

## **Toying with the Menace – the Objects of Vlad Olariu**

Remarkably coherent for an artist in his mid-twenties, **Vlad Olariu** is focusing his artistic practice on the production of rather small objects or installations, often constructed out of unexpected materials or objects that he combines and recontextualizes in vividly creative ways.

Olariu's art looks –and is– fresh, smart and funny; his works are almost always exercises in diffuse irony, gently and subtly directed toward contemporary culture(s), the viewer and sometimes the artist himself. Most of his objects possess a friendly, appealing look. They are pleasurable in an immediate and unsophisticated manner but still they are really invitations addressed to the spectator to reflect, after indulging herself or himself in smiling, upon the topics they circumscribe. Thus, his art is not necessarily critical, but rather driven by and requiring reflection and inquisitiveness.

The works in the **“Innocence”** exhibition are alluding to what one might call civilizing actions and their instruments. Building shelters and travelling are the human activities Olariu's sculptures recurrently refer to. Those two types of actions poignantly have in common some significant features. First, they both represent ways in which the human being is conquering space, is mastering his habitat and is ruling his world. Then, they are also some of the most destructive actions humans can pursue, in terms of environmental implications. And finally, somewhat summing up the above mentioned common denominators, they are both so strongly linked to the idea (or should we say myth?) of progress, an idea so dear to the modernists, so suspiciously viewed by our post / trans / alter modernist culture.

But the seriousness of such topics is paradoxically combined with the playfulness which is unavoidably implicated by the fact that his works are at the same time obvious renderings of toys, with which they roughly resemble also in size. Colorful and made out of plastic, the truck, the ship etc. were some of the most common and beloved items that accompanied the childhood of several generations, especially that of boys. The artist is part of such a generation and the works seem to denote also a feeling of mild, amused nostalgia.

Semantics are once again turned upside down because of the unusual material the artist is using. In his rendering, autoclaved cellular concrete (ACC) is replacing the original plastic as constructive material of his “toys” (although Olariu is an artist who loves to work with plastic, too). The sculptures emphasize the tactile

and visual charm of such a commonplace material and at the same time their meaning is once again enriched, or complicated, by the status of this material. ACC is something of a universal construction material, at least in nowadays Romania. One should also have in mind that some of the ugliest, of the most hideous architectural and urban works of the last decade in this country are literally made of it.

Thus, the paradoxical juxtaposition seems almost a regulatory principle of Olariu's work. One can hardly overlook, for example, that the juxtaposition of the friendly and inherently minimal Eskimo's igloo with the modernist looking silhouettes of tower buildings, with the truck or with the ship – not any ship, it's an "Icebreaker", to take the irony a step further – produces a contextual sarcasm which is perfectly coherent with the bittersweet humor that delicately pervades his work. Global warming is looming and the unassuming Eskimo standing near the igloo is in danger: his intensively travelling, extensively building fellow humans might just end up destroying his ice, his world. Still, he's smiling at us and his large smile has something childish about it: yet, there still exists innocence, or so we'd like to believe ...

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