

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2010

Art in Review

Chris Vasell

'The Estate of Chris Vasell'

*Team Gallery
83 Grand Street
SoHo
Through Saturday*

Reports of the death of the Los Angeles artist Chris Vasell have been nonexistent, but that hasn't stopped him from calling his first solo show in New York "The Estate of Chris Vasell." Nothing like a sense of scarcity to increase sales.

The good news is that Mr. Vasell's latest efforts are an improvement over the rather generic monochrome canvases that he exhibited in the 2006 Whitney Biennial. Decidedly idiosyncratic, they combine stain-painted fields ranging from solid colors to variegated washes, with careful scatterings of delicate collage accents. These include stitching in bright yarn, bottle caps, strips of men's underwear, wire, sliced-up toilet-paper tubes and dried banana peel. Small, surprisingly realistic cigarette stubs put in regular appearances, made, it seems, from real filter paper and tiny strips of gray tube socks.

The works inspire a multilayered perception process, full of weird twists and increasingly nasty surprises. From afar they seem suave and rather beautiful in the painterly sense; on the gallery's Web site they appear to be normally painted. From the middle distance, images — a hand here, two faces there — come into focus, and little modernist jokes abound.

Up close things turn raunchy, if not icky, and an outsider, thrift-shop looniness takes over. Perhaps these works were discovered in the attic of the artist's crazy great-uncle who recently died and for whom Mr. Vasell happens to be named. **ROBERTA SMITH**