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Helena Papadopoulos

Claire Fontaine

Consumption

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For the inaugural exhibition at Helena Papadopoulos Gallery Claire Fontaine deploys a reflection around contemporary living conditions, where consumption has become not only our main activity but also our personal destiny; at the point where a life that refuses to consume and to get consumed has a lot less chances to persist than a life that refuses to produce.

Repression shows daily its cruelty and arbitrariness against any gesture that criticizes the voracious system we live in: freedom is no longer a value where wealth is not reproduced and this reproduction also goes through consumption. The extraction of value has never been more precise and systematic, and the need that the chronically ill system has of our energy and money to keep functioning has never been greater. The state even enjoins the ones that cannot be exploited to pay by all possible means. The different types of precariousness and oppression that we endure are more and more various and therefore increasingly difficult to federate: today we experience a new type of solitude that probably never existed before.

The neon sign *Foreigners Everywhere* in Greek which has been previously shown in Athens as part of No Solid Crystal, evokes in this context the condition of the foreigner as the paradigm of a generalized situation. Immigration and emigration are no longer simple epiphenomena linked to the economy but are existential and perceptual experiences in their own right. The strangeness that we can all feel when faced with a world, that is entirely fabricated and governed by senseless logic, unites natives and immigrants, it makes exile a common condition. New forms of racism and intolerance stem from this very phenomenon. The 'crisis' that the media continuously mention is not the one that we must fear. In an earlier text, *Foreigners Everywhere* Claire Fontaine wrote that :

"... we will have to pay a stiff price for the western withdrawal of identity, the fear of proximity, european-communitarianism and the opinions rented out to the newspapers and the TV screens. We're going to experience a kind of poverty that will remind us of our worst memories, a poverty not tied to the economic crisis but much more devastating: a poverty of possibilities, which is already gnawing away the edges of politics.

What is happening in the streets affects what is happening inside us. Since our apartments became refuges where we couldn't dare to host those who have been neglected by police memory, the mask of apparent innocence has been taken off of our private property, which has at last shown itself as an act of war. (...) Since a few years they ask us several times a day to be scared and sometimes to feel terrorized, and now they dare talk to us about security. But security was never a matter of militias. Real security has to do with the possibility to be protected when one is in need; it's the potential friendship hidden in all human

beings. And since that has been destroyed, everything is haunted by risk. Foreigners are everywhere, it's true, but we ourselves are foreigners in the streets and subway corridors, patrolled by men in uniforms." (Claire Fontaine, *Foreigners Everywhere*, 2005)

In order to write in large letters on the wall the word 'consumption' Claire Fontaine and her assistants have used thousands of match-sticks. The hidden work which the sculpture requires to come into existence, a full week of intensive labour for many people – is entirely part of the artwork. A physical exertion, very similar to a fordist productive performance, is required to compose the word that describes the very situation of the workers. What gets consumed is at the same time the drill inappropriately used to make thousands of small holes in a wall, the match-sticks filling the holes, the forces of artists, gallerists and friends together making a job of factory workers.

The recession sculpture presents the opportunist marriage of a vacuum cleaner and a gas meter. The vacuum sucks forward the counter of the gas meter until it reaches zero and therefore completely erases the evidence of its consumption. The recession sculpture is there to remind us that fraud has been and will remain an essential tool of survival as long as economy will be a murderous machine.

Made in U.S.A. is a smoke drawing from 2004 that lifts its name from the famous 1966 Godard movie where Anna Karina pronounces several times the sentence "*I have no words to tell you how much I hate the police*". The gesture of tracing with a flame on the ceiling evokes the vandalistic actions of leaving marks through fire, usually performed in spaces that are at the same time enclosed and public like corridors, toilets or elevators. The *Sculptures Suspendues* (suspended sculptures) are rotating synthetic hanging plants that allude to the vicious circle and artificial temporality of production. Their leaves are golden, they look as if they are forever just about to fall but never do.

Short Bio :

Claire Fontaine is a Paris-based collective artist, founded in 2004. After lifting her name from a popular brand of school notebooks, Claire Fontaine declared herself a "readymade artist" and began to elaborate a version of neo-conceptual art that often looks like other people's work. Working in neon, video, sculpture, painting and text, her practice can be described as an ongoing interrogation of the political impotence and the crisis of singularity that seem to define contemporary art today. But if the artist herself is the subjective equivalent of a urinal or a Brillo box - as displaced, deprived of its use value, and exchangeable as the products she makes - there is always the possibility of what she calls the "human strike." Claire Fontaine uses her freshness and youth to make herself a whatever-singularity and an existential terrorist in search of subjective emancipation. She grows up among the ruins of the notion of authorship, experimenting with collective protocols of production, détournements, and the production of various devices for the sharing of intellectual and private property.

Recent personal shows include, *Future Tense*, El Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico D.F., *Economies*, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, *Closed for Prayers*, Dvir Gallery, Hangar 2, Jaffa Port, Israel, *Etrangers Partout (QDM)*, Nuit Blanche, Belleville, Paris, *Kultur ist ein Palast der aus Hundescheiße gebaut ist.*, MD72, Berlin, *After Marx April*, *After Mao June*, Aspen Art Museum, Colorado.