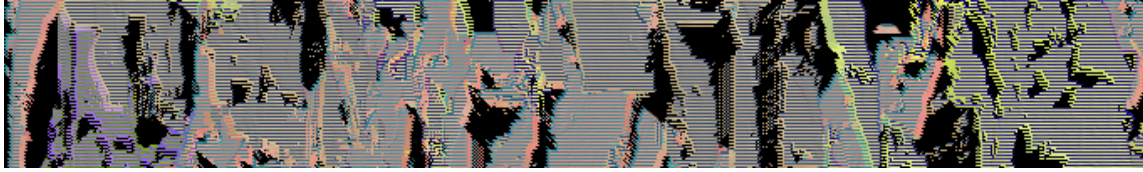


METRO PICTURES

Whitner Kimball, "Review- B. Wurtz : Works at Metro Pictures," ARTFAGCITY.COM, June 29 2011



B. Wurtz: Works at Metro Pictures



You don't have to be an industrial designer to be a sculptor. Sometimes the reminder is bracing. *Works*, a forty-year survey of B. Wurtz's work on view at Metro Pictures, is a modest slap in the face to the commercial gloss and industrial scale of much recent sculpture. Here, the product is comprehensive reflection; delicate arrangements of recycled items become heavily loaded vehicles for what has been referred to as "[critical expressionism](#)."

Works features beige and colorful bits of detritus – plastic bags, strings, yogurt lids, pieces of wood, etc. – fastidiously lined up on shelves, hung from walls, clustered on the floor, catalogued, and juxtaposed. Tree-like works, of plastic bags suspended from rods, look a little like Depression-era Christmas. By hanging on the wall or manipulating the canvas-on-stretcher convention, many of the pieces refer to painting; in one instance, what might have been an antique doorstep is wrapped in canvas with the word "painting" penned on it, its wiry handle reminiscent of the wire used to hang a frame. Like the "[anti-painting](#)" constructions and objects of Joan Miro, the boundaries between painting and object are questioned, but here the breakdown is more playful than dire.

Though large-scale installations of recycled materials is a well-trodden path – [Sarah Sze](#) and [Jessica Stockholder](#) come to mind – but rather than engulfing the space, *Works* synthesizes the conceptual and the expressive through calculated moves. What you see is not a plastic bag, a yogurt lid, or a lock; it is a token for an enormous game. Sometimes the game is evident in the tension imbued in action that is not completed. For instance, two halves of a lock are separated and mounted to wooden blocks on opposite ends of a rectangular piece of wood that is tilted. The viewer immediately insinuates motion and is compelled to reach out and complete it; however, there is no obvious reason that the wood should be on an angle, other than curiosity. The power of juxtaposition of objects to create a specific, immediate reaction is very simply an essential element of visual communication. The disrupting of systems creates something else that is uniquely human.

Works rejects the idea that art needs to be [shiny, overblown, or expensive-looking](#). The basis of Wurtz's work is said to be his 1973 drawing *Three Important Things*, which simply lists "sleeping, eating, and keeping warm." The act of reducing artworks to bare necessity clears a path for a contemplative examination of visual language. They seem to assert that art is in the act of arrangement and displacement, rather than the object; it doesn't have to be definitive, but there must be evidence of a brain at work.

AFC's Rating: 8/10 (Whitney Kimball)