

"Cleanliness"

Sara Meltzer, through Jul 30 (see Chelsea).

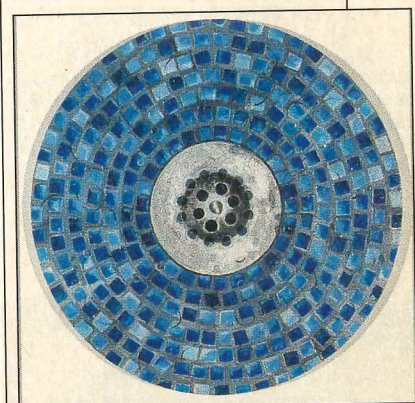
Sanitizing the body, combating filth and avoiding contamination are not only medical and consumer preoccupations, they're demanding physical labor. Or so suggests "Cleanliness" at Sara Meltzer Gallery, organized by Adam Frank, which presents works whose meticulous structures mirror the pursuit of perfect hygiene.

In Orit Raff's *Untitled* (2002), cleanliness is portrayed through its residue, the traces of dirt that are not so much expunged as relocated. Photographed in pairs, soiled rubber housekeepers' gloves bear the grimy stains of frequent use. The 12 square-format photos are arranged in a grid; an odd 13th pair is appended to the upper left of the series, sullyng the tidy order of the piece. The gloves' worn contours connote the drudgery of their wearers' tasks, lending a social and psychological charge that recalls Eleanor Antin's haunting photos from the early 1970s of empty rubber work boots arranged in methodical rows.

The patterns that swirl through Jason Middlebrook's round painting *Glass Tile Bottom* (2004) appear merely ornamental but are in fact irreverently ribald. A drain is surrounded by concentric circles of blue and turquoise tiles; the op art intensity of the radial vortex is disrupted by psychedelic eddies of pubic hairs.

The show includes several painstaking replicas of cleaning implements, which in this context may be read as commentaries on our cultural fixation with neatness. In Jonathan Seliger's fastidious re-creation of a janitor's broom in Plexiglas and varnish or Margarita Cabrera's elaborately stitched vinyl vacuum cleaner, the toil that everyday objects demand of their users is observed in a labor-intensive artistic practice of farcically obsessive duplication.

—Eva Diaz



Jason Middlebrook, *Glass Tile Bottom*, 2004.

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