

spielact

Zahltag

A group exhibition with:

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Curated by:

Amir El May & Sylvain Gelewski

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Le Commun, 10 Rue des Vieux-Grenadiers, 1205 Geneva, Switzerland

The visual arts and books, as structured and structuring environments, are not in a position to reform themselves. They depend on the condition that we denounce, because they have been built on the myth of the Selenite artist, irresponsible but free, so intoxicated with thoughts that he or she forgets to feed. This discourse is a fable that only serves those who live off the work of others.

- Aurélien Catin, *Notre Condition, Essai sur le salaire au travail artistique (Our Condition, Essay on the Wage of Artistic Work)*, 2020

Zahltag (Payday)

End of the month, payday. Or almost.

The *Zahltag* exhibition brings together some twenty artists from a wide range of practices and backgrounds at the Le Commun exhibition space in Geneva. The title takes the common expression "it's payday" and expresses it in the Germanism that characterises the name of the festival. Referring to the precise day on which anyone who has done their work receives their due, the title directly questions the status and nature of artistic work. The irregularity of the income or lack of salary of people working in this field is commonplace.

In keeping with Spielact's desire to devote its sixth edition to the working conditions of art professionals, the contemporary art fair was chosen as the main theme of the exhibition, as it is one of the symbols of the market. From this point of view, taking an interest in the fair system means rethinking the meaning of this kind of glitzy, capitalist event, where what is at stake is not the remuneration of the dealers or organisers, but that of the artists. From the start of the process, Spielact wanted to present *Zahltag* as an imaginary fair. It is, in the sense that this type of format would probably be unthinkable in a commercial context. The works have a value but are not for sale. There is no stand, gallery, entity or institution representing the artists, no prizes awarded to a few of them or to individual exhibitors, no admission ticket, no VIP area, no press or publishing. So instead of imaginary, we could describe it as fictional, playful, critical, alternative, fantasised, marginal, interpretative, protesting, personal, apart, furiously varied, inspired by the artists who make it up and the relevance of their work.

In concrete terms, *Zahltag* appropriates the term "fair" by investing its theatrical and reproducible potential. The proposal is partly inspired by an abandoned or dormant supermarket, where works rest at night and are observed/consumed during the day. It also plays with its sense of festivity and effervescence, imagining the exhibition as a great open stage, a place of performance and role-play, where the designs of one person mingle with the aspirations of others.

In a sober scenography, in contrast to that of the fair, the works delimit their own spaces and nevertheless take up some of its codes. A domestic zone questions the place of the individual inside and outside the fair. A post-apocalyptic-inspired room highlights metallic, industrial, worn and organic materials. A commercial space, with works that could be mass-produced, takes its inspiration from advertising and criticises over-production and over-consumption. One radically white and black space counterbalances another with conspicuous colours. In the textual emanations, the discourse is sometimes made by the works themselves. The presence of text, sometimes frontal like slogans or manifestos, sometimes subtle

and implicit, counters the omnipresent and sometimes aggressive display of the traditional fair, where names and information are everywhere. Instead of strong, uniform overhead lighting, light sources of various shapes are directed towards certain single pieces or more homogeneous groupings of works. Abandoning the model of booths while retaining a certain spatial distribution, a singular atmosphere is created by the nature and arrangement of the forms, offering a multitude of routes for people wandering through the two floors of the Le Commun building.

The pieces address the question of the status of the artist and the nature of their work in a more or less immediate way, from a variety of angles. Some do so directly through their subject, their form or the materials of which they are made. Some do so through the references or metaphors they invoke. Others offer a range of possible interpretations, serving as a means of revealing the meaning of another work nearby, or as a treasure hunt in which different degrees of reading have to be applied for the proposition to hit the mark. All these pieces have been chosen for their subversive and humorous potential, their aesthetic and expressive power, their simplicity and effectiveness, their political character, the richness of their production and the quality of their reflection. What they have in common is a certain singularity, which only makes sense collectively if they all fit together properly as a whole. A bit like the false walls that line the colourful carpets at the big trade fairs.

At Spielact, we do a lot of thinking, we experiment a lot and we're constantly remodelling. *Zahltag* is the result of over a year's worth of work, patiently built up from the heart's desire and emulation, the obvious and the necessary compromises. Here we talk about hardship, conditions, worries, status, promises, contracts, diversity, disenchantment, voluntary work, part-time work, disappointment, representation, existence and meaning. We also discuss hiring, pay, success, ambition, demands, impact, merit, commitment, activism, unity, intelligence, hope and meaning. In short, we question what makes our job, how we do it and what needs to be done to keep it viable.

The sixth edition of the festival attempts to tackle these issues head-on, not just as an invective or a demand, but as a

subject for collective reflection. The issues raised by *Zahltag* are discussed at meetings, round tables and workshops that bring together artists and speakers from a wide range of backgrounds, including associations, activists and institutions, as well as market players and representatives from galleries and off spaces, directly in Le Commun, at the heart of the exhibition. There's another link with the fair, where the location of the moments for meeting and reflection is already a debatable issue.

Zahltag can be critical, even if that's not its primary aim. It is a group exhibition that uses the codes of the fair without the weight of having to be one. It plays with certain rules that characterise the fair, without being obliged to obey them. It caricatures and imitates certain features of the system in which it is created, without claiming to be a revolutionary idea. It is artistic and ephemeral by nature. However, let us be clear: we are not vindictive, but that does not mean a lack of intransigence about the environments in which artists and art workers operate. Now is not the time for prevarication. Recognition of our work and fair remuneration are no longer options subject to conditions. They are our primary demands, and the issues we take action on every day. Work, every day. Pay, every payday.

– Amir El May & Sylvain Gelewski

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