

The Trouble with Value discusses the tangled story of the symbolic and economic value that a work of art holds, being a product of its maker's labour; with an attempt to provide insights into current notions of value and value systems surrounding us.

Any artwork is subject to a web of assessments, expressed from the perspective of experts and audiences. Among those actors in this judgmental spectacle are curators, critics, art historians, philosophers, art dealers, and of course the public too. Institutions and the machinery of the art market complete this disposition.

Aside from the monetary evaluation of artworks and their unregulated market, the criteria for an artwork's quality and its merit remain rather vague. Despite this

fact the contemporary art world is persistently fixated on the "value" of art: wanting to recognize what is "new" and "original", "relevant", "challenging" or "radical". Yet, is it possible to truly recognize what makes a work of art "outstanding" or "contemporary", those qualities which are telling of their time while also carrying universal modes of understanding?

The whole is made from a not-quite-transparent set of determinants that are difficult to break down. As usual, it is much easier to reflect on the past, for a look back provides examples of views and ideologies that defined – perhaps in a rather simple way – values and "qualities" of artistic creations. This is how the development of the canon of art has reached a condition where, despite continual redefinition

and deconstruction, its rate of change is tardy at best. Well, don't we all like tunes we already know?

Since the arrival of the avant-garde movement art has taken a progressive and experimental position, one which breaks away from tradition and introduces new ideas that sometimes do not receive appreciation and understanding during the era of their creation. According to many of its critics, the socially engaged ideals of the early avant-garde slowly faded into an elitist project in which only a continuous chase of "new and radical" impulses remained. Other critics consider contemporary art to be little more than an exceptional asset, a neutralized commodity that refrains from institutional criticism or engagement with the politico-economic realities of our time.

Today, when the methods of branding, marketing and aura-creation are the prevailing means for valuation the good-old invisible hand of the economy, matching demand and supply, is at rest. The booming contemporary art market behaves similarly: without a set of market rules, it operates on the basis of an empathically fetishized commodity. Is art capable of escaping (and should it) a commodity fetishism that relies on the apparent autonomy of an artwork and its aura? How can we devise other strategies to value art?

The Trouble with Value aims to locate and extract practices that bring us closer to understanding the potential of art to represent different notions of value in the contemporary. How can we counter the certain apathy of

the contemporary to engage with positions that resist this mood and present us with challenging perspectives on value? The project attempts to locate artistic and institutional practices that offer viewpoints beyond the strategy of blending-in and conforming to the rules.

In the light of the above, an investigation into the sources of an artwork's value, the values it may create and the value systems it is subject to is an arduous, if not simply naïve task – for all methods, theories and ideologies fail. It is impossible to lay out the basic arguments in a singular, clear and precise manner but it is possible to distinguish several attitudes within the practices of contemporary artists as being notable for their reflections on the difficult process of cultivating value in a work of art.

One such aspect is the role of language in building narratives and providing a layer of immateriality to complete a work of art. We may also take into consideration the variety of modes artists (de-) value and disseminate their artworks. The infrastructure of art and the institution's role in the circulation and presentation of art is certainly one we cannot disregard. Furthermore, we would like to consider iconoclasm as a mode of image and value creation along with matters of the canon of art in globalised society. Last but not least, we would like to acknowledge and problematize the question of artistic labour and its modes of valuation inside and outside of its institutions.

The Trouble with Value

Curated by Krzysztof Sikora (Bunkier Sztuki) and Krzysztof Sikora (Onomatopee)

With the participation of:

- Benera and Estefan
- Rachel Carey
- gerlach en koop
- Fokus Grupa
- Karolina Grzywnowicz
- Gert Jan Kocken
- and Arnoud Holleman
- Kornel Janczy
- Adrian Paci
- Feliks Szyszko
- Timm Ulrichs

Opening April 21, 2018 18:00
Exhibition continues April 22 – July 27, 2018
Open Thursday-Sunday 13:00 – 17:00 and by appointment

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Exhibition production:

Technical support: Guus van der Velden and Glenn Peeters

Production assistance: Pernilla Ellens and Marine Kaiser

Supported by The Mondriaan Fund and the Province of Noord-Brabant. Additionally the project received support from the Mondriaan Funds' Experimental Regulation for fair artists' wages.

The exhibition is the second chapter of a collaborative project between Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art, Krakow, Poland and Onomatopee. The project's third chapter, a publication is expected in late 2018.

Graphic design: Agata Biskup

The participation of Karolina Grzywnowicz and Kornel Janczy is supported by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan's participation was made possible with the support of the Romanian Cultural Institute Brussels.

ground floor

RACHEL CAREY

Liquidate it All Away
video 10' and installation
2017-18

The items on display in Rachel Carey's installation are a combination of everyday objects discarded by the project's host institutions Onomatopoe and Bunkier Sztuki Gallery, together with items found at flea markets, and clay sculptures created by the artist. What ties these objects together is their mode of valuation: their pricing is based on their use- or material value, as estimated by a professional appraiser. The price tags on the sculptures and objects point at the gaps between their use- or material value and the more subjective, symbolic value of an art object. All items on display are for sale.

FOKUS GRUPA

Map of Invisible Matter
wallpaper and animation
2017-ongoing

The presented work shows the second outcome of the artist duo's long-term data research into the global contemporary art field. For this presentation they thoroughly analyzed the announcements of the globally-present art publishing and PR platform, e-flux. Over the past two decades, e-flux has come to dominate the flow of information on art, such as exhibition announcements and the discourse on art. Fokus Grupa created an animated map of e-flux's activity from 2000 to the present, which spotlights the activities of e-flux clients and their performance. The goal of the growing database is to map the "invisible matter" of the global contemporary art world, its actors, and their relations.

