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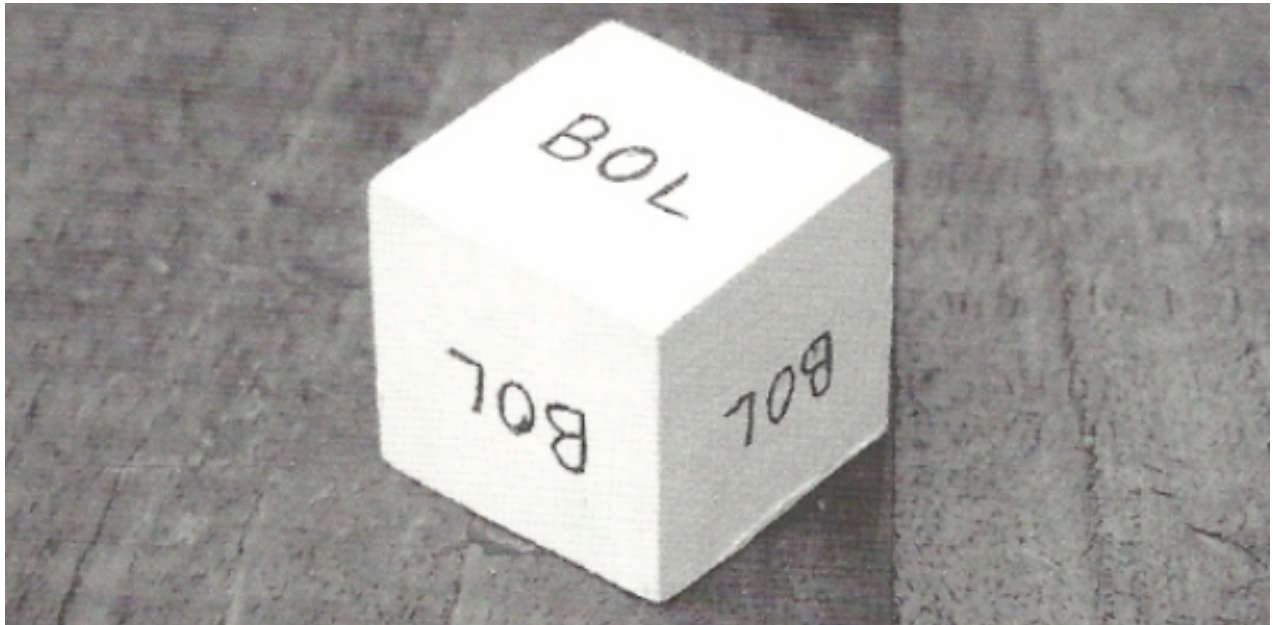
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PERMANENT PLAYFULNESS

Curated by Camilla Barella

Adrian Melis (*Havana, Cuba*)
Ahmet Ogut (*Diyarbakır, Turquie*)
Beto Schwafaty (*São Paulo, Brazil*)
Deyson Gilbert (*São José do Egito, Brazil*)
Irma Blank (*Celle, Germany*)
Goran Trbuljak (*Varaždin, Croatia*)
Mladen Stilinovic (*Belgrado, Serbia*)
Pilvi Takala (*Helsinki, Finland*)
Paulo Bruscky (*Recife, Brazil*)
Paulo Nazareth (*Governador Valadares, Brazil*)
Robert Kinmont (*Los Angeles, USA*)
Roberto Winter (*São Paulo, Brazil*)

AUGUST 31 - OCTOBER 5, 2014
OPENING: SUNDAY, AUGUST 31, 4PM - 8PM



Mladen Stilinovic, *Igra Bol / The Pain Game*, 1977, acrílica e grafite sobre dado de madeira / acrylic and pencil on wooden dice, dado: 2,3 x 2,3 x 2,3 cm; texto: 7 x 10 cm.

“-Come play with me, Uncle.
-Sorry, I have to work.
-But when you work, you're playing, aren't you?
-Well me, when I play, I'm working.”

