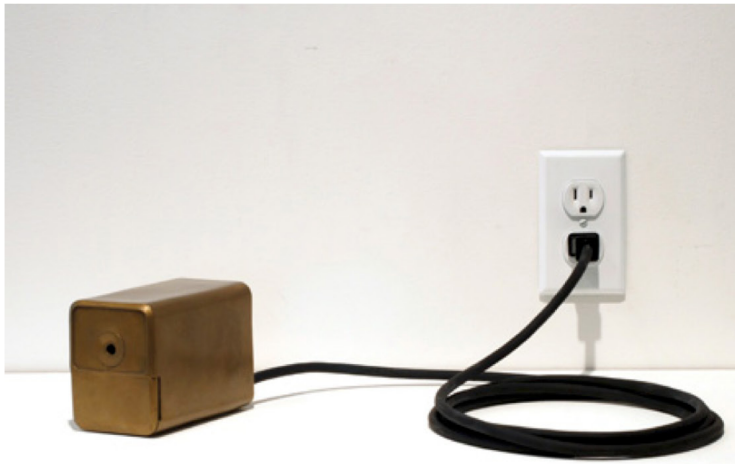


Stephen Sollins: "New Thoughts" at Brian Gross Fine Art

by dewitt cheng

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*New Thoughts*

2008

Stephen Sollins

Cast bronze with power cable

3 3/4" x 5 1/2" x 3" with 10 foot cable, Edition 1 of 3

Photo: courtesy Brian Gross Fine Art

In Borges' story, "The Approach to Almutasim," the narrator discerns the influence of a holy man in the transfigured faces of his followers. Surveying contemporary art, one often glimpses the smiling countenance of Dadaist/proto-conceptualist Marcel Duchamp, who made intellectually rigorous prankishness de rigueur for generations of successors and avatars; one sometimes thinks of those "Matrix" movies with thousands of combative Hugo Weavings.

Stephen Sollins' work manifests a similar Duchampian sensibility: ironic, humorous, skeptical, and even absurdist. The New York conceptualist has previously gutted security envelopes and constructed geometric abstractions from their patterned or colored linings; partially unwoven mass-produced embroideries to reweave the colored threads into the floating squares once beloved of Russian Revolution utopians; created post-minimalist grid paintings (reminiscent of Alan McCollum's impastoed paintings of superimposed grids) by whitening out or drawing over the verbiage in newspaper sports, TV and art schedules, or camping-goods catalogues, sometimes leaving survivor images of camping tents or rubber rafts. He has even constructed word poems from obituaries. "Source materials are very important in my work," writes Sollins. "All have to do with domestic space or the establishment of it." Sollins domesticates commercial artifacts by recontextualizing these humble materials into art that both expands and subverts the idea of art, creating parody-homage hybrids. Two bronze sculptures, paradoxically beautiful, mock the ideas of, respectively, utility and visual legibility. *New Thoughts*, replicating an electric pencil sharpener, replete with presumably functional power cable, shares art DNA with Meret Oppenheim's Surrealist fur-lined teacup and spoon. *Can't Have*, a framed picture shown leaning on a small shelf, back side out, its framing tape, ID label and hardware duplicated in loving detail, recalls James Melchert's descriptively captioned yet visually indecipherable graphite rubbings of Polaroid photographs. Less provocative are *From Planning Ahead*, a dozen sheets of drafting vellum, with preprinted title blocks, onto which images of office supplies--file cabinets, sorting and drawing racks, stools, chairs, and file-storage boxes--have been eccentrically collaged; two similar *Stage Set* collages atop metal foil; and the jewelry-like *Nine Small Monuments* and their associated drawings.