

METRO PICTURES

Yau, John. "Andreas Slominski's Wonderfully Ugly Handbags," *Hyperallergic.com* (March 29, 2014).

HYPERALLERGIC



Installation view, Andreas Slominski at Metro Pictures.

Andreas Slominski's exhibition at Metro Pictures, which closes today, is the perfect riposte to those enthralled with the expensive baubles of Jeff Koons, or with designer fashions, reality TV, and the gaseous personalities populating these self-inflated, narcissistic times. The exhibition consists of six ladies's handbags carved from Styrofoam and given a touch of sickeningly sweet, pink spray paint on their white exteriors, with an added touch of robin's egg blue on the insides of those you can see into.

The models for these handbags could have come from cheap designer knockoffs sold at a discount store or hawked on street corners after a hefty mark-up; they are garish and inappropriate, like the loud, unwanted relative who shows up drunk to a wedding. In addition to the six sculptures, each of which is displayed on a low plinth, mimicking a department store display, there are two small paintings of wood grain done on inexpensive store-bought canvases. The paintings, which land somewhere between Sherrie Levine's "Knot Paintings" and Catherine Murphy's paintings of knotholes, suggest the cheap, disposable materials that lie beneath the glossy veneer we are supposed to hold in high regard.

While I was scrutinizing the handbags like some discerning shopper, aware of the absurdity of what I was doing, I thought of the elaborate traps Slominski has made over the years out of a wide variety of materials — from sheet and wire to readymade items such as plastic trashcans — and the various animals they are purported to catch: dogs, cats, birds, mice, ermine, and fox.



Andreas Slominski, "Handbag" (2013/14), polystyrene and acrylic paint, 19.88 x 12.4 x 5.51 in

It occurred to me that Slominski's working traps upend, literally and metaphorically, the old adage: "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." His traps do the opposite — not only do they bite, but they also imprison those who unwittingly enter them. Might not his trap for ermine or fox really be for the wealthy collectors wearing such coats to the exhibition? I began to see the handbags as another way of biting the hand that feeds you, of exposing the foolishness of those who equate art with fashion and money, regardless of how expensive or awful the fashion might be. I looked with increased appreciation at the carved Styrofoam bird on the side of one bag, which stood as testimony to the loving attention Slominski has paid to all the lowly details making up the dreadful bags he used as models.

There is something delicious about the way Slominski does everything seemingly without irony. He is the Buster Keaton of sculptors, the one who remains unfazed as the world keeps finding new ways to crash down around him. First, he makes the sculptures out of Styrofoam, a non-biodegradable petroleum byproduct, which he makes no attempt to disguise.

Second, he carves and cuts the Styrofoam into a work of art (something precious), which a collector is supposed to buy and put on display. Third, by turning it into art, he inverts the function of Styrofoam, which is meant to be used to pack precious objects so that they will not be nicked, dinged or broken in the shipping. Fourth, the white Styrofoam endows the handbags with a deathly pall, which isn't helped by the touch of pink. If anything, the pink reinforces the sensation that the handbags's models were made out of equally cheap materials. Fifth, the artist includes only six handbag/sculptures in the exhibition, which is just enough to make the point. The restraint and scale of the exhibition made the whole seem like an installation, a purposeful redefining of the space. The low lighting only enhanced the faux-dramatic effect.

By placing each bag on its own plinth, Slominski turned the gallery's intimate exhibition space into a fancy boutique. And isn't that exactly what many galleries have become — immense showrooms for those who can afford to park their money in the right investment? Instead of trying to please the moneyed members of the art world, he thumbs his nose at them, daring them to embrace his vision.