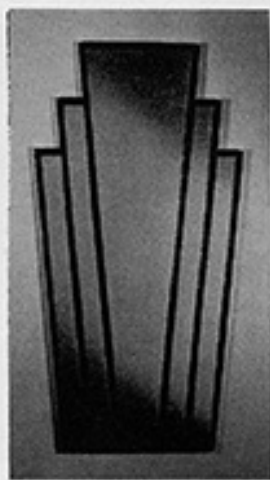


ARTS

APRIL 1990



Lewis Stein, *Untitled #14*, 1989,
Cibachrome, 57 1/4" x 29 1/4".
Courtesy Paula Allen Gallery.

In his show at Paula Allen Gallery (January 4–27), **Lewis Stein** presents a tantalizing series of photo-objects, the sources of which are the pages of wholesale mirror catalogues. The work is conceptually complex. As one cannot actually photograph a mirror without an unwanted reflected image, a common trick-of-the-trade is to superimpose an airbrushed simulation of a reflective surface over the "mirrored" area. Thus, Stein photographs the depictions of mirrors. If the process of recording an already reproduced image of a re-created reflective "reality" wasn't enough, Stein twists the screw once more by enlarging his photographic images of the mirrors to their "actual" size, as specified in the catalogue, mounts them on Foamcore and cuts them out, thereby creating "real" objects. With this jump Stein reveals that he is playing with the notion of representation, though not in its common definition as symbolic, but rather in its literal state: to re-present. A circular "mirror" by Stein brought Lichtenstein to mind, in its formal similarity to the latter's early mirror paintings. The painting (or the depicting) of a mirror, however, is more an act of re-creation than re-presentation in that it involves an initial original reinterpretation of a mirror's physical features. Stein's work, on the other hand, functions more on a conceptual level—its commentary being that of re-presenting an already (extant and) determined interpretation of a mirror. Stein's is a more distanced art than that of Lichtenstein. The blank stare of these fabricated "mirrors" seems to comment, as well, on a common trend in marketing strategy: the creation of a fully unresponsive "reality" in which what is marketed functions to supersede real life through its imposing bland aura.

Gretchen Faust