

VISIONAIRE

HELMUT LANG'S BURRY

By Martin Solomon
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Seminal designer, Helmut Lang, has opened his first solo show in a major American art institution with "Burry", at the Dallas Contemporary through August 21st. The Austrian born designer-cum-artist, who redefined the silhouette of the 90s, continues his decades-long artistic explorations, which run in close parallel to his design disciplines, with unconventional media, considered use of the gallery space and an inversion of textural materials.

"Burry", a pastoral term which refers to a soft material being covered by protective barbs, is the exhibition's title and reflects its predominant material – in this instance, sheepskin. The pelts, familiar in Lang's work as designer are recontextualized through a heavily tarred and painted treatment in blacks and metallics. Taking a soft, warm fabric that has practical use, as well as shamanistic and mythological implications, demonstrates both Lang's understanding of tactile texture as well as historical and alchemical connotations. Both in alchemy and in mining, sheepskin was used to separate gold from dirt and alluvial fluids. This notion runs true in Lang's prolific body of work, by the creation of precious materials from the everyday and mundane, with the skin's original function retained as an echo of memory.

Traversing this material history of an object with permeations of volume, light and form, as well as ruminating on the idea of abstraction vs figuration, the artist's use of the gallery space when paired with the aforementioned material choice, creates an unexpected sense of weightiness and foreboding by contrasting the heavy objects with their precarious positioning in the space.

Lang, who has garnered long-standing respect in both the art world and, of course, in fashion, is no stranger to the connection between both creative disciplines. Having worked as a visual artist since the 90s and exhibiting alongside the likes of Louise Bourgeois and Jenny Holzer, "Burry"'s transformation of literal materials into art objects should come as no surprise and reflects a continued theme in his work – after all, Lang famously used his clothing archive, which was burned and destroyed in a fire, to create a series of powerful, charred, twisted and re-appropriated artworks. A master of deconstruction, minimalism, subtlety and beauty-in-the-unexpected, Lang's "Burry" is a must-see for art and fashion lovers, alike.