Robert Filliou transcribed this conversation between his daughter (then age seven) and his physician brother in his book *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (1970). The artist dreamed of a society in which the divisions between work and leisure were nonexistent, in which everyone was rich enough to live like poor people, and that all work was exercised in a voluntary manner and committed to pleasure. Filliou based much of his thought on the theories of French socialist Charles Fourier, who proposed a cooperativist society based on passions and the free development of personality. *Permanent Playfulness* borrows its title from a piece by Filliou, who, in addition to being an artist and a poet, also worked as a Coca-Cola factory worker, earned a degree in economics, and eventually dedicated himself to Buddhism.

Up until the time I accepted the invitation for this curatorship at the Mendes Wood DM gallery, art in my life had always been related to leisure, a hobby that I enjoy in my “free time.” The occasion on which this pleasure turned into work stimulated thoughts that resulted in the curatorial concept behind this exhibition, which questions the possibility proposed by Filliou, of living in a constant state of recreation.

The word 'work,' in all European languages, means pain and effort and is also used for the act of giving birth. In French and Portuguese, for instance, *travail* and *trabalho* have the same etymological root as *trepalium* or *tripaliu*, an instrument used for torture. The relation between work and sacrifice is not exclusive to etymology. The idea that today we have the freedom to choose our profession according to our aptitudes and desires, and that, as such, work should be an activity just as pleasurable and satisfactory as a hobby, is illusory, not just because it applies to just a small percentage of society, but also because it ignores the fact that the feeling of pleasure of liberation from pain is much more intense than pure pleasure or the absence of pain.

Blurring the line between work and leisure may have a much more perverse meaning than what Filliou proposed in his rather naïve Poetic Economics. Many politicians use theories of work as pleasure in order in hopes of achieving a society that is more economically productive. Francesco S. Nitti, an Italian politician, wrote in his book *Les Travail humain et ses lois* that “the idea of work as pain is a psychological fact rather than a physiological one, and one which would disappear in a society where everyone works.” Written in 1895, this theory could not have been proven more false in modern times. In a society where everyone works voluntarily, but

motivated much more by financial needs than by pleasure, as Fourier and Filliou once dreamed, pain in relation to work is still quite eminent. For most workers, the only truth of these theories is that leisure is a necessity secondary to work, without time or options for activities of rest and relaxation.

Artists, on the other hand, are viewed by society as an exception, and their activities are seen more as recreation than work. Artists don't choose a profession, but rather they are chosen by a vocation. Within this context, the artist will forever be working and forever at play. In his piece *Free all day (2011)*, Paulo Nazareth represents the figure of the artist as a free man, much like all of his art work and posturing in relation to the market. But if the work of artists is also their leisure, the same thing, rather than freedom, could be seen as an eternal prison, and even six hours of dreaming can be viewed as work, as represented by Mladen Stilinovi in *Artist at Work (1978)*, a piece in which she registers herself sleeping.

An important activist against professional artists, Stilinovi defends the practice of laziness as having the utmost importance for the artist to remain close to art, and not become a mere producer of objects, a position also defended by Duchamp and Malevich. The artist's idea was one of the starting points for the concept of the exhibition and is represented in three other pieces that reflect on the dialectics of work in relation to pain and the lack of power in the impossibility of avoiding it in *The Pain Game (1977)*, to individualism in *Mine-Mine (1975)*, and to time and value in *Substraction of Zeros (1993)*. Living under socialism allowed for the exercise of idleness and negated the possibility of commercializing his work for a long time-- two facts which, for the artist, were fundamental influences in the result of his practice.

Cuban artist Adrian Melis also suffers from the influence of the time in which he lived under a socialist regime. In his piece *The value of absence (2009-2010)*, he discusses the attitude of employees in relation to work in Cuba's state-owned companies. By paying these employees the same money that they would earn for a day of work in exchange for them to invent an excuse and take a day off from their post, Melis reveals the feeling of loss caused by the lack of motivation and identification in relation to work within this system.

Like Stilinovi, Paulo Bruscky took years for his work to take on a commercial destination, a fact that never inhibited the rhythm of his activities as an artist, which he reconciled with his job as a civil servant in a hospital. In his piece *Loteriartempo (1975)* Bruscky proposes a game which turns any participant into an artist, subverting his activity as artist to the other, in a contest with a prize, judges and a date that are dubious and random.

