

*DANIEL RAEDEKE: Magasin*

*October 13 - November 11, 2006*

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DANIEL RAEDEKE: Art for Sale  
By Matthew Strauss

Daniel Raedeke wants his art to be as slick as the store displays and magazines he alludes to in the title of his exhibition "Magasin". That is not to say that the cheap disposability of the consumer culture Raedeke approximates is his end. His artistic strategy embraces the inherent appeal of various advertising's quick communication, amplified images, and other good-looking lies. And like magazines and merchandise, Raedeke's imagery does not bear the burden of needing to embody any great meaning or message beyond its "look". Raedeke, complete with his own logo, needs his forms to do little more than convincingly represent the Raedeke brand. Just like the end-of-season sale rack or last week's copy of whatever, Raedeke embraces the short shelf life of any particular idea. Each thought for a work becomes nearly obsolete as the next idea comes along; Raedeke's painted circles replacing his earlier latex bumps, July's issue replacing June's.

When Raedeke speaks about his art he refers to Pixar animation and Toys'R'Us as often as his more traditionally artistic forebears. He is as deeply interested in low forms of design as he is in high art.

Department stores, airbrushed t-shirts and puffy corporate logos hold a place in the artist's imagination not too far from medieval altarpieces and Jean Arp. The key question is how exactly does Raedeke's art making and his eye for tomorrow's trash combine to result in anything more meaningful than arty trash? In order to understand Raedeke's work it is essential to recognize the lengths he goes to in order to achieve the appearance of something mass-produced. His art is fueled by the ironic tension in how difficult it is to make it all look so simple. The key to Raedeke is in his studied contradictions of high and low, simple and complex, hard and easy. Raedeke attacks painting's conventions from within what

amounts to a smiling, candy colored blob of a Trojan Horse. It may be that the cleverest aspect of Raedeke's strategy is that by the time a viewer notices all of his art's funky subversion they have already let it in the door.

There is an additional conflict being cultivated within Raedeke's tiles and ceramic sculpture. In my view utility is the death of art, and Raedeke's cast objects purposefully flirt with a suggestion of functionality, approaching the line more perilously than his paintings do, and still never quite drifting away into mere design. Within the confines of gallery walls, there is very little as tense as bearing witness to art in the act of intentionally trying to destroy itself, and that is exactly the stage that Raedeke has set.

Very often an artist with sympathies similar to Raedeke's will rely heavily on the context of having their work placed within a museum or gallery to emphasize the distinction between the object of art and the object of origin. Something like Warhol's *Brillo Box* sculptures or Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* needed to be in a gallery for the viewer to notice that something was amiss. Raedeke's approach is less extreme than either Duchamp's or Warhol's, the requisite tension in Raedeke's art being largely self-contained within the individual

work's surface, rather than in the expectations the viewer arrives with.

Like a good joke, Raedeke's art succeeds because it is true. But of course Raedeke's art is not a joke, is not parody, and ultimately it is not quite a critique either. What makes his art meaningful is that it bravely luxuriates in its own potential meaninglessness. Raedeke's art is a knowing acknowledgement of what art today really is, for good or bad: branded, marketed, and ultimately just another thing for sale.

Written by Matthew Strauss

Matthew Strauss is an artist. His work was recently on view at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. His next exhibition is scheduled with the Bruno David Gallery during the 2006-2007 season.

This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists.

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