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Originally published by *Houston Press* June 29, 2000

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{ <http://www.houstonpress.com/issues/2000-06-29/art.html> }

De-meaning Objects

What's the significance of a canister vacuum in a box? Nothing, and that's the whole point of Inman's show.

By Kelly Klaasmeyer

When viewing the work of Ludwig Schwarz, remember that the response to the classic "Hell, I could do that!" comment is "Well, you didn't." The quality or validity of an art object is not inversely proportionate to the ability of a proverbial three-year-old to re-create it. This said, Schwarz presents *Untitled (Sovtek)* (2000), three Soviet-made cardboard lightbulb boxes glued together and neatly placed on a pedestal. It looks like something he made while talking on the phone.

We could wax lyrical about the beauty of the mundane, of everyday objects; we could carry on about the wonderful linked hexagonal shapes of the boxes, the red and white Soviet star, and the hammer and sickle that now look like cold war kitsch, the empty husks of a Communist utopia... ad infinitum, ad nauseum. We could wander off on a million irrelevant or faintly relevant tangents. But in the end, this is just a funny little strangely appealing object. Screwing around with stray bits of unassuming refuse has its own merit. If you want to be Duchampian about it, the "art" comes from deciding to present it as such. But when do you stop goofing around with something and say, "Okay, it's done. It's art now"? Schwarz keeps the viewer and possibly himself a little off balance. Is he kidding? Maybe, maybe not.

Schwarz's *Untitled (Untitled Vacuum)* (2000) is a sculpture that looks like something your mom stuck in your car when you moved to your first apartment. A cardboard box contains an aged canister vacuum, the hose, accessories, some foam and the body overly taped together with the quintessential bonding material, duct tape. The piece could have come straight from a garage sale, a corner of the box ridiculously reinforced with pieces of wood. It's another example of Schwarz's quirky way of looking at things, and unless we give him a shot of phenobarbital, we aren't gonna know what errant thoughts informed the piece.

Katrina Moorhead's *Futogoyama Sometimes* (2000) is a huge roll of clear vinyl with little colored pieces of plastic shopping bags stapled to it like cherry blossoms fallen on some synthetic landscape. The vinyl is unrolled, like a scroll, and bunched up into little mountain shapes. The piece is simultaneously cheesy and elegant, traditional Japanese woodcut meets contemporary consumerism. In a nod to consumer-product innovation, it's also portable, dimensions variable. You could roll it up and take it anywhere.

Legs (2000) by Brad Tucker is an "S" of two conjoined and elongated curves of brown and tan polyester. Think of polyester before its recent reintroduction -- old guys in cowboy-cut leisure suits, the chunky thighs of elderly ladies swishing against each other in their synthetic casings as they push carts through Wal-Mart... (Remember, you were warned). *Medusa* (2000) is a tangled outline cut from black painted cardboard, then casually tacked to the wall. The rounded ends stop abruptly at the boundaries of the original cardboard square. It's a rough-edged graphic shape that, like much of Tucker's work, reminds you of something you are just on the edge of remembering. In *Woman's Wo* (2000), small scraps of foam in a "W" and an "O" shape are painted orange and placed on the floor. As Davenport discusses Tucker's work in his essay, "It is this partial failure of significance, characteristic of the enigmatic pronouncements of broken signage which makes it intriguing."

http://www.houstonpress.com/issues/2000-06-29/art.html/printable_page Page 1 of 2

I N M A N G A L L E R Y

Limey avocado-green and white op-art panels cover two walls in Francesca Fuchs's *Dining Room Set* (1999). Overall, the installation feels like hip '60s interior design, complete with a cool square light fixture hanging from the center of the room. The optimistic, decorative luxe of the paintings combines with a shimmering and indeterminate pop nostalgia. The work could be shown traditionally as "paintings," but that presentation seems a little too cold for them. Creating a pseudo-environment with the work gives it a warmer feeling. There are elements of "Painting" with a capital P, but Fuchs chooses to emphasize its decorative and human aspects in a self-effacing way.

Says Davenport of the pieces in the exhibition: "Each of these works pretends to try to mean something, pretends to fail, and is thereby off the hook -- free to be itself, to express the artist's state of existence without coming to any conclusions." Artists sometimes create strategies to facilitate or to even justify in their own minds the things they feel compelled to make. Things can succeed or fail for reasons that aren't easily definable. Sometimes you just like something and you can't extract from the piece *why*. It is this alluded-to meaning that can put viewers on edge, waiting for the punch line. As a viewer, you have to trust yourself; if you can't find one, it may be because there isn't one.

Looking at these works you get the feeling that, for these artists, elaborate, "important" or expensive materials or grand themes and artistic agendas are, well, pretentious. There is a witty and disingenuously unassuming approach to much of the work. One needs a certain sense of personal artistic security to stick a vacuum in a box and present it as art. Either that, or a combination of insecurity and optimism, or maybe just a sense of humor.

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