

# ANDREAS SLOMINSKI

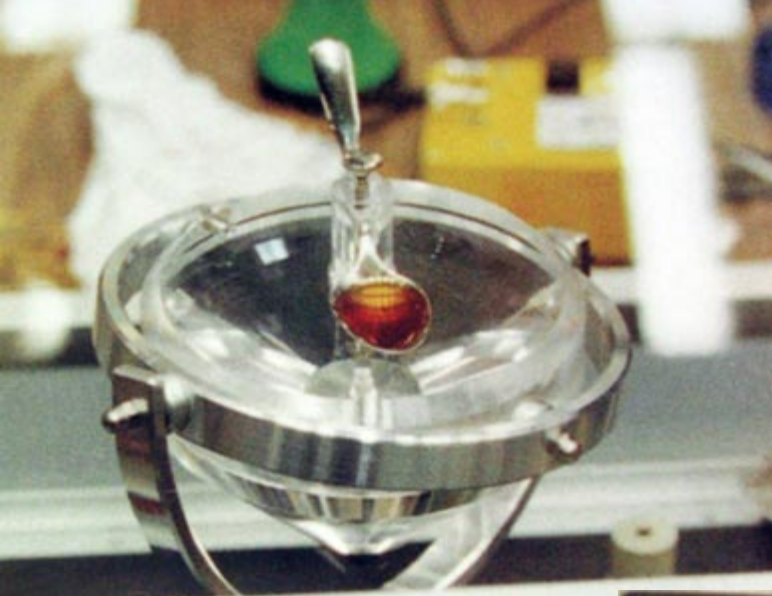
radical absurdism



The work of Andreas Slominski is remarkable for its apparent stupidity. He pushes absurdism to its limits. But his work succeeds because of his peculiar ability to transmute nonsense into a logic and logic into nonsense. His work is an exploration of the structure of the idiotic. Its validity lies in the fact that irrationality is part of the fabric of human existence: even the most intelligent and capable of us will think or behave stupidly at times.

Humour reaches deep into the human psyche—one thinks here of Freud’s discussion of oneiric language in terms of *condensation* and *displacement* {Freud, 1991}, notions that resonate with the Surrealist’s ‘juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities’ {Breton, 1972 [1924]}. We would not laugh at a genuinely stupid action but we can be amused when presented with a cleverly conceived fabrication of such an action. It is possible to understand Slominski in terms of an intellectual account of humour that points to its deconstructive credentials.

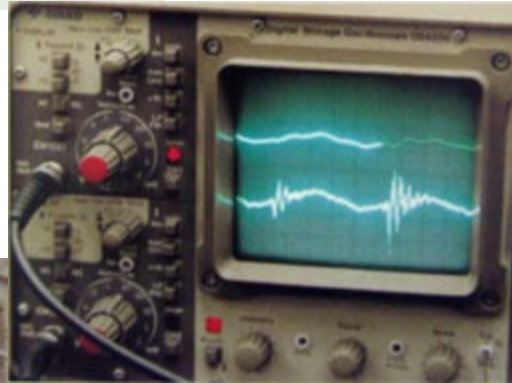
In *Self-Portrait with Sombrero*, 1998, Slominski cut a hole in the corner of a room near the ceiling so that he could take a self-portrait photograph. He wore a sombrero to make the event more risible due to the fact that the sombrero had to be cut to fit into the corner. Slominski’s work appears to be the



antithesis of the social-critical interventions that come under the rubric of reintegrating art into the praxis of life. In contrast his works are an apparent waste of time and money.

His *Cough Syrup Transport System*, 1998, is a case in point. This work entailed placing a spoon carrying a dose of cough syrup into a Cardan's suspension apparatus used to keep mariner's compasses horizontal. This was in turn placed within a Vibro-Shock safe. The safe was placed in a van and carried from one end of Berlin to the other, completing its journey in the Deutsche Guggenheim at Unter den Linden:

During transport, one could watch two shock waves on the instrument screen of the oscillograph. The top wave measured the frequency of disturbances within the safe, while the bottom wave measured the disturbances to the outer frame. As the van traversed the city, the screen recorded various bumps and turns, with the bottom line always indicating the greatest level of turbulence, since the inside of the safe is outfitted with shock absorbers. On two occasions during the journey—a sharp curve made at a crossroad, and when the van accidentally drove onto a curb while parking outside the museum—the bottom wave on the screen showed an enormous shock outside the safe while the top wave remained almost still. {Guggenheim 1999}



Slominski's *Cough Syrup Transport System* amplifies the uselessness of art to a point where it cannot be ignored. Yet at the same time one's curiosity is awakened, which is a productive effect in itself.

In spite of the fact that thought is ultimately directed towards practical purposes, to achieve this aim it must be able



to detach from what is known in order to explore that which is not known. In Slominski's work the activity of thought is presented in its purist form as oblique and distracted. He explores an intellectual territory in which the joke intersects with the mathematical puzzle. His work offers a perspective on everyday objects and situations that subjects them to transformations that are both unexpected and unfathomable.

For another work, *Bucket of Water*, 1998, the basic concept is simple, to place a bucket of water in an art museum's shop. But Slominski went about this task in the most convoluted manner. He commissioned a plumber:

to come install a 15-meter long pipe from the nearest bathroom to the bucket. In no time the pipe, including a faucet, was installed and the artist was able to fill the bucket. After that was done the pipe was removed and all traces of the action were eliminated, leaving only the bucket full of water behind. It is important to mention that this action took place with no audience present. The only thing the audience was able to see later was the relic of the action, a bucket of water, sitting lost and seemingly forgotten in a museum shop as if the cleaning personnel had left it behind by accident. As with the work in Zurich, the only documentation of the activity were photographs in the publication. {Hoffmann, 2003}

One's immediate response is that the work would have had much greater sculptural impact if the plumbing had been left. If the act of installing a cumbersome extension to the existing water supply to fill a plastic bucket was absurd then was removing it an erasure or amplification of that absur-

dity? In this work what is not said, not seen, not known is more important than that which is in evidence. Perhaps at this point the dimension of the ludicrous intersects with that of the Zen *no-mind*.