



(re)collecting, (re)constructing
Scott Pellnat and Allen C. Topolski

September 9 – October 30, 2013

October 17 (Third Thursday): Artists' roundtable with Scott Pellnat and Allen Topolski

Scott Pellnat and Allen C. Topolski both accepted the invitation to create new work for the Stedman Gallery; this exhibition presents two sculptors who transform found materials and objects in magically illusory ways. Scott Pellnat's installation of a flying squadron and Allen Topolski's domestic appliances intrigue the viewer, who might wonder what the original material or source could have been and what the function of the new object is, all the while recognizing the familiar aspects of these artworks. The viewer is drawn into examining these objects through this recognition, attempting to decipher the illusions that these artists have insinuated in their creations.

As sculptors, Pellnat and Topolski transform and shape material and create new objects. As you read the artists' statements below, which provide valuable insight into the artists' working processes, it is evident that both artists are troubled by, and disturb, the idea of the 'new'. Their work is inhabited by memory, albeit in very different ways; both seem informed by and concerned about the parameters of individual memory, which are dissolving or disappearing as mass culture and consumerism come to occupy more and more social space.

Certainly there are marked differences in the two bodies of work, which act in this exhibition to bring out their respective qualities. Topolski's objects are discrete and contained, reflecting their origin as domestic appliances. His objects emulate the vocabulary of traditional sculpture of object and pedestal, but confound this simple equation by interrogating the value of the origin of material and the role of craft. Pellnat's installation, or installations, if we break his work down into configurations, seems to have no boundaries, seems to be seeking an infinite expansion, to take up as much space as possible, and even then to overflow. Looking beyond the frame of the domestic, Pellnat models his work on another terrain of consumer culture, that of the airplane and the highway, where we bring more mobile expectations of comfort and utility. Pellnat's work engages with entropy, with destruction, with falling apart—also an antithesis of traditional sculpture that attempted to seize the permanent and eternal.

Pellnat's work might suggest a nightmarish immersion, as the viewer stands and walks through its suspended components, perhaps even dodging moving parts, or confronts the seeping growth of the cancerous highway. The artist translates the tremors we feel when we get stuck in highway congestion where there is no exit and the only tactic is to muffle the dread arising from recognizing that there is no way forward or backward out of a traffic jam. Or stuck in an airport security line, that seems to be longer and taking more time than the last time, where we, as the airline passengers, were propelled forward and spit out into the over-crowded waiting rooms and herded cattle-like onto the plane; these experiences overwhelming all the pleasurable anticipation of where we want to go or where we are coming back from, overwhelmed by this huge archaic machinery which we know is taking over the world.

Topolski's objects approach the dream differently, replicating the promise of the new consumer object that we, as consumer, fondle (visually or manually, depending on the retail platform) with our appreciation of design, and the projected satisfaction of enhanced performance and utility, and the egoistic enhancement attached to possessing the 'latest' and the 'newest'. Where the nightmarish dystopia seeps into Topolski's vision is to be found on the shelves of discarded and outmoded appliances assembled from Topolski's studio collections—which we can still appreciate for their form and color and design—that resurrect the struggles that we as consumers have undertaken to make sure that what we acquire is the best; a struggle that we promptly forget when the new gadget and the new device appear on the market that we just have to have.

The antidote, both artists seem to suggest, is humor and passion that leaven the darker reaches of these artistic visions; passion that motivates an unrelenting search for insight and understanding; and humor that delights in the accidental and serendipity.

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