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ARTFORUM

Andreas Slominski

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High on the list of a novice art lover's mistakes must surely be wandering into a Chelsea gallery and asking to use the bathroom. Unfortunately, the portable toilets installed by Andreas Slominski in his recent exhibition at Metro Pictures did not function in the conventional sense—unless some gutsy viewer decided to take a tip from Jackson Pollock, who, during the 1943 unveiling of his commissioned painting *Mural*, notoriously urinated in Peggy Guggenheim's fireplace—so a full-bladdered visitor's needs likely remained unresolved.

Slominski's fourth exhibition at the gallery suggested a punchy display of high-Minimalist sculpture that felt something like a forgotten, low-end suite by Donald Judd or Robert Morris. Primary-colored outdoor latrines jutted sideways from each wall; several cast-plastic, cube-like items were scattered around the floor; and a set of plastic reliefs was mounted on the wall. A German manufacturer fabricated all of it—the artist is loyal to his nationality. While versions of these works had been shown elsewhere, most recently at Hamburg's Deichtorhallen museum in a sprawling, one-hundred-piece spectacular, the reliefs were making their debut here. Allusions to motherhood, the spiritual, and the organic—appearing in depictions of female figures and babies, alongside imprints of plants and chunks of wood in plastic—gave his ready-made facilities a curious nudge in the direction of the nature-versus-nurture debate.

In the gallery's, ahem, *rear* space, a complete if open-sided potty titled *Chameleon* (all works 2018) was installed in splendid isolation, theoretically accessible, though only by visitors with some serious Pollockian chutzpah. The toilet has long been a favorite formal and allegorical device for artists, and comparisons to Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917, and to Maurizio Cattelan's eighteen-karat gold *America*, 2016, are inevitable. But Slominski transcends both *Fountain*'s dependence

View of "Andreas Slominski," 2018. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.



on recontextualization and Cattelan's blunt political symbolism to expand the associations of the object in several directions at once; just when we think we have a handle on the artist as the cool manipulator of generic-looking product, he throws in those allegorical emblems and moves the whole undertaking into more lyrical territory. His focus on this particular genre of lavatory felt strategic, too, its portability connoting temporary status, perhaps in the service of construction, or even an emergency situation.

While there will always be a certain base humor attached to the toilet as art object—even, or especially, when displaced or deconstructed—it has profoundly uncomfortable associations, too. The bright, flat hues of Slominski's oily plastic give his works not only the playful appearance of children's toys, but also the opaque, forbidding sterility of mass-produced, industrial-medical hardware. The cubicles have a claustrophobic aura and an institutional aesthetic that no amount of superficially cheery design—or, here, juxtaposed pastoral imagery—can mitigate. Thus Slominski's ongoing project occupies an especially difficult (incommodious?) territory, one in which comedy and something close to horror are brought into proximity, and an oddly persistent art-historical motif demonstrates its continued utility.

—*Michael Wilson*