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S LAZ IN PRAISE OF
SQUANDERING

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"LA CAIXA" COLLECTION Y
CALL FOR CURATORS

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EXHIBITION

SOOOOO LAZY. IN PRAISE OF SQUANDERING

PRODUCED BY	"la Caixa" Foundation
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FRANCESCO GIAVERI

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SQUANDERING

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“Lazy money, lazy sexy, lazy outa space
 No tears are falling from my eyes
 I’m keepin’ all the pain inside
 Now don’t you want to live with me?”

David Byrne – *Lazy*

“Looking for work.” No, no it wasn’t like that. The exact wording we read in an old classmate’s LinkedIn profile was “Actively looking for work.” The phraseology used was striking. There was a need to be more explicit about the activity, to make it clear that this person (through her profile in a social medium for “professionals”) was “looking” and furthermore “actively”; as if the state of being unemployed was somehow shameful, a social stigma. Nevertheless, everything suggests that in the years to come, in about ten or perhaps a few more, half of the current jobs will be done by machines, in an unstoppable process of the automation of production. So many of us will be unemployed, and for a long period of time. Perhaps it is time then to begin to put ourselves into context and think about not doing, about how we could efficiently squander a huge amount of time of a large part of the workforce.

Being unemployed is a drama and what’s more intrinsically bears the idea that inactivity is a guilty state that is chosen, a lack of ambition or enterprise, almost a crime these days! Having no determination is despicable: if you don’t join up with the “pro-active” crowd, you automatically become disposable. In the light of a situation that is now affecting millions of people across the world, what would happen if the question shifted towards separating work from income? How would these opinions that contaminate and poison social relationships change? The question emerging from all this is what we are now going on to consider: since when has laziness been considered the mother of all vices?

Being truly lazy, not doing anything at all. Not doing anything useful. Being completely useless. Mondays in the sun. The rest of the week on the sofa. Not being productive. Squandering time. Our best virtue is squandering time, seriously giving ourselves over to total laziness. Laziness is the mother of all vices.

It's obviously a question of regarding laziness – or non-productive inactivity – not from an ethical point of view, where it is frowned upon, as in the classical reproach of parents to their children: "Don't waste your time, make the most of it." Sooooo Lazy proposes thinking about laziness in the light of economic theory and events we have been through in the last few years, including the recent experience of a pandemic that has forced our system to slow down.

By suggesting a storyline that yearns for wasting time instead of using it productively and destroying wealth before accumulating it, the selected pieces propose a criticism of contemporary hyperactivity and introduce hope for a redistribution of resources and time to be able to rethink the norm.

To accept squandering as something necessary and propose a different use of our time inherently implies an urgent reduction of work and involves an alternative way of understanding communal life. Our guides in this project have been, on the one hand, Duchamp's rejection of work; on the other, Russell's praise of idleness and Lafargue and Malevich's worship of laziness and, finally, Arendt's reflections in *The Human Condition*.

As giving ourselves over to laziness suggests an anomaly in contemporary society's system of values and at a time that is now "out of joint,"¹ we'll take the opportunity to time travel.

In 1921, a few years after the Russian Revolution was successfully achieved, Kazimir Malevich wrote, for his acolytes in UNOVIS (The Champions of the New Art), a short theoretical text titled *Laziness as the Real Truth of*

Mankind. It was a declaration coherent with the development of his painting and very brave of him considering it included a sharp criticism of "this son" of laziness, the recently launched Soviet regime.

His dissertation affirms that "laziness frightens people and those who give in to it find themselves persecuted, the reason being that no one has understood it as truth, but instead have called it 'the mother of all vices', when really it is the mother of life. Socialism is a bearer of liberation at an unconscious level, but also defames it, without understanding that it is laziness that has engendered it. And this son, in its madness, categorises it as the mother of all vices. It is not this son who will remove the anathema, which is why, with my short text, I wish to reduce to nothing this defamation and turn laziness not into the mother of all vices, but rather the mother of perfection."² What Malevich calls for and yearns for is "the right to be lazy." Years earlier, the Franco-Spanish revolutionary Paul Lafargue (incidentally Karl Marx's son-in-law) had written a short pamphlet with exactly this title, published in 1880 in *L'Egalité* quite successfully, and which circulated widely among libertarians, not just in Europe. In it he opposes (or complements) the famous Marxist theory of "the right to work."

Rescuing laziness from public disdain. The will to reinstate it has nothing to do with any ideological body, far from it. The Russian artist's aim is to disclose a misunderstanding that has spread to all economic systems. Because, in actual fact, laziness is the objective of every human being, their maximum goal, the earthly paradise that we all wait for as the best possible future. And despite this obvious fact it continues to be regarded as a major vice. Malevich argues that the "socialist system of labour has

¹ From Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The quote "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!" is repeated time and time again by the philosopher Jacques Derrida in his work *Espectros de Marx, El Estado de la deuda, el trabajo del duelo y la nueva Internacional*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 1995, p. 196. There is an English translation: *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, by P. Kamuf, Routledge, London, 1994.

² Kazimir Malevich, *La pereza como verdad inalienable del hombre*, translated by Jorge Segovia and Violetta Beck, Maldoror Ediciones, 2006, pp. 56 and 57. [The original manuscript is kept in the Malevich archives at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (inventory no. 10).]

a plan, subconsciously of course, to get all mankind working, to increase productivity, to guarantee security, to strengthen humanity and through its productive capacity, affirm its 'being'. Really this system that does not worry about the individual but rather all mankind is unquestionably just. But so is the capitalist system. It offers the same right to work, the same freedom to work, the accumulation of money in the banks to guarantee 'laziness' in the future and so presumes then that money is this sign that will be seductive because it will bring the happiness of laziness that is really what everyone dreams about. Certainly, this is the *raison d'être* of money. Money is nothing more than a minimal conquest over laziness. The more you have the more you will understand the happiness of laziness."³ For the very same reason, money is kept in a bank, so as not to lose it! And incidentally, why not put laziness itself in a safe place? If money turns out to be unquestionably valuable because it guarantees being able to have the pleasure of laziness, then how much laziness do you need to satisfy a lifetime? Is it possible to accumulate laziness so as to then share it with others? Can laziness be transferred from one human being to another? Is it possible to make laziness profitable? And bequeath it before dying?