Deyson Gilbert's work also take roots in lottery games in order to address randomness and ephemerality in art, faith and economics. Aside from alluding to the compulsive and obsessive act of the gambler, by framing the many tickets, he turns them into dysfunctional objects.

Artist Pilvi Takala documents a community of poker players living in Bangkok in her video *Players (2010)*. She plays all of the characters, while one of them clearly narrates the group's routine and its own social rules, guided by the rationale of the game, competitiveness and minimal efforts.

In his piece *Send him your money (2010)*, Turkish artist Ahmet Ögüt, reenacts a performance by artist Chris Burden, who, in 1979, spent an hour on live radio attempting to persuade listeners to mail money to his house. Ögüt appropriates the text, only replacing Burden's address with his own.

Croatian artist Goran Trbuljak evokes the ephemerality of the artist's work in photographic registers of an action which he engaged in on a series of Sundays. Trbuljak painted the window of a store of artistic materials in which a blank canvas was displayed. Each Monday, his *Sunday Paintings (1974)* were removed.

Robert Kinmont's sculptures *Listen 3 (2010-11)* and *Waiting and a broken letter (2014)* feature ideas cultivated over 30 years in which he did not dedicate himself to artistic production, instead running an experimental art school, practicing Buddhism and working as a carpenter. By resuming his work as an artist in 2005 at age 68, Kinmont demonstrated in this new production how not producing art work and not being active in the market altered nothing in his creative thinking. What demonstrates a complete autonomy and awareness regarding time also proves the extent to which artists are vulnerable and hostage to their own thoughts and ideas.

In his work, Roberto Winter questions this alienation from the time division of recreation and work in contemporary society and also in the exclusive case of the artist, accepted as a plausible exception. In the piece he developed for the exhibition, *Alegoria Foxconn (2014)*, he juxtaposes artistic production, represented by a Vermeer painting in which he is portrayed at work, with labor production, represented by Chinese workers at the Foxconn factory, which manufactures Apple products and registers a high rate of suicide, being one of the hypotheses, as a form of protest for workers' rights.

Meanwhile, in the piece by Italian artist Irma Blank, the idea of time and manual labor is expressed in her obsessive and repetitive practice in a profound dialectic between writing and drawing. The abstractionism of the meaning of writing, which, with every series, becomes more

intense and makes the gestural more apparent than the rational, alludes to the repetitive nature of manual and operational labor.

In the video *To Watch and To buy* (2008-10), Beto Schwafaty compares different ideas of public spaces from a perspective of industrial, as well as cultural, production in a montage of images found in settings of mass work, consumption and recreation, such as shopping centers, combined with texts.

As a member of a generation and a social class which today is experiencing conditions quite similar to those defended by Fourier in the 18th century and Filliou in the 1970s, I had the opportunity to voluntarily choose my profession, motivated precisely by the free development of personality. Yet, the concept sold to us today of work that is entirely submerged with recreation strikes me as a stimulus to alienation regarding to time instead of awareness. Technology also makes it so that we are working everywhere we go and at all times; we are now wireless beings and this has supposedly freed us from the work environment. But has this not perhaps brought us closer to a perpetual prison, where the work environment now belongs to us and stays with us 24 hours a day? Just as it is with artists, who are slaves to their creative minds.

The struggle for a balance between recreational time and supposedly productive time seems closer to the Foxconn workers than an elite that is employed in intellectual work. But the iphones that they produce mechanically in a repressive, mass media environment are the same things that have supposedly freed us from the work environment, when, in fact, they have caused a transference and invasion of work into private and recreational life. This illusion which we insist in believing only further distances the possibility of a fair division between work and leisure, something which applies equally to those engaged in intellectual work, factory workers and, ultimately, artists.

Through the work of these artists and their selected pieces, *Permanent Playfulness* intends to stimulate thoughts of awareness regarding human beings' time with work, leisure, pain and pleasure. Could the answer be to balance these elements in our hours, rather than viewing them from the same point of view to the point of complete alienation? As Lucretius once begged the question: "Do you not see that nature is barking for two things only, a body free from pain and a mind released from worry?"