

BRAD DOWNEY

USA

The works of Berlin-based American conceptual artist Brad Downey reclaim privatized and commercialized urban space through temporary interventions. Downey himself describes his humorous works as “spontaneous sculptures.” “My early stuff was about adding lots of things; afterwards I was subtracting,” he says. “Now I am more interested in reorganizing, like taking the information that is already there and reorganizing it to make new meaning.” Inspired by, and in the tradition of, sculptors such as Constantin Brâncuși or Roman Signer, Downey is always reinventing himself. Whether it is Dadaism, the readymade, Bauhaus, or street art, art history inspires him to take new approaches. His leitmotif is freedom—of thought and action. He fights for the personal freedom of each individual through the means of art. His 2019 work *Melania* was a big stunt: on July 4, 2019, in a small town in Slovenia, he unveiled a wooden sculpture of Melania Trump that he had commissioned. The work was executed by Ales “Maxi” Zupevc, a local folk artist who was born the same year and even in the same hospital as the former American First Lady. Downey’s point was to provide food for thought on the political situation in the United States, and Melania’s dual role as immigrant and wife of the anti-immigration former president. The sculptor, who was not particularly talented, created a deformed Melania, and immediately the statue was compared to a “scarecrow” and “Smurf” and became an internet meme. Exactly one year later, monuments are being toppled around the world, and the sculpture has been

1, 3 + 5
Melania
Slovenia, 2020,
life-size
bronze sculpture

2 + 4
Melania
Slovenia, 2019,
life-size
wooden carving

vandalized by fire. “The aesthetic of vandalism is seductive, but so is the aesthetic of propaganda,” Downey comments. (AB)