To be precise, this exhibition begins with the idea of consumption, a lavish expense without compensation. Georges Bataille introduces the concept in a similarly named essay⁴ and then goes on to develop and broaden it in *The Accursed Share*, his analysis of the general economy. Bataille, who recovers and transforms Marcel Mauss' studies on the *potlatch*, claims that the owners of great fortunes ought (and therein lies their power) to sacrifice a substantial part of their wealth in non-productive social expenditure, such as parties, shows, games and the arts. It is important to point out firstly that the idea of consumption Bataille deals with is a long way off (nearly the

complete opposite) the current conception of consumption synonymous with "consumerism". The originality of Bataille's theory resides in seeing the economy in its entirety, as a living mass, in which "if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically."⁵ No growth can be infinite, and the excess of energy not used up (its accumulation and conservation) prevents the sustainability of any kind of eco-system.

What concerned the French theoretician is squandering, waste. The Copernican turn in the economic theory proposed by Bataille consists of thinking about the excess that incessantly has to be destroyed. Its destruction, a loss without compensation, makes itself necessary and fundamental for running the economic system. It is obvious that no growth can be infinite and that the excess of energy not used can only lead to serious risks for humanity. And for this reason, according to Bataille, a large part of the sun's energy gets lost in the atmosphere before reaching earth. This waste is positive and crucial. If the solar energy was to arrive without losing any of its strength on the way, it would burn the earth's surface, destroying everything and making life itself impossible.

The most critical squandering these days, prohibited and almost fanciful in the midst of our fiercely utilitarian society, is the fact of wasting time. And it strikes us as a paradoxical situation where we find it. Currently, unemployment condemns millions of people to unhappiness, others work too hard, and some, very few, do nothing at all. Wouldn't it be more logical to distribute laziness? Thus, it would quickly solve the problem of unemployment, working less and in such a way that everyone works who

³ Ibid., pp. 13 and 14.

⁴ This is a study published originally in *La Critique sociale*, no. 7, January 1933. See Georges Bataille "Consumption" in *The Accursed Share*, translated by Robert Hurley, Zone Books, 1988.

⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, translated by Robert Hurley, Zone Books, 1988, p. 21.

can and wants to. Not too many hours a day, no more than four. It is very likely that we would all sign up to work under these conditions which, today, sound utopic and obviously strike us as unbeatable, don't they? Even more, it has been proven empirically that, in cases where universal income⁶ has been applied, laziness has not spread but in fact quite the opposite: the number of small businesses has risen and many people have discovered their own enterprising nature. Will it not be fear of laziness that ends up saving capitalism from itself? In any case, this scenario has to be another argument in favour of laziness.

One shouldn't assume that laziness is something that everyone can devote themselves to easily without possessing an attitude and a certain awareness of what one is (or not) doing. Laziness is something serious, complex and difficult to attain. To be truly lazy is far more difficult than it would seem. Marcel Duchamp was well aware of this. One of his most ambitious projects was a Home for adult lazies / Orphanage for young lazies. An institution which he never managed to inaugurate and where obviously "it would be forbidden to work." A place where few would have had the right to enter, as only a very restricted number would truly be capable of enjoying the services given to laziness which were on offer there. According to the French artist, in these places "there wouldn't be as many residents as one might imagine [...] it really isn't easy to be truly lazy and do nothing."⁷ Duchamp often confessed how deeply captivated he had been by Lafargue's book mentioned above and it had become one of his most definitive references: "[This was] a book that really struck me around 1912. It still seems to me today quite legitimate to challenge

the forced labour that even newborns are subjected to."⁸ And it still is in 2020.

One of the main activities for the lazy ones would be to devote themselves to truly useless leisure. Not like today's leisure promoted by impresarios to fill in time for those members of the public who want to "learn" in their free time, nor the leisure provided for tourists who want to make the most of their holidays by getting to know about other cultures. It could not be further from today's leisure but nearer the idea of pure squandering that we saw in Bataille: dedicating oneself to doing nothing whatsoever which could produce beneficial compensation, no less useful. Nowadays time is money and something useful is the ultimate goal for any action, be it public or private. It is seen as a utility doubly perceived as positive: for those who obtain an enriching experience from this way of life, and for the impresario who gets wealthy selling a small portion of paradise, or a whiff of it. As Duchamp wrote: "There would be very few lazies in my home, because they couldn't stand to be lazy too long. In such a society barter would not exist, and the great people would be the garbage collectors. It would be the highest and noblest form of activity."⁹ The greater the change, the greater the distance that has to be run.

Education in this utopian society, which we could call Cuckoo Land or New Babylon, in which the French artist would be considered one of the founding fathers, would be a key activity and totally different from today's. At present the final objective of education is seen as a way of preparing students for the world of work; they are not taught to think but to act. One

⁶ For more information, watch the documentary *Free Lunch Society – Come Come Basic Income* by Christian Tod (2017) or read this article: https://www.eldiario.es/theguardian/experimento-respaldado-Finlandia-bienestar-receptores_0_1024698522.html, among others.

⁷ Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*, translated by Joshua David Jordan, Semiotext(e), 2014, p. 11.

⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

of the scholars, an expert in this theory, was Karl Kraus: “In the days when there was time one could find solutions in art. In a time when there are newspapers matter and form have split in favour of faster understanding. As we don’t have time authors have no other choice but to describe with a great wealth of detail what could have been expressed with brevity.”¹⁰ Kraus is even more specific in the field of education: “If dead languages were useful to life, teaching them would have to be abolished.”¹¹ At present we are witnessing their suppression precisely for that reason, because they are not useful for the future and longed for job which in less than fifteen years will be eliminated by the growing mechanisation of work where people will be substituted by far more efficient and cheaper technology.