For more information and to follow the project's development, visit www.invisiblematter.xyz

The wallpaper's pink colour is an homage to Mladen Stilinović and his work *An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist*. The work was included in *The Trouble with Value's* first chapter at Bunkier Sztuki Gallery in Krakow and its version is also currently on view at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

MONIQUE HENDRIKSEN

Naturally False
video 9'30"
2017-18

The landscapes in Monique Hendriksen's work seem familiar, and at the same time oddly unnatural and artificial, as if arising from the future. In her practice Hendriksen seeks an aesthetic for our contemporary state of capitalist realism. Instead of creating new imagery she looks for models to represent the invisible, "as diagrams depict abstractions." Notably, her films find their origin in copyright-free sources, and are radically copyright-free. In doing so, she points at the way visual materials circulate and gain value today, as the more something is seen the more it becomes important, and thus valuable.

upstairs

Feliks Szyszko

Art Box Mondrian
acrylic on board
1972

The painting's neoplastic composition has been transformed into a model kit, which may be transfigured into a cube decorated with Piet Mondriaan's characteristic colors. Here, the iconic visual pattern has been translated by the artist into the functional form of a simple toy.

FELIKS SZYSZKO

Art Box Mondrian

lithograph
1972

A variation on the neoplastic painting that appears to be a deconstruction of Mondrian's work. The print can also be described as instructions to make a toy using simple scissors and a sheet of paper. The work of the Polish conceptual artist Feliks Szyszko (1940-2011) represents his critical attitude towards modernist heritage, typical for the neo-avant-garde movement of the '60s and '70s.

ADRIAN PACI

The Column

video, 25'44"
2013

Courtesy of the artist and Kaufmann Repetto, Milano/New York
The film tells a story of an enormous piece of marble, its extraction from the ground and a weeks-long sea journey from the East to the West. Over the course of the grand voyage, workers sculpt the block of stone into the renowned form of an ancient Corinthian column.

KORNEL JANCZY

Geo

drawing on photographs
2011-ongoing

The simple prints of satellite images of landscapes, clouds, mountains, or settlements of people are modified by marking open drawings. In this way the natural structure of the landscape is juxtaposed with a political-fictional interpretation. The artist set the boundaries, created artificial divisions, and named the area. The words used are humorous, yet also inflected with commentary on contemporary politics.

space in the back

GERLACH EN KOOP

Entitled

2017

Vide-poche is a French term meaning "empty pocket" and designates trays that are designed for collecting small personal items such as coins, keys, and transport tickets. Such objects are often positioned near entrance doors in order to keep all these small belongings organized. The particular *vide-poche* situated in the exhibition space originates from the by-now demolished building of Générale de Banque in Brussels (now part of BNP Paribas Fortis), more specifically from their management bathrooms.

GERLACH EN KOOP

Dispersion

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The core element of Gerlach en Koop's work is oftentimes situated between language and material. The visual and linguistic cues of the title or description complete the work, where none of these elements is more important than the other.

At first sight *Dispersion* appears to be an abstract painting. The swirling shapes, created on the sandpaper-canvas using a one-euro coin, have defaced the coin's value. Each side of the paper was used to disperse one side of the coin, and its metallic remains lie hidden inside the frame.

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KAROLINA GRZYWNOWICZ

Still Life

black oak sculpture
2017

A pallet is made out of certified wood from a 1350 year-old tree, grown in the area of Białowieża Forest between 560 and 650 AD—one of the last remaining primeval forest in Europe. Black oak is an expensive and luxurious material, often called "the Polish ebony." Its dark hue was created by soaking the tree in water for hundreds of years.

ARNOUD HOLLEMAN AND GERT JAN KOCKEN

Broken Thinker

photograph and website
2007

Rodin's sculpture, created in 1881, is probably one of the most well-known figures in art history. The life-sized bronze figure of *The Thinker* is presented nude, sitting on a rock pedestal, supporting his head on his hand in an iconic gesture of melancholy. The photograph shows the sculpture from the Singer Museum in Laren, where perpetrators who initially stole it for its precious material destroyed the work. Rodin's sculpture has become an inspiration and starting point for long-term artistic research to examine the journey of its iconography, its appropriation and distortion to the level of banality. Holleman and Kocken are collecting stories, visual representations, and clichés related to August Rodin's work. See also www.brokenthinker.nl

BENERA AND ESTEFAN

I work, therefore I'm not

drawing series
2012-ongoing

Since 2012, this series of drawings has been capturing the conditions in which the artists oftentimes have to support their artistic practice through an additional day job. On days when they are unable to dedicate their time to art making but have to earn their living as graphic designers, Benera and Estefan capture the movement of the cursor on their screen. Thus the abstract drawings depict the amount of labour hours spent in front of a computer when not making art. On days when they can fully dedicate their time to art making, the sheets remain blank. Paradoxically, as they become more and more acknowledged as artists, more and more sheets stay blank, until the drawings slowly vanish.

TIMM ULRICHS

Ich kann keine Kunst mehr sehen!

poster
1975

The artist pictured on the poster acts as a blind man, holding a sign that reads, "I cannot see art anymore!" The image is photo documentation of a performance that took place during the Cologne Art Fair in 1975. The poster is part of an edition of prints that are available for online purchase, each signed by the artist, for the price of 22€.

