



HEYDAY

The urge to destroy money can be stronger than the urge to make it. The artist is susceptible to either urge and its taboos. It's the egotism that's alienating: tyrannical greed or anarchistic profligacy, both are antisocial, even misanthropic. Hording it and blowing it show an unhealthy contempt for others. But there is always, at every level, the underlying desire for money. And whether the desire for money is poorly repressed in the destruction of its object or more convincingly repressed in the equal dispersal of fortunes among puritanical communities, it remains as constant an agony for the middle class as it is for the rich or destitute. The closer we get to a cashless society, the more we understand and appreciate the fetishization of money as an object, an unhealthy habit: we've long forgotten the reason for these shackles. We manifest a fascination with death in a quaint fascination with objects from the past.

Kristi Malakoff's dioramas are meticulously scalped from local and global currency. Her global tableau, a utopia under the bell jar of the gallery vitrine, encompasses airplanes and satellites, tribal dancers and heroes, and numerous indigenous structures. But we are inoculated against this mosaic of optimism by the ever present knowledge that these iterations of human achievement have been lifted from cash money, the greatest human inequity ever invented. The old saying *money to burn* reinforces the taboo Malakoff is breaking by implying that only the super-rich have the right to do what she's doing—destroy cash—only the decadently prosperous are allowed their *heyday*. Malakoff turns ruined money into a semiprecious *mise-en-scène*. She has made an ahistoric Eden etched by timeless greed, corruption, vanity, and base price. Here, even talent is at the mercy of money's needs. Never mind Malakoff's utter precision with a knife, the more detailed and unique the design is for each dollar bill, the harder it is to forge. And the longer it takes to do something—like meticulous scalping—the greater value we place on the final product. Without their original value attached, Malakoff presents the figures, edifices, and inventions shown on money as beautiful, fragile, and utopic, and all equally honorable examples of artistic technique and human accomplishment. Each of her Canadian birds—one per vitrine, in palettes which are

no doubt labour intensive to replicate—are small masterpieces of approval. Now, the iconography on the world's money begins to speak of each nation's honest collective longing, at times for the sanctities of the past, and at other times for the latest landmark of human accomplishment, as if we can take credit for our time in history.

There's a certain amount of redundancy in the act of taking apart a perfectly good leather wallet and then carefully putting it back together again by hand. It is redundancy as a form of innovation. The styrofoamed paper coffee cup that Sarah Massecar peeled apart and reconnected as if no intervention, exorcism, and resurrection had even occurred was finished without any waste or much distortion of the original; but a first edition of Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pecuchet* was given the same treatment and the reconstruction is displayed alongside a pile of cakey paper flakes and amber glue drops to reinforce the difference/mess the artist accomplished/made in her repetition/room. There is also a tangle of unneeded thread and fabric placed on a plinth beside the wallet so that nothing of the original was left out of the exhibit. It is a process of removing only the factory from the wallet and reapplying the actions of the leather worker, the man machine. The remade wallet suggests similar artistic contradictions as Malakoff's money works, that the value of labour is massively unstable. It is a form of penitence for art's bullishness that the artist offers to mimic the assembly line, to denude commercialism in art by repeating by hand the actions of a machine. But the redundancy of her remades isn't that they already existed, it's that they would have been accepted, however listlessly, as legitimate art objects had she left them entirely untouched. In a sense, this is not a remade wallet so much as it is a handmade representation of a readymade. A lot of sculpture today has this fear of ontology. The strategy of imitation conceals the artist's innately obsessive craftsmanship. It's *green art*: what was once called a talent is now sublimated by an act of self-conscious recycling. The covertness of the technique is like that rhyme hidden in the middle of the poem's stanza, surprising on its second time around. And there's no lack of awareness on the artist's part that to create a sculpture using the subject as the material is a deeply

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self-conscious activity. Flaubert is often described today as the most self-conscious prose stylist in modern literature, and the first. His appearance in Massecar's series of remades as the author of a book that has been replaced with its hand-made identical suggests the impact his ideas has had on close to a hundred and fifty years of subsequent thinking.

Taking images from hotel brochures in his native Germany and digitally erasing the props that set the scene, Peter Freitag produces large scale images that appear untouched but are more disarming and traumatic than any hotel advertisement. They are immediately attractive, to the credit of the original compositions, but without props to guide our reading of the scene, the relationships between the actors turns ambiguous, complex, even savage. One of these tourism brochures once featured a family seated around a full meal; now the meal's gone. The consumptive sacrifice that revives the soul has been eliminated so that Freitag's family is now seated before an empty cloth, with only mother looking up cheerfully, as if expecting nothing besides judgment to ascend her at any second. Evidence that a magazine was spread open on a hotel bed has been extracted from one image so that a middle-aged woman now sits with her legs off the mattress, gazing down with great concentration at the plain blue linens. Her happiness is now strained to anxiety. The sheets are fitted so tautly as to give the bed the cubic immaculateness of something unreal. Behind her, a man wearing convenience store sunglasses, a moustache, and receding hairline is seated cross-legged in khaki shorts in front of a white light blazing through the deck curtains as if the sun is screaming next door. His eyes are fixed, staring at the side of her face. There's no People magazine or fresh pack of cigarettes to distract these old lovers from the fact they're the only two people in the room now. Without the dressings, most of the situations in Freitag's pictures begin to spell out tragedies. The hotel room is at its essence a generic habitat no more sympathetic to our needs than life itself, seeing bodies come in and seeing bodies leave just the same. The hotel room is the most indifferent living space we pay for. And without their leisurely domestic props, the pleasure purpose completely vanishes, and what appears in

Sarah Massecar, *Remade: Book*, 2006

Peter Freitag, "example for communication #62" (detail), 2000

Sarah Massecar, *Remade: Wallet*, 2006

Kristi Malakoff, *Ornithological Series-\$20* (detail), 2004

Photos: Peter Freitag and Aina Rognstad

its place (in the expressions and actions of the actors) are the same sordid myths of dysfunction that artists have represented forever.

Heyday is comprised of works with theoretical price tags and spatial dimensions that are readily importable to the collector's home. This strangely domestic commercialism is tempered heavily by the fact that all the work speaks candidly about their passive-aggressive acceptance of money and commodification. Perhaps the artists themselves see no distinction between art and commodity, and what could be construed as antipathy is humour. Even as the works speak to the fact that the human race has ceded a large part of our retinal privacy to commercialism in everyday reality, these are all still smart, eloquent objects hardly beyond the market. There is even a cautiously sardonic fascination with the impact the originals have on the conceptual experience. The artists have gone so far as to sublimate their own talents to present only slightly tampered visions of this *supra-regular*. The coffee cup, the national currency, the advertisement, the first edition... these are nondescript on a scale of global mass-production surely unparalleled in history, and the current result of thousands of permutations over thousands of years. These might all be considered object-extensions of our bodies. The wallet is never far from the hip. The cup, never far from the grip. The cash is in the wallet or the palm of your hand. The book is in your hands, beside your bed, always nearby. In the case of Freitag's images, which might not at first glance suggest an organ or extremity, the subtext to any vacation is work, and labour is our survival. The family vacation is an essential valve in the organic system of an economy without slaves, allowing for the occasion, if not the direction, towards feeling truly human. We earmark a time and a place for aimlessness, where the purpose is not to escape but to arrive, but we usually squander the opportunity because our minds aren't prepared to drift like that.

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