Years later, Bertrand Russell reiterated these ideas in his *In Praise of Idleness*. “What happened for decades in capitalist economies [...] was that technological progress, as well as increasing companies’ profits by improving productivity, brought prosperity to a broad strata of society. Professionals and workers continued working eight hours a day, like in 1932, but went from receiving subsistence salaries to slowly improve their working conditions: they had access to better homes, bought cars and changed their wardrobe every season. It was the gestation period of the famous middle classes. But this idyllic movement had to have a limit. In a world where machines could do all the work – something that today is closer to reality than science fiction –, one has to wonder what human beings will do. If all the pins and all the cars and all the refrigerators were produced by pushing a button, what would men and women do?”¹² It seems obvious to us therefore that these women and men should be idle and, through this wonderful idleness,

contribute to the well-being of the world. Bataille’s proposal should be resorted to and large amounts of time should be squandered with nothing in return other than humanity itself, which would benefit from those who do nothing so that everyone else should fill the day doing as little as possible devoting themselves single-mindedly to serious idleness.

According to this point of view, idleness, inactivity, would not be seen as a negative vice but rather the opposite. Squandering time would constitute a way to resist, delivering us to a utilitarianism that seeks to perpetuate a neoliberalism that neither shares out nor ensures a decent life. This is all about reclaiming the right to do nothing. According to Hannah Arendt, in a totalitarian regime everything that is allowed is obligatory. Therefore, real freedom is to be found in the possibility of not doing or stopping doing what one should be doing. In the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: man’s freedom consists less in doing what he wills than in not being forced to do what someone else wills.

The power of the human being consists precisely in the dilemma that it is important not to break: “The power of being and not being, of doing and not doing.”¹³ If we eliminate one of these two we surrender to a process that even we cannot control – which anyway we cannot avoid doing – nor can anyone. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes that current “democratic” power “separates mankind not only and not so much from what they can do but above all from what they are not able to do which is what makes it therefore all the more urgent that a human being recovers all the potential that power has suppressed: the possibility of not doing. Separated from his impotence,

¹⁰ Karl Kraus, *Deti e contraddetti*, Adelphi Edizioni, Milan, 2009, p. 116. There is an English translation: *Dicta and Contradicta*, by Jonathan McVity, University of Illinois Press, 2001.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Luisgé Martín, “Elogio de la pereza”, *El País*, 1 June 2012. Available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2012/05/29/opinion/1338317588_867296.html

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Nudità*, Edizione nottetempo, Rome, 2009, pp. 67-70. There is an English translation: *Nudities*, by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2011.

deprived of the experience of what he can 'not do', the man of today believes he is capable of everything and repeats his jovial 'no problem' and his irresponsible 'it can be done', precisely when, on the contrary, he should realise that he has been delivered in a completely unheard of way into forces and processes of which he has completely lost control."¹⁴

We see ourselves forced to do a lot and to do it well, at all times and without respite. When we are not working and following our 9 to 6 timetable we are promoting ourselves on social media, putting ourselves out there and contributing significantly to increasing the background noise of the ever open factory of capital. The power of capitalism "strikes with its anathema the flesh of the laborer; its ideal is to reduce the producer to the smallest number of needs, to suppress his joys and his passions and to condemn him to play the part of a machine turning out work without respite and without thanks,"¹⁵ according to Lafargue.

The current culture of effort, consisting of working more and more for less money and in which technological development inevitably leads to an increase in unemployment, produces what Zygmunt Bauman calls "flawed consumers": people who are unable to earn a living, nor have money to spend and who find themselves on the verge of becoming "human waste."¹⁶

Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, theoreticians of the post-work world and advocates of universal income, have researched into the ever more likely possibility of a world without work in which, because of the rapid rise in automation, the resulting precariousness of employment and a continuous growth in population, an ever increasing amount of people will not be able to

obtain enough income to survive.¹⁷ What sounded to us like a distant utopia may well seem closer now having lived through various months of quarantine and an unprecedented process of economic downturn. For the first time, the population has been watching out for a curve that had to go downwards when in the whole of our recent economic history we've been led to believe that the only possible curve is one that grows upwards, the one always with positive objectives.

We need to recover control of our own time urgently, as unhinged it is as hectic, and the imposition of a mistaken conception of *vita activa*, which, with its insistence on work, degrades the person to a simple *animal laborans*. The subject, according to Marxist theory, continues to be a worker subject, even if not working and is therefore a tireless consumer. They consume their time and their assets continuously. The concept of "time to recover" is what comes from the Greek *skholé*, which is tantamount to "giving yourself over to discussion in pursuit of knowledge."

Through the idea of consumption, it is a question of regarding non-productive activity and the squandering of time as utopia of a life dedicated to leisure, just as *skholé* defends laziness as the ultimate and most ambitious goal of our current existence.

The lure of inactivity, stopping the motors, breaking away from the ticking clock which organises our time according to productivity, should be understood as a type of resistance, of a social change within our reach. Slowing down our industries and going into a new period of downturn would allow us to pass from the slavery of a false *vita activa* to a *vita*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy*, translated by Charles H. Kerr, Charles H. Kerr & Company, Chicago, 1907, p. 4.

¹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001.

¹⁷ See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future. Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, Verso, London, 2006, and Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, "Los robots te quitarán el trabajo" in Marta Echaves, Antonio Gómez y María Ruido (Eds.), *Working Dead*, Barcelona City Council. Culture Institute. La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona, 2019, pp. 161-176.

contemplativa, suitable for encouraging thought, the quality that defines the human being. Under the pressure of frenetic activity, we cannot distinguish between what is ambivalent, indeterminate or complex. Only by recovering the necessary peace to be able to think will we really be able to give ourselves the time to understand the divergent positions, the otherness of our global world and advance towards alternative ways to a closed, imposed reality which, as has become obvious in the last few decades and even more evident in recent months with the global phenomenon of COVID-19, can only provoke crisis after crisis, each one getting worse and more lethal.

“Never is a man more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself.”

