanging from the wall or placed inside the boxes. They cross Carl Andre with ikebana, formalist abstraction with sleek anonymous hotel rooms, talk-show sets with home furnishings showrooms. (In one piece, two lighted rectangles have the proportions and position of the headboard of a queen-size bed.)

The watercolors serve as foils for the sculptures, footnotes that highlight the deliberation of their compositions, colors and textures. But they also bring out the sentimentality beneath the sculpture's studied banality. The take-it-or-leave-it beauty is seductive, but also a little too easy to take, or leave.

ROBERTA SMITH
