

## Magdalena Los

### *last drop*

The duck press, in French cuisine, is a specially designed device, in which pressure is applied on the duck's carcass to extract blood and other juices. In *ohne Titel (Entenpresse)*, we see the reflection of an audience, stretching out its hands to receive the share it deserves. It is a ritual of extraction, not unlike an alchemical process of transmutation.

For *last drop* Magdalena Los has produced a new series of paintings that continues her ongoing inquiry into the relation between art and labor. The works situate the place of art in a world of transactions, and respond to their own situation with mixed emotions. You are looking at the different moods of a lemon, and they are de-pressing indeed.

The “untitles” that Los chose for these works—reaching from *Tugend* (virtue) to *Unsterblichkeit* (immortality)—allude to the fact that lemons throughout history have always held many promises. These “golden apples”—fruits of love, fertility and eternal life—were once given to Zeus and Hera as a wedding gift, to be guarded by the evening nymphs, Hesperides.

In worldlier contexts, too, the lemon became an object of luxury, particularly in areas where it was difficult to grow: it appears in roughly half of Dutch still-life paintings, with artists not only showcasing their technical proficiency with curls of peel, but also offering reminders of *vanitas* through drought and decay. Paintings that encode the “spirit of capitalism”: to squeeze every drop out of life, it seems, is to practice frugality in the face of abundance—to secure the surplus lest it goes to waste.

If scarcity is the measure of luxury, then surely the lemon today must pale in comparison to gas and oil, often referred to as “blue” and “black gold.” The motif of *vanitas* in turn has moved from still-lives to daily newspaper articles that portray how we are captured by the commodity.

The *last drop* marks the end of a process of extraction, of drawing out value from a material. Here, the economy does not discriminate between people and things: labor, too, can be extracted to the very limit, leaving employees feeling not just pressured but fully squeezed out.

On the surface, insisting that what one *earns* is not what one really *deserves* is to insist on a better price for one's labor; but at root, it is to question the identification of “values” with “prices,” which slips as easily into our language as it does into our minds. And yet the reliance on ideals—priceless values—may unwillingly help to sustain, rather than undermine, new forms of precarious labor and techniques of squeezing.

The editions produced for *last drop* provide a mirror image, a counterpoint, to the series of paintings, commenting on the hierarchy of value between original and copy as it transitions into our digital age.