

The conditions of production (remain indefinitely reversible)

Group exhibition

Participating Artists: Stella Baraklianou (Gr/UK), Lorna Bauer (Ca), Nadia Myer (Ca), John Player (Ca), Ilias Koen, (Gr), Claudia Piepenbrock , (De), Tina Tahir (De/US)

This exhibition is a group show structured around the work of seven international artists linked to the New Materiality residency at the Banff Arts Centre in Alberta Canada.

Through a variety of materials and exchanges, such as sculpture, installation, ceramics, photography and painting, the artists in this exhibition attempt to uncover or reveal a set of propositions for reversible models of production. Modes of production are usually encountered within financial models of capitalist societies. By 'reversible' here we attempt to articulate when and how the notion of value, art object and agency within the production process are undone. The production of artwork necessarily involves the same ingredients similar to any production line. Labour, materials, space and more essentially, time are what artists deal with in a way that can be profitable or not.

If we take objects in the widest possible sense, art objects always necessarily remain conditioned by their methods and modes of fabrication and production, as they remain invested with the labour of the artist. As Deleuze notes, artistic activity remains at the core of a certain 'act of resistance'¹ attempting to create and work with materials without a known outcome. Experimenting with materials and time, experimenting with processes that extend beyond a simple use value principle, in any case, the materiality in the work of these artists is about reversing the phase of production.

Marx's infamous articulation of 'commodity fetishism', within consumer and capitalist societies, is where a certain surplus value of a commodity or product extends well beyond its use value, through the concealment of the modes of its production. This status or 'aura' that occurs from the separation of mass manufactured produces from craftsmanship or individual labour.

Chris Tilley and the critique of anthropologists aligns with the currency to examine material culture its modes of production more closely. In the example he uses in order to articulate 'objectification' he describes how in Gawan society the exchange value of the kula shells extends well beyond their use or material value: "the production of values involves, on the one hand, consideration of the phenomenal form of practices, and, on the other, underlying structures or generative schema that characterise this process. [...] the lived world is both arena for action and constructed through the actions of persons, a dialectic of objectification and embodiment".²

It is exactly the concealment of these modes of production that are strangely aligned to the methods and modes followed by artists. In the case of the artist, the process of creating or generating an artwork can be a lengthy or arduous procedure. Sometimes calculable by time, in most cases time loses its quantifiable set, space becomes the setting for the agency of objects.

Alfred Gell in 'Art and Agency'³ describes art as social system of doing things, rather than processing visual forms and representations. Art objects 'captivate' the viewer, they have an impact through their formal complexity, virtuosity and technique. Precisely because the modes or methods of production, and construction are hidden, thus creating for the viewer a space for interaction, to disturb, frustrate, tantalise or even enrage.

The current debates and resurgence of materiality are a necessary critique of Marxist theory today, stemming from anthropology and material cultures as well as philosophy. Bringing back the ideas of production aligned to craftsmanship, intensive individual labour and considering notions of wasted time, failed outcomes and agency of materiality and objects, the conditions of production are made to appear and yet still remain within the realm of 'enchantment' or having a certain 'aura.'

By attempting to reverse the phase of production, pointing to a certain undoing or unmaking, time, labour, materials and exchange are all part of an indefinite set of reversible propositions. Each object in this exhibition is the sum of its unequal parts, including waste of material matter, in a variety of forms, from bed sheets turned into pulp, broken ceramics, cloth turned into pulp turned into sculptures, paper sculptures made from pulp that never dried in time, objects left behind because they could not be transported and empty frames. Photographs captured and re-captured through the paint-brush, photographs remaining a by product of the darkroom and photographs of objects displayed as if acting out on a stage. Extended time, labour intensive practices, invested time and materials that form a set of conditions of artistic production.

In the light of the current financial and social crisis, the work of the artists attempts to address the issue of production through the means of extensive labour, wasted time, materiality and agency.

References:

1 Deleuze, G., (1987), 'What is the creative act', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_hifamdI5s

2 Tilley, C., (2006) 'Objectification', in Handbook of material culture, ed. Kuechler, S., Tilley, C., Rowl, M., and Spyer, P., London; New York: Sage publications

3 Gell, A., (1998), Art and Agency. A new anthropological theory, Oxford: Oxford University Press

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