

Dirk Von Lowtzow, "Beyond Folklore," **Texte Zur Kunst**, September 2006, pp. 235-237

### Beyond Folklore

On Andreas Slominski at Metro Pictures, New York

Seven years after his last solo exhibition at Metro Pictures, the works of Andreas Slominski defy recognition. The older objects, evocative of everyday life and the modern aesthetic in their brittle materiality, had yielded to polystyrene pictures which more or less self-contentedly evade any reference system. Like wacky documents of a trip to kingdom come, the garish new works marked the white walls of the gallery, providing occasion for a wide range of associations and one question: Where is the artist?

Andreas Slominski's new paintings at Metro Pictures are an odd mixture of quirkiness and extreme efficiency: They consist of polystyrene panels the size of walls, into which naturalistic patterns have been scratched and chiselled with almost sadistic accuracy. They form a work group which, in its material as well as its choice of motifs, makes virtually parodistic reference to the classical marble relief. For in place of historical or religious themes, glorifications, allegories and symbols, demonstratively "stuffy" motifs such as "Mirinda Oranges," labyrinthine ski slopes, Christmas trees, snow chain tracks, tropical fruits and vegetables can be discerned in the grooves. The cheapness of the polystyrene takes care of the rest.

In my initial perplexity I thought maybe this was a reference to *Nouveau Realisme* and its programmatic use of everyday objects. But for a topography of coincidence in the Spoerrian sense the depictions I saw here were clearly too illustrative: As in a children's picture book, motifs representing the cycle of the seasons were reproduced with their typical attributes. And the gaudiness of the paint on the Styrofoam panels likewise made them reminiscent of the pages of children's books. The use of neon paints gave the works an additional eighties touch. Now and then I inadvertently thought of graffiti. In addition to the low reliefs thus created, several slightly enlarged, cut-out depictions of toy-like objects had been applied to the polystyrene panels, together emitting a certain nostalgic charm in their allusion to the tradition of the "home-made" and the "good old days": tools, clocks, skis and ski poles, gears, worn-out hiking boots and other things of that ilk. Not a trace of Post-Fordism to be found. It was as though we were seeing the pictures accompanying a story going back to the early days of the last century, memoirs of a peregrination or tales of a hike through an alpine region. In any case, aside from the fact that – in the uniformity of their execution – the images were reminiscent of handicrafts and decoration, they possessed a decidedly illustration-like character. And due to precisely these qualities, Andreas Slominski seemed to have the strange tendency to evaporate, leaving nothing more than an imprint on the surface. He disappears from his work like the glider which has left the impression of its nose in the orthopaedic foam (in his sculpture "Imprint of the Nose Cone of a Glider," 2005). Already the titles of the works alone – combinations of letters and digits, for example "xHBy60z," (whereby the letters "xHByz" form a constant and onomatopoeically approximate the word "exhibition) – allude to serial numbers and industrial production and, accordingly, the extinction of the artistic "signature." But perhaps they also represent coordinates, indicating the whereabouts of a Slominski floating somewhere in the space-time continuum.

In my view, however, this relative intangibility and the process of withdrawal are not to be understood in the "Bartlebyan" sense, as proposed by Jennifer Allen in a review on his show last year in the Serpentine Gallery in London, in which he showed several works of this kind as well.<sup>1</sup> In his literacity, rather, Slominski reminds me more of the Swiss author Robert Walser, whose writings evade any and every attempt at categorization. Like Walser's writing, Slominski's art features details, sometimes quite strange details, painted and carved in a manner as playful as it is insistent. It vacillates constantly between madness and folklore, for Slominski's art is an art of deviation. His formula, accordingly, is not the famous "I'd rather not," but rather: "I'd like to very much, but as circuitously as possible, please." In his artistic actions, for example, he loves complicated organizational procedures. For his one-man show at the Galerie Neu in Berlin in 2004, he hired a carnival procession which scattered confetti and candy in and around the exhibition space. In this context we can also cite his predilection for cumbersome apparatuses, such as his animal traps. Maybe these digressions serve "the purpose of filling in time."<sup>2</sup>

The frequently recurring clocks in Slominski's imagery would appear to imply just such a method. The gracefully looping tracks, branches and ski runs are embellished with secondary branches and lines, blossoms and fruits because Slominski is afraid of getting finished too quickly. After all, the white block of polystyrene has to be filled in. Products of digression in both form and content, these ornamental

bricolages appear to be virtually irreconcilable with the demands of the aloof, modernist culture. Thus depicted, these winding objects – the clocks, gears, screws and screwdrivers –, and the “overwound” quality of the works in general makes them appear curiously out of place in the White Cube of the gallery space.

Repair, embellishment and conservation were the themes of these ice-floe-like picture-objects which were hung, in turn, in oversized glass containers. As during a visit to the aquarium, the beholder was inevitably overcome with a feeling of dizziness. This form of presentation lent the works the quality of found objects from a different age, exotic and provincial at the same time, but also strangely self-referential and void of programmatic content. They remain arrested in superficiality, and that is what, gently, makes them so weird. Along with the total lack of glamour, particularly in the context of the New York gallery landscape, the constant fiddling – the perfectionist care with which Slominski processes his materials – made a decidedly way-out impression.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Allen, “Andreas Slominski,” in: *Artforum*, September, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Walser, as quoted in: W. G. Sebald, “Le promeneur solitaire. Zur Erinnerung an Robert Walser,” in: *Logis in einem Landhaus*, Munich/Vienna, 1998.