Slug.

I first saw Slug in the studio while visiting Erika in Los Angeles, opening the door and immediately encountering a line of clothes racks that acted as both frames and support structures to a series of sculptures. Initially read as a single image, a dense tangle of material, they expanded to become an assemblage of objects as I moved into and around the room. I experienced Slug first as a nod to the theatrical, given that the last project we had worked on together, The Artist Theater Program, involved not only similar racks to move the props on stage but also a presentation of artworks sequentially, in a progressive time of a play’s scenes or a vaudeville’s acts. In addition, that project had required the scaling-up of her sculptures from the somewhat hand-scaled to full-bodied, a quality that Slug seemed to turn on. In that regard, I was struck by how the theatrical had transposed itself into these actor-less works, from the literal use of the clothes racks to its logic of staging and sequence – and, of course, the essence of the “waiting in the wings”. Now was the time for them to move into the spotlight, racks, ropes, and all.

On reflection since that viewing, it has become clearer just how much Slug simultaneously invites opposing readings. Initially we read them in series, dramaturgically in the sequential sense, but only up to a point. The density and relation of the “sculpture-racks” to each other certainly points towards a unified object, one to be read as a single multi-layered sculpture, as with the flurries of superimpositions in her moving image works. However, in resistance to this narrative there is certainly no clear sense, progression or advance. The unifying motif is all we have: the slug. The slug who not only provides the title of the exhibition and this particular series of works but whose quite literal image is presented three times over, as a real photographic likeness inching across the monitor and as a hand-drawn image in print. It is this emblem with its polyvalent meanings and reproductive doubling that takes our hand and provides the key.

Just what are those meanings? There is the oblique reference to the interval, the black space you add in video editing programs between frames, but a slug also engenders a form of resistance – a heavy blow, a bullet, a defiant sluggishness. However, this challenge is paradoxical. Take a turn around the sculptures and behind the highly finished, confidently boisterous facades (be it shiny rubberized blue or a dense Tàpies-esque ground). Each has a verso that betrays its material production, the other Janus face marking its past, the artist’s hand and means of production inscribed in its material. The racks and sculptures enclose the slug. They care for it, even monumentalize it. We encounter the slug as if behind a gate, the frame and surrounding objects acting as barrier to a malevolent salt-wielding child.

After our first meeting a few years ago, Erika sent me a copy of Anne Carson’s Economy of the Unlost, the last of the author’s books I was yet to read and which signaled a comforting common sensibility. Like most good gifts, the book seemed to be not only a gesture of thanks from my guest, but equally a lens through which to understand her, her thought and her work. The book tracks the transition of the ancient Greek gift economy to the rise of currency-usage through the Marxist perspective of alienation, one that transforms the object from non-objective and reciprocal to a capitalist commodity. Through the gesture of the gift, Erika communicated this fundamental connection, one that prefigures commodification or resists the underlying social structure that colors artist-curator interactions, closer to what (as Carson explains) the Greeks called a “symbolon” or “a sign of mutual obligation between friends”. This gift communicated a

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reciprocal relationship.

To read Slug through this gift of words (albeit someone else’s) as “an extension of the interior life of the giver, both in space and time, into the interior life of the receiver”\(^2\) allows us to perceive the slug in its dialectical sense: as a $50 gold coin, for sure, but also its opposite, a counterfeit—a token used to subvert a slot machine’s understanding of exchange value. We experience Slug as the implicit trace of productive activity, but it also transforms us (the viewer) into the slug, the interval between things, the breath or gap. “But blank lines do not say nothing,”\(^3\) as Carson writes.

Through her work, Vogt attempts to gesture towards community. Not in the educational sense or what we conflate with “social practice” as an institutional turn, but in the old way, the way it used to mean—friendship, comradeship, living and working together. The sculptures shade, point, protect and interact with each other, creating new perspectives on and for one another. Bringing to mind Shelly Silver’s *Things I forgot to tell myself* where the filmmaker’s scrunched up hand forms an aperture through which we see the city, we should read Slug together, and it is through their implied social relation that these objects reveal sincerity. An artist who refuses to take the stance of either cynical embrace or pseudo-rebellious anti-art, there is instead an untypical openness to the work. It yearns to protect, to support.

Vogt’s artworks resist metaphor, and they certainly resist categorization. They demand us to move around and through them, to curiously encounter them as if passing through ornate metal gates. They demand bodies. They manage to present process, production and transformation within a single space and in one viewing. The ambiguity of value in the sculpture and/or prop dilemma must be activated by us and in time.

At the time of our first meeting, Erika was making *Darker Imposter*, a tightly layered and rhythmic video that combined animated and hand-drawn images with footage of hand-manipulated objects. Although impossible to divorce from the structuralism of her moving image works, you experience Slug not as flattened and fast, but rather in real time and with ever-expanding space. It is opposed to that proscenium stage and captive audience with its props and illusions, Slug turns our value-experience on its head, and you ‘see’ them differently here. Together.

— Victoria Brooks, 2015

Victoria Brooks is curator of time-based visual art at Experimental Media and Performing Arts Centre (EMPAC) in Troy, NY.

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\(^2\) ibid, p18