Cato, quoted by Cicero in *The Republic*

The exhibition *Sooooo Lazy. In Praise of Squandering* proposes an approach as much ironic as utopic to the above ideas. Questioning short-sighted pragmatism and proposing another concept of what is useful are activities that are easily assimilated with the very nature of artistic creation. What defines an artist is their “activity” not so much what they “do”, as Marcel Duchamp, among others, argued. This exhibition offers the visitor viable strategies for squandering time while at the same time reducing speed in a narrative route that begins in hyperactivity and moves slowly towards contemplation.

“Finally, to be lazy and conclude: there is no art without laziness.”

Mladen Stilinović, *In Praise of Laziness*

Barcelona, 25 April 2020

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Ângela Ferreira invites us to think about the colonisation carried out by Western nations, particularly in African countries. The logic of capitalism demands continuous, never-ending growth. The countries that brought in the market economy were limited by their national borders and had to overcome this so as to broaden their fields of action and obtain supplies of raw materials and cheap labour in order to be able to go on increasing production. This was how Western nations initiated the growth of factories all over the place, strengthening old trade routes and exportation and creating new ones, until they controlled most of the world. Financial imperialism took on different forms so as to achieve its objective of unstoppable growth: military occupation, plundering natural resources, exploiting local labour and even slavery, among many other things.

Fábrica colapsável [Collapsible Factory] (2012) is a production that emerged from a residency this artist from Mozambique had in Guimarães (Portugal). This large format multimedia sculpture consists of two wooden mobile structures, accompanied by a series of slides. Ferreira's installation makes a big impact as it greets us at the entrance of this exhibition, both because of its size and the fact that the spectator is confronted with the dynamics of a factory. Ferreira's piece reflects the work process, specifically that of a textile factory, a key sector in the development of the Industrial Revolution and modern capitalism, both for Portugal and for Catalonia. Its mobile mechanism is an effective metaphor of hyper-production: a machine that cannot stop (in this case it has to be triggered every hour by the specialist personnel in the exhibition centre) and can only go on producing.

The ever more regular financial crises almost completely take over and shape governments' political agendas. The recent pandemic has highlighted an issue that sends a shiver down our spines. The Lieutenant Governor of Texas proposed quite explicitly in March this year the "need" to let older people die so as not to slow down production and thereby save the economy. Increasing the production of wealth is considered the most suitable formula for ensuring the well-being of a nation. However, this formula is being questioned more and more, for among other reasons it is

clear that the growth of production is not accompanied by a redistribution of wealth, nor an increase in welfare. Growth continues, but with it, in this latest stage of capitalist development, there has also been a growth in the distance between a minority (the very rich) and an immense majority (with fewer and fewer resources). Is it possible to slow down this neo-liberal machine that brings limitless exploitation with it? Is it possible to reduce production without it threatening thousands of jobs and the survival of millions of people? Is it possible to stop the effects that hyper-exploitation of resources is having on our ecosystem and on all living creatures? Ferreira's installation resounds with a sense of work in a factory as suffering, pain and even physical torture.¹ Furthermore its appearance in this exhibition shows a curious synchronicity, momentarily giving new meaning to the exhibition space and returning it to its industrial past. The *modernista* building that houses the headquarters of the CaixaForum Barcelona was built between 1909 and 1912 by architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch on behalf of cotton industrialist Casimir Casaramona. After losing his old factory in the Raval district of Barcelona due to a fire, he wanted a new building that would incorporate state-of-the-art architectural and technical features so as to avoid a similar disaster. Testimony of this are, among other novelties, its two water-towers that incorporate tanks of water for use in case of a fire, and above all the fact that steam power and chimneys were abandoned in favour of electricity, and also the determination to introduce improved lighting systems and air circulation. The building's architectural style shows the *modernista* decorative trends such as mosaics, floral motives and filigree in the wrought iron work and in the same way the oriental influence in using exposed brick, turning its back on the plain functional industrial architecture of the past. The new factory, awarded a prize in 1912 in the City Council's annual competition for artistic buildings, was to close down in 1920 after

¹ And we are not going off the point. The etymological origin of the word *trabajo* (work in Spanish) can be found in the Latin *tripaliare*, which itself comes from *tripalium*, a cruel device of three sticks (*palos*), a kind of yoke that was attached to animals to brand them and which seemingly was also used for holding down slaves to whip them.



losses suffered during the long strike known as La Canadiense (that took place from 5 February to 12 April 1919), which on the other hand resulted in one of the major achievements of the labour movement's struggle: the introduction of an eight-hour working day. Spain became the first country to enforce this. Since then, more than a century ago, the working day has not been reduced any more than that...

Aernout Mik's video *Pulverous* uses the ritual of *potlatch* as its starting point, something first described in the anthropologist Marcel Mauss' essay *The Gift* (1923-1924). This research was to become the theoretical start of Georges Bataille's *The Notion of Expenditure* (1933). The function of the *potlatch* ritual as described by Mauss consisted of destroying riches so as to oppose any accumulative process. This implied a new start and more sustainable distribution of wealth in the community. Similarly, in Bataille's economic theory we find the proposition that excess should be destroyed lavishly and the waste should consist precisely in the loss of this wealth.

In this Dutch artist's video, several people systematically destroy, without any anger or rage, products (consumer goods) in a large store. They move in an organised, methodical, constant way. What we are watching is a representation of a ritual of destruction, carried out in a state of alienation and reaching fever pitch. The artist seems to be reflecting on the excess imposed by the continuous dynamic, with no pause or break, of the model of production and consumption in which we find ourselves fully immersed. During the COVID-19 pandemic we realised how unstoppable production is: only a few weeks of the machinery being stopped led to financial collapse which institutional bodies quickly described as "catastrophic".²

² "The microscopic coronavirus will cause the worst downturn in the world economy since the Great Depression in the thirties and will be twice as bad as the Great Recession of 2009. This was the warning from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its forecast published this morning in Washington, at the start of its bi-annual assembly taking place this week, virtually and distanced." Andy Robinson, "El PIB de España caerá un 8% este año y el paro rozará el 21%, según el FMI" [Spain's GDP will fall 8% this year and unemployment will be nearing 21%, according to the IMF], *La Vanguardia*, 14 April 2020, <https://bit.ly/2AwTopG> [Accessed 25/05/2020]



As in Bataille's theory, Mik's video questions the notion of *what's useful*. What do we understand by "useful"? And especially, useful for whom? For the majority of we human beings living on this planet? Useful for the planet itself and its ecosystem? The answer seems to lean towards the negative: neither production nor growth seem to contribute greater quality of life to the majority of the planet's inhabitants. What's useful then is seen to be a fragile, elusive concept, conflicting with the idea of absolute universal. The question "what is useful?" emerges spontaneously when facing this work and throughout the exhibition, often leaving the answer hanging in the air.

