

THE GENTEEL



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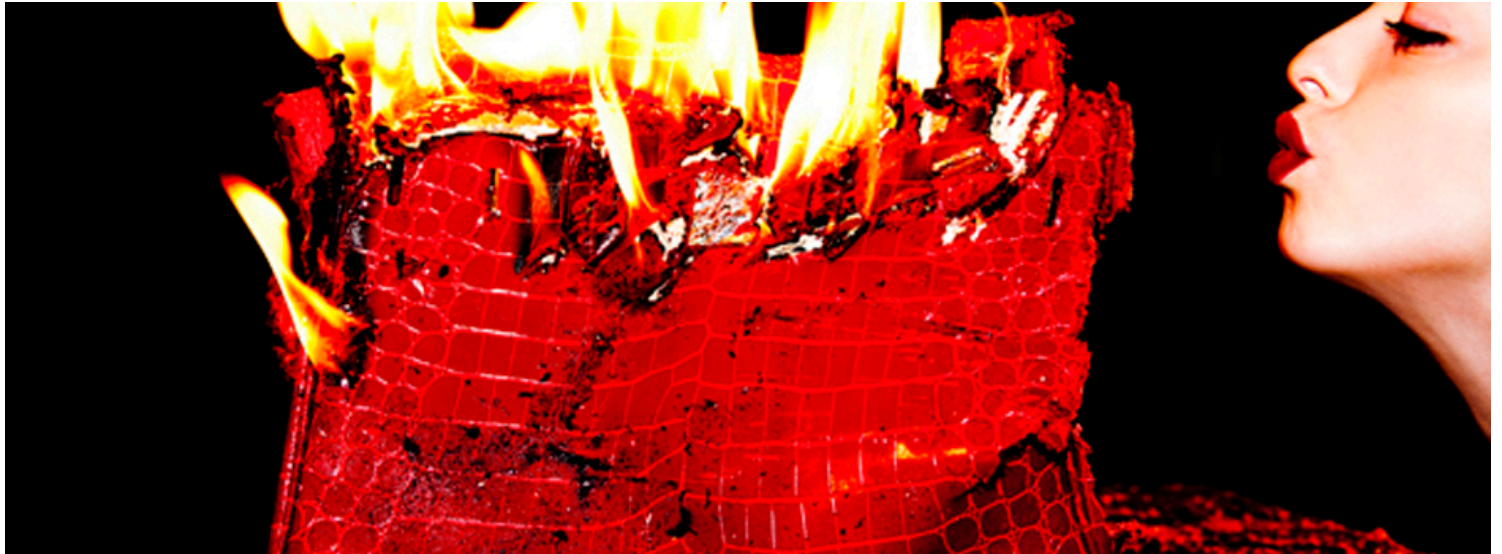
COMMENTARY

Burn Baby, Burn

by [Semmi W.](#) | Posted June 7, 2012

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Francesca Eastwood with the burning Birkin. Source: [tylershields.com](#).

Got \$100,000 to spare? I didn't think so. [Tyler Shields](#), on the other hand, apparently does. Along with his model girlfriend, Francesca Eastwood (yes, she is the daughter of *that* Eastwood), the celebrity photographer took it upon himself to cut up a red crocodile Birkin bag with a chainsaw and then [set it on fire](#).

Blasphemy. Pure and utter blasphemy. As one person who commented on Shields' [site](#) put it: "f***ing spoiled rich f***ers have NO clue what it is to make a dollar. Go and work for a living and see if you burn a 100k bag. Hell you wouldnt [sic] even be burning a 50 dollar bag. That is NOT art losers."

Another comment accused Shields of having a lack of empathy: "Do you realize how many animals you could have saved in a shelter for what you did? How many families could be fed? This isn't art, this is a narcissistic [sic] show of your own excesses. If you have a Birken that you can destroy then you are not living in the real world. Both of you need to grow up."

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In the caption below his [photos](#), Shields asserts, "Destruction is a beautiful version of freedom..." The 30-year-old provocateur then proceeds to taunt us all with follow-up questions:

"Would you want this bag?"

Why, yes Mr Shields. Yes, I would.

"Are you sad to see me destroy it?"

I am beyond sad. I am furious.

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egos and fan the inner fires of disillusion.

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Previously, Shields cut apart a pair of **Christian Louboutin heels** and burned both a **Louis Vuitton wallet and bag**. Collectively, this means he has presumably spent well over \$100,000 burning luxury items for the sake of **publicity** art.

In an interview with **ArtInfo**, Shields explained his reasoning for ripping apart the shoes, prior to the Birkin bag inferno: "I have nothing against Christian Louboutin. I love Christian Louboutin. I have a pair of Christian Louboutin's men's shoes that I wear. The

reason why I did it was because I wanted to see what was inside them."

To burn a Birkin or to destroy a set of Louboutins, while walking around in your own pair of luxury kicks, is extremely disingenuous. Why point the finger at the very lifestyle you imitate? Let's not pretend; there is a fine line between making artistic, political statements and outright hypocrisy.

An **Hermès** Birkin bag is not just the ultimate symbol of opulence, but of craftsmanship. It takes several days to produce one bag. Each Birkin is hand-sewn and polished by an individual craftsman in France. No bag is made alike, leathers are procured from different tanners and are sourced from a variety of hides.

And there is a reason why you do not see an official celebrity spokesperson or supermodels appearing in Hermès advertisements for the Birkin. The carefully designed accessory has built its reputation on quality and discretion. There are no regular seasonal launches or announcements of repackaged items. Technically, a Hermès Birkin **does not even carry an imprinted logo** on its outside casing; just a simple white or yellow gold padlock with keys.

Choosing to purchase a Birkin is an investment in art itself. Just last week in London, Christie's **auctioned** a collection of 58 "previously-owned" Hermès bags, including the Birkin. There is a growing community of men and women who consider such bags to be collectibles - unworthy of even minimal usage.

But while Shields can do what he wants with his money, I believe his actions are a grotesque reflection of how extreme wealth can butter up egos and fan the inner fires of disillusion. When asked how he was able to even access the bag, **in the same interview**, Shields gives us a peek into his comfy cocoon: "I got it from - basically one of my very good friends over there has a bunch of them, and they set me up with the person who they got them from, and somebody brought me one in the trunk of a Bentley."

What does this say about Shields' allegiances? If you are buying a handmade item, only to destroy it, how do you (as an artist) assess the value of design? Would it not have been cheaper, easier and perhaps even more controversial if Shields decided to burn, say, a \$250 knock-off?

There have been **rumours** circulating around that Shields purchased a fake Birkin instead. Whether that is true or not, to his credit, Shields has offered to donate US\$100,000 to a needy family in **cash** (tax-free). But his offer comes a bit late, and would appear to have been brought on by **death threats** and fiery accusations naming him a spoilt, insensitive jerk. It is also one that is conditional: in order for that needy family to receive the "donation," someone has to buy his photos.

Believe it or not, that purchase might be realised. To date, over one thousand people disagree with my distaste for Shields' photos. On his **site**, the images of the flaming Birkin have received a ridiculous amount of Facebook "Likes," and I still don't quite understand why. The burning effigy either represents a waste of money or a disrespect for genuine craftsmanship. In setting ablaze the Birkin, Shields also managed to burn out a tired publicity stunt.

Having presumably destroyed the world's most sought after accessory, what else could be next on his artistic agenda? Hopefully, a different concept.



You call that art? Source: tylershields.com.