

CCINQ CVIJF CFIVE LIONEL MAES ALEXANDRE LAVET

Marcel Duchamp's readymade (exhibiting simple, everyday objects in order to desacralize artistic production) not only redefined artistic work by introducing a departure from labour but also took a stand against the artists' subordination, creating resistance against contemporary capitalism in art. By stubbornly refusing to work, whether as an employee or as an artist, one is refusing to submit to certain functions and roles; refusing to submit to existing consumerist power mechanisms as well as to the obligation to be productive.

"John Cage boasts of having introduced silence into music, I'm proud of having celebrated laziness in art." – M.D.

Work—both as a subject and a driving force—has always been omnipresent in art: from the hunting scenes depicted in cave paintings to mediaeval rural labour calendars, to the industriousness of Egyptian workers. We can also mention Vermeer and his humanist figures, Millet and his genre scenes in which peasant activity is exalted, Degas' ironers, Fernand Léger's builders or the workers in August Sander's photographs. Work as a motif seems to only disappear with the dawn of abstraction, remaining only visible when celebrating the artist's accomplishment. Today, there is a certain absence of work in the visual arts, whereas it is still frequently dealt with in cinema or literature.

Alexandre Lavet does not wish for his installation at CCINQ to be referred to as a "work". He does not consider it as an object that can be bought, but rather as an obstacle, or something that prevents.

The installation's title is borrowed from Herman Melville's famous phrase "I would prefer not to" uttered by Bartleby, the protagonist of the eponymous novel published in 1853. In the story, this notorious statement leads Bartleby's employer to stop asking him anything, and illustrates a strategy based upon abandon. In opposition to direct conflict, Melville's character has inspired many anti-power theorists who see this strategy of refusal as no longer a simple defection but a new form of combat.

By means of a dualistic proposal, and going against what visitors might commonly expect, Alexandre Lavet confronts the dogma wherein the artist is supposed to appropriate the exhibition space: on the one hand we perceive an apparent refusal to create an artwork and on the other hand, a physical form advocating the idea that rest and procrastination can indeed produce a creative outcome.

According to an article published in January in the newspaper *Le Monde*¹, more than 38 million Americans left their jobs in 2021. The United States has experienced an unprecedented peak in resignations since the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic. These mass resignations are said to be the expression of an "unofficial general strike" against the precariousness of the US labour market. This trend, dubbed "The Great Resignation", is at the origin of numerous TikTok videos, in which Internet users film their departure. These reveal their desire for freedom, having reflected on their lives during lockdown and realised that they were unhappy with their jobs. From these "video performances" emerges the desire to put an end to subordination and regain control over the use of one's time.

All Work And No Play, the title of Lionel Maes' installation at CCINQ, refers to the American proverb "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", a sentence that is also repeated over and over again in the unfinished manuscript penned by Jack Torrance, the terrifying writer and protagonist in Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining*. For this installation, Lionel Maes connected a desktop printer to a single-board computer containing all the news reports from the Belga agency over the last two years. In contrast to a continuous, real-time stream broadcast, the installation uses a time-restricted capture as its source: dating back to two years before the exhibition began. The machine makes a very limited selection amongst all of the dispatches, printing only the sentences containing the word "work", thus positioning the four-letter word as a central element and exposing all the uses that are made of it.

If we consider that the way a word is used can change that same word's meaning, here the multiple meanings of "work" are thus revealed. The installation performs as a kind of "scrivener-machine" that reproduces a perceived time and a context through the prism of a word. Needless to say, two years before the start of this exhibition coincided exactly with the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

In this new exhibition at CCINQ, we catch a glimpse of presence becoming ever more absent from the world. It constitutes an escape, underlined by the installation titles inspired by fictional stories. There is a sense of disconnect, a manifestation of the Neutral as Barthes conceived it, a desire for the "suspension of orders, laws, summons, arrogances, terrorisms, puttings on notice, the will-to-possess ».

If Marcel Duchamp's words are quoted here it is precisely because they still have meaning. In spite of this, a work of art is too often understood as a material object, characterised by the link between work and value. Lavet and Maes' installations reveal an alternative definition of the artist's labour: the conversation around work becomes an integral part of the work itself, the work exists as an encounter, the work is language. Of course these installations question reality and society, but they are above all an attitude that consists in undoing the binary structure of discourse through which meaning usually manifests itself. They thwart this opposition in order to find a new way of inhabiting time.

¹ "L'immense vague de départs dans les entreprises américaines bouleverse le marché du travail", Le Monde, 25 January 2022 Lionel Maes

Lionel Maes
All work and no play, 2017
www.lionelmaes.com

Alexandre Lavet
I would prefer not to, 2017
www.alexandrelavet.fr

19.02.2022 - 02.04.2022

Visits by appointment
Rue Marché aux Herbes 116 B-1000 Brussels

CCINQ is a non-profit space initiated by C12, directed by Patrick Carpentier

Photographs of the exhibitions Miguel Rózpide
Translation Blurbs
www.blurbs.be

Thanks to Guillaume Bleret

CCINQ is supported by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
Thanks to Duvel and Fritz-Kola

ccinqspace.com - hello@ccinqspace.com - [instagram.com/ccinqbrussels](https://www.instagram.com/ccinqbrussels)