In *Malgastar* [To Waste], **Ignasi Aballí** lets the paint dry in their pots without touching it. The pictorial process is reduced to a minimum, he doesn't even take the material out of its original container. His intention is to use the paint in a clearly incorrect way, squandering any chance of painting; "to waste" without generating something productive. The artist himself describes the origins of this piece remembering: "I bought all the paint I could with the production money I had been given for an exhibition, and then I did nothing at all with it. [...] While I was thinking what to do with it, it had dried and was useless. In some way, the work puts the thinking before the action, the containment before the expression."³

This installation continues delving into the concept of "wasting" but, as opposed to Mik's excessive, shocking audio-visual installation proposal, this one is done with extreme economy of means. The wealth, that is the money the artist was given for production, has been simply spent on buying litres of paint, so as in the end not to paint anything. *Malgastar* is a finished piece of work before it gets done.

³ Sergio Rubira, "El azar como rutina. Entrevista con Ignasi Aballí" in Various Authors, *Una tirada de dados: sobre el azar en el arte contemporáneo*, Consejería de Cultura y Turismo, Comunidad de Madrid, Madrid, 2008.

As in all the work of this Catalan artist we find a reflection on time but also on "doing", on "stopping doing" or "not doing". His process shows, what's more, the impasse that is normally implied in the act of thinking. The artist admits he has given more attention to questioning what he was doing than the end result. Aballí watches over it without interfering in the process, waiting for the work to be done, taking on an almost zen-like attitude that, unexpectedly, brings him close to the essence of the painting of another artist which we'll find at the end of this exhibition: Agnes Martin.

If art is characterised clearly and above all by "doing" and putting objects in a space, its power lies as much in the possibility of "doing" as in "not doing". With *Malgastar*, is Aballí wasting time, resources and wealth? The attention the artist devotes to "doing without doing" or, rather, to "stopping doing", takes on a peculiar significance that emphasises the relevance of those small, continuous decisions we make almost automatically.

The work takes us in a direction that is more aligned to the philosophical thinking of Giorgio Agamben, according to which the practice and responsibility of working freely lie in what one can "be" or "do", just as in what one can "do" and "not do". He warns us when talking about the danger of restricting the right to not do, the right to impotence in current democracies: "Nothing makes us so poor and so not free as this banishment from impotence. That which is separate from what can be done can still resist though, can still not be done. Whatever is separated from actual impotence loses, on the other hand, the capacity to resist above all. And thus, as it is only the burning consciousness of what we can not be that guarantees the truth of what we are, it is also only the lucid vision of what we can not or what we can not do that gives consistency to our behaviour."⁴

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, "Sobre lo que podemos no hacer", in *Desnudez*, Adriana Hidalgo Editora, Buenos Aires, 2011, p. 65.



Therefore praising idleness is something that needs to be claimed: the possibility to not do. Claiming the right to laziness is reclaiming the very possibility of impotence, of not being and not doing. Without this right, we are only left with what we should do. To carry on doing, carry on working till death us do part.

On Sundays, his weekly day off, **Alberto Gil Casedas** chooses to devote himself to a dull, repetitive, absurd activity for the eight hours of a working day: in a systematic way he fills up A-4 sheets of paper with tiny white lines that are almost imperceptible. The result of this process is the installation *147.710 [Blank Sundays]. Prueba de Leucofobia: 40 h en blanco*. [147.710 (Blank Sundays). Leukophobia Test: 40 h in White] that consists of marks on white paper and the stubs of the wooden pencils used, worn down and stashed in small pots.

Here again we return to the concept of *squandering*. And more specifically, not just squandering time, but free time (symbolised by Sundays), which adds a further edge, if that's possible, to the activity of squandering. The result of the artist's efforts on his day off is white on white, a non-representation and a non-story. The artist voluntarily wastes his free time, parodying the very rituals and dedication of working time, with an absurd, unproductive result. In today's context when our free time is regulated and directed towards consumerism, and where the criterion of workers' maximum flexibility and availability reigns, to carry out a task that results in little more than invisibility is a type of resistance able to cast some light on how absurd daily work tasks can be or to say the least is a strategy that makes it possible to relate the level of importance we normally assign to our "duties". In its form, with its emphasis on the almost completely pure white, this piece, like Aballí's described earlier, links up with the last part of this exhibition where the visit comes to an end with two large paintings by Agnes Martin.

In the work *Nòmines. El meu espai productiu / econòmic* [Payslips. My Productive / Economic Space], **Francesc Abad** introduces himself to the public through his working life as a teacher. We can regard it as a self-

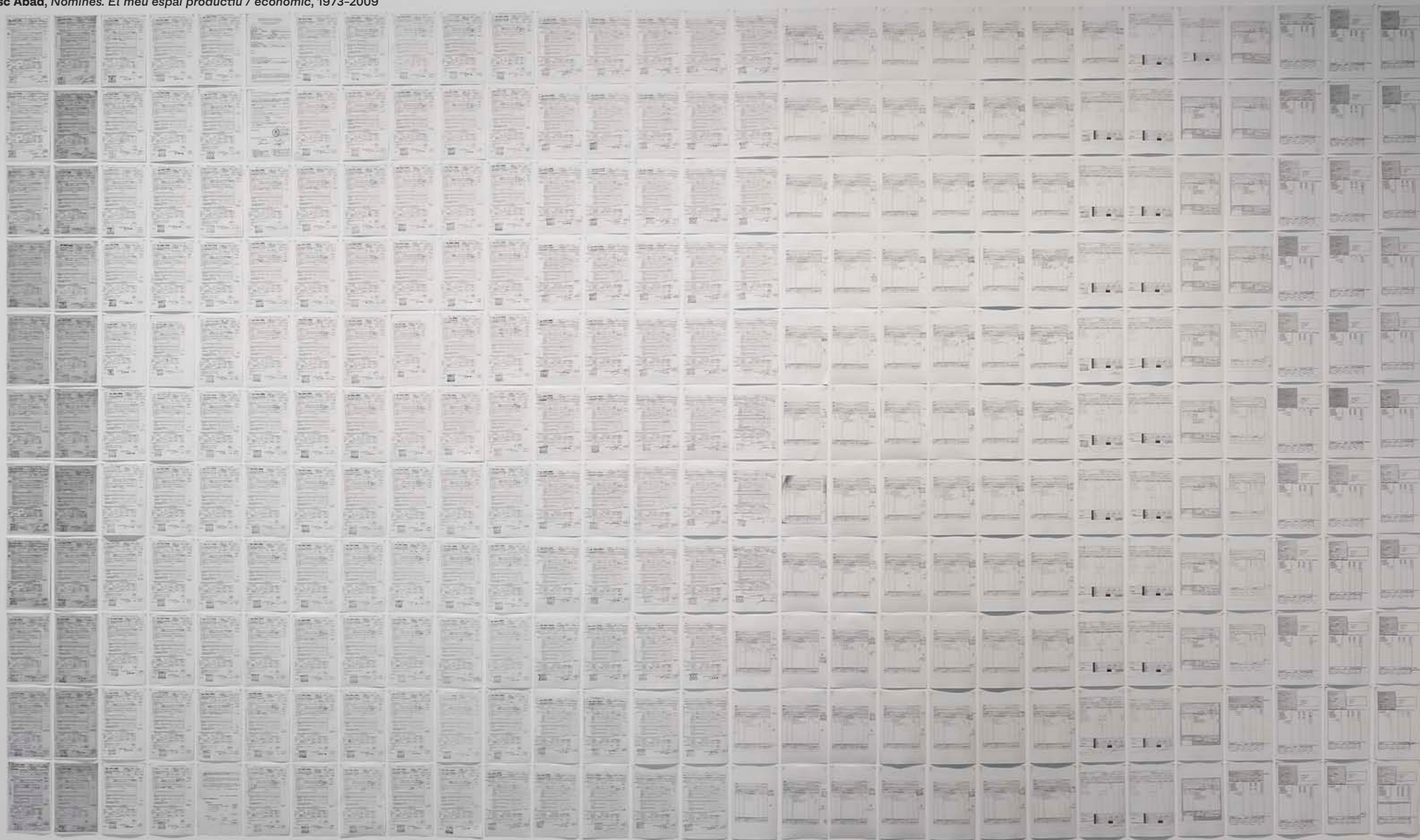
portrait of the artist being shown, in this case, by his background that is beyond the strictly artistic activity. Although this is not totally the case, either... In fact, Abad does not talk of his years as a teacher, nor his memories. The artist simply displays all the payslips he received during his working life. And it is quite some exhaustive, colossal documentation. Each paper is a payslip, each document corresponds to a particular period of his life. Succinctly shown through a simple, straightforward financial transaction.

At the current crossroads, when work is scarce and precarious, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis, with less pay for longer working days, the representation of a lifetime's career becomes like a monument to work (but not to employment). In a creative universe quite different from that of the conceptual artist, but of the same generation and context, Evru/Zush translates his experiences, visions and his interior world by expressing them to the spectator in work that is brimming over with hallucinogenic and stunning creativity. His language is not antagonistic to Abad's but in fact complementary; some recent comments reveal an unexpected assonance and could shed light on Abad's installation: "The mystery of life is to be and not to be at the same time, being somewhere and not being somewhere, is transparency. But we are always expected to define ourselves: what's your name, what do you do, what are you like... We have to stop being victims of this."⁵ With this in mind, Francesc Abad's work takes on a new dimension, as if it were a sombre reflection on time frittered away at work and robbed from real life, authentic life that seems to be increasingly a promise that is never fulfilled.

This self-portrait also invites us to think about how an artist is paid and regarded in the framework of the neoliberal system and above all places an emphasis on the concept of creative autonomy. *Nòmines. El meu espai productiu / econòmic* makes us think about the meaning of the word "wage-

⁵ Interview with Evru/Zush by Ima Sanchis, "Cada día hay que dejar de ser un rato", *La Vanguardia*, 25 January 2020, <https://bit.ly/3eLxgWm> [Accessed 22/04/2020]





earner” in the creative world. By using payslips as an official document of one’s existence we find proof of how an artist with a long track record survived: a whole life inside the world of art. Abad displays his salaried work, something that paradoxically has little or nothing to do with the activity which defines him as an “artist”. Another paradox is that Abad’s work as a teacher is a waste of time, considering it is time out from his studio, away from doing truly artistic pieces and projects. Or simply, employment is time robbed from life, as some graffiti seen in a Barcelona street says: “How much life is your salary costing you?” In the exhibition *Sooooo Lazy* this work is symmetrical to Alberto Gil Casadas’ piece: work time and leisure time and vice versa.

To relieve the feverish tension we undergo between life and work, Bertrand Russell’s text, *In Praise of Idleness* (1932), puts forward rational proposals on the radical reduction and decreasing of working hours. Russell’s proposal advocates using time to devote oneself to knowledge, thinking, the arts and leisure so as to allow the human being to develop in a better way and let human relationships progressively improve, so as to make the world a better, more pleasant place to live in for an increasing number of people. Russell’s proposal aimed to extend welfare to the whole population, sharing out the means and free time to every human being. Today, the first step towards this objective would be to separate work from the income needed for survival.

Sharon Lockhart’s work fits in with a long tradition characterised by thoughtful observation of day-to-day activities. One of the most relevant features of her projects is the emphasis on processes, ways of working and labour organisation. The four large format photographs that are shown in *Sooooo Lazy* with the title *Lunch Break Installation, Duane Hanson: Sculptures of Life, 14 December 2002 – 23 February 2003, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art* freeze moments of the process of installing a hyperrealist sculptural piece by Duane Hanson. The museum staff assembling the work are mixed in with the sculptures. And so the lunch break becomes a contemplative pause by the workers resting (the sculptures), while we can see the assemblers (humans) hard at work. The

four photographs detain time and turn it, as often happens with Lockhart’s work, into long drawn-out contemplation.⁶

This US artist’s intent to show a suspension of productive work (twice over) within an institutional framework is very suggestive. The break for eating is the subject of Hanson’s sculptures, and the pause of the workers assembling Hanson’s piece (whose movements are seen frozen by the instant of the camera shot) is the subject of the photographs. The high quality, life-size scale of the photographs turns this series into a reflection about time divided between work and rest (business/leisure). Displayed in a line along the wall, this work is like a monument to rest and celebrates the importance of not doing.

Looking at the photographs, a watchful visitor’s eye will see a burnt out butt on a white pedestal. There are traces of ash with the part on the cigarette elongated, the product of a slow burn; it’s the slowed-down process of a cigarette that hasn’t been smoked, or perhaps has just burnt out on its own. Obviously someone forgot about it and left it there while setting up. Someone busy with something more urgent, maybe even something more interesting, has wasted a cigarette that has now gone out on a pedestal. Or they were so lazy they didn’t bother smoking it, an activity that in itself is fruitless.

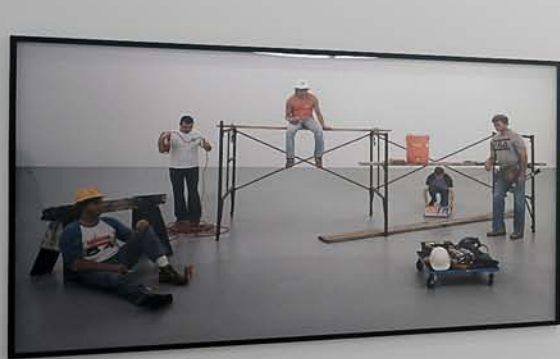
As Malevich would say, laziness is the inalienable truth of man. **Misha Bies Golas**, the artist behind this work, does not hide the reference to smoke sculptures, Giovanni Papini’s ephemeral creations in his novel *Gog*, where he makes a crude dissection of our society. It tells of an eccentric character obsessed by creating smoke sculptures, which would be even more fleeting than theatre or dance, but also than the installation we are looking at here,

⁶ Several years later, in 2008, the artist made the film *Lunch Break* on the same subject, but this time by using a long take slowed down, which extends the factory’s lunch break to the 83 minute length of the film.

Sharon Lockhart, *Lunch Break Installation*, Duane Hanson: *Sculptures of Life*, 14 December 2002 – 23 February 2003, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 2003

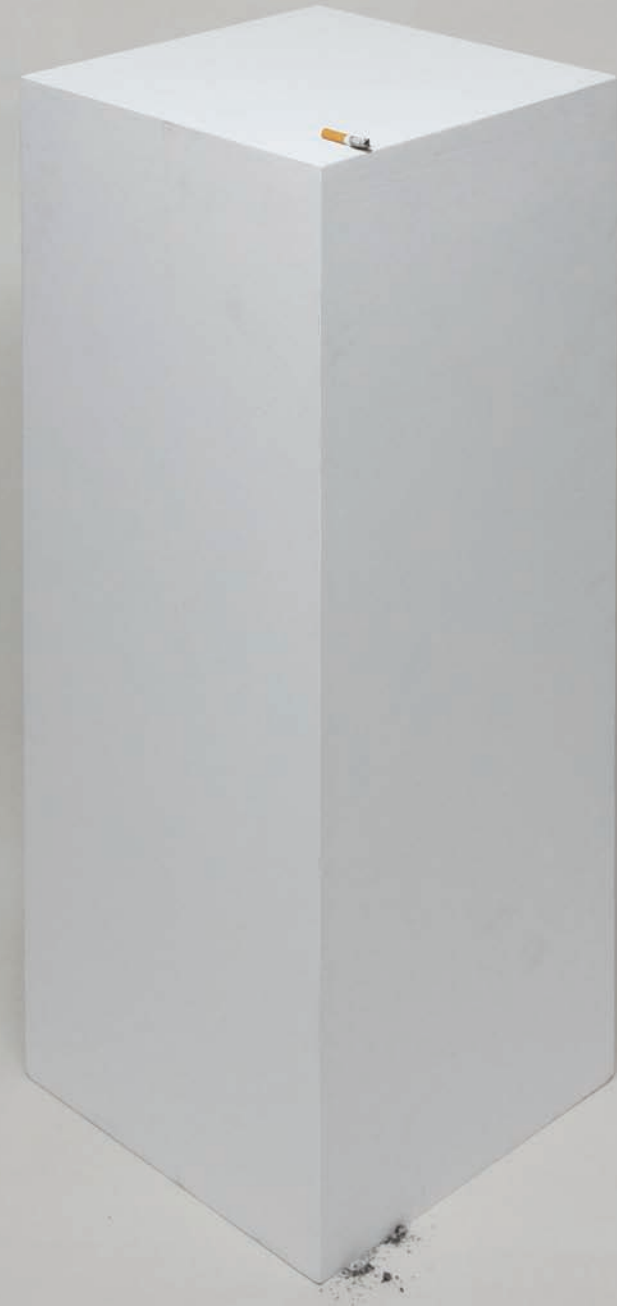


Sharon Lockhart, *Lunch Break Installation*, Duane Hanson: *Sculptures of Life*, 14 December 2002 – 23 February 2003, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 2003



nothing but the remains of a smoke sculpture that has petered out so the public can no longer enjoy it. Returning to Aballi's thinking: without doing or stopping doing it is possible to expect that something is happening and then recognise it. However, here it is forgetfulness which brings about the work. The pedestal works as a support for a cigarette and support for an unexpected sculpture. Although not that unexpected: Misha Bies Golas' sculpture is made of hope and forgetfulness. In the context of the exhibition *Sooooo Lazy*, the cigarette fading out without being smoked and left on a white pedestal is in dialogue with Sharon Lockhart's huge photographs and in turn gives these some sense and human scale. If the US artist's photographs freeze eternally the moment of the installation of a work, this break for lunch, the proposal of Misha Bies Golas captures a duration, the time it takes for a forgotten cigarette to burn on top of a piece of museum furniture. A solitary cigarette being left there adds an ironic component to the squandering of time and the richness of the *potlatch* and opens up another possibility for wasting. It takes us at the same time along the good route of what's enjoyable, a time liberated from the imperative of productive work.

As the sign on **Esther Ferrer's** work *Silla Zaj* [Zaj Chair] tells us the visitor is supposed to sit on it and stay in that difficult position "till death do us part". An unfeasible proposition (in the gallery the visitor will always be persuaded to carry out this almost iconoclastic and revolutionary action) that synthesises and brings into focus the absurd irony and rupturist poetry of the artistic group Zaj's proposals. Ferrer works with that group. This chair is an emblematic piece by this Basque artist, surely alluding to the imposition of rules and following them that restricts the lifestyle of a hypothetical person who agrees to comply with the order given by another invisible person, and to the possibility or not of contradicting them (let's not forget this work was done in 1974 towards the end of the Franco dictatorship). It is also dealing with thoughts about time passing and how we use it, and at the same time delving into the boundaries between the spectator and the piece, visitor and performer, and the rules that condition the space of participation where we consume art.





The artist has used chairs in other works and performances, like *Acción para 36 sillas, 36 zapatos y un despertador* (Milan, 1989) and *Canon para 7 sillas* (Marseilles, 1990). Ferrer has written about her long relationship with this object: "I've always been interested in chairs, everyday and almost anodyne objects whose mere presence can nonetheless modify the space of a room." She goes on: "I have done several different installations with chairs: sometimes they are simply a dialogue of shapes in the space, hanging from cables, delicate or not; other times they also have a political or social significance."⁷

There is no doubt at all that the work shown here has a clear political significance. Its urgent exhortation, read in the light of today's hyperactive and unhinged society, seems highly relevant. Although perhaps its proposition is partly undermined by the anthropological transformation imposed on us by technology that we increasingly embrace without complaining or thinking much about what we are doing. Even if we were sitting, shut in our homes as we recently have been during the lockdown, we would not stop to produce and communicate through our most fundamental prosthesis: our mobile and a good wi-fi connection. We shall possibly be connected to millions of people till death us do part... But can we really communicate properly with so many people at the same time? And, above all, what do we get from this way of socialising? Are we sure that we, with our feverish fingering, are creating a world where we would really like to live?

"All of my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet or rendering it uninhabitable. [...]"

⁷ Esther Ferrer, *Espacios Entrelazados*, <https://estherferrer.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/exposicion> [Accessed 22/04/2020]

I'm concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create an action, not to go out and buy a Coca-Cola, but to create an alteration in the reader's consciousness. You know, they ask me if I were on a desert island and knew nobody would ever see what I wrote, would I go on writing. My answer is most emphatically yes. I would go on writing for company. Because I'm creating an imaginary – it's always imaginary – world in which I would like to live.”⁸

William S. Burroughs

In the 1980s the group **Agustín Parejo School** (APS) were pioneers in Spain of an artistic practice understood as urban and social activism. Their rhetoric places special emphasis on the subject of work and the false dialectic of production time versus leisure time, a theme that runs through this exhibition. Spain in those years was living through the first crisis of capitalism within a formally democratic context. These were years of unemployment and a housing shortage. Taking as a reference Agitprop and the Situationist International movement and infused with the spirit of punk, APS turned public space into a field of collective action and social demands. Their surprising and unexpected street actions drew attention in a provincial city like Malaga which received them with unexpected support. Streets were and continue to be a valid territory for art. Something which makes the APS ideas more relevant today than ever.

⁸ William S. Burroughs quoted in Federica Gordon, “Hasta que la muerte les separe”, *BCN-MÉS*, #76, December 2018 – January 2019, p. 21.

Por favor estamos parados [Please, We're Stopped] (1986) was part of the production of postcards and a calendar of street graffiti painted by the group. In the exhibition *Soooooo Lazy* we propose reactivating one of these postcards, using the same slogan to convert it into a stencil and produce some graffiti within the exhibition area. Being unemployed is not presented as being in a position of subordination and some social drama but rather as a recognition of a world finally freed from the slavery of work.

Technological development entails an endless amount of possibilities; to make the most of this enormous opportunity it is now a question of separating and never going back to unite work and the income necessary to survive – and to not even consider them as two sides of the same coin. The attachment to work, our obsession to submit more or less voluntarily to this productive activity, stems from an insidious little voice ringing in our ears: if we don't work we won't eat. It is necessary for humanity to put an end once and for all to this terrible punishment to the human being, something that is becoming increasingly less sustainable even for the mere survival of the capitalist system itself.

In his text *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work* (2014), Maurizio Lazzarato analyses aspects of the French artist related to work and other tragedies of humanity: “Can the refusal of modern-day work draw on lazy action in order to develop its political potential? Without a doubt, because, as Lafargue might have said, a ‘strange madness’ – one still stranger than in his time – has spread the globe: the dominated are no longer clamoring for more work but rather, quite simply, a job.”⁹ The Italian sociologist continues quoting Duchamp: “I consider that working in order to live is foolishness [...] It's shameful we're still obliged to work simply in order to survive, [...] obliged to work to exist – it really is a disgrace.”¹⁰

⁹ Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*, translated by Joshua David Jordan, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles (CA), 2014, p. 41.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

**POR FAVOR
ESTAMOS
PARADOS**

Greil Marcus writes in *Lipstick Traces* (1989) that with their single *Pretty Vacant* the Sex Pistols had made the Lollards¹¹ rise from their graves after hundreds of years of oblivion. The group, formed by some louts gathered together by Malcolm McLaren, assumes its ontological condition of being unemployed and insecure with pride in a Great Britain holding (then) a record number of one million unemployed and proclaims it with a