

# MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

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## Christopher Miner

How Beautiful Heaven Must Be

*Mitchell-Innes & Nash  
534 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through Feb. 11*

Christopher Miner's solo debut feels empty, as if the two videos he is showing aren't quite enough. Then again, the theme of Mr. Miner's work seems to be emptiness — or more precisely, a sense of personal pain and deficiency — and he handles it well.

He combines the mood of early 1990's abject art with identity consciousness and aims it at himself and, by implication, white, straight, possibly Southern males in general. The two works here approach his malaise from opposite directions, comedy and tragedy.

The 14-minute black-and-white "Self-Portrait" from 2000 (shown in the "Greater New York" exhibition at P.S. 1 last spring) is an unsettling, politically incorrect piece of performance art. It features Mr. Miner imitating a seemingly inebriated, extensively profane black man talking on the telephone in the light of his television set. At the end, he threatens to beat up a white man he knows because that man talks like a black man — saying, "It's wrong to talk like a black man and say it ain't racism." His double persona merges poor white man and poor black man, while indicating their mutual obsession with each other.

The second work is "The Best Decision Ever Made," a 17-minute video from 2005 that takes the form of a confessional documentary. An affecting combination of short video sequences, still images and family photographs in faded color, this tours the house of Mr. Miner's dead grandparents, full of ersatz furniture and memories.

In a voice-over, he reminisces about their enviably normal marriage, the formative sexual awakenings he had in the house and the present aimlessness of his life. The message, while depressing, is clear: you can't go home again because you were never there in the first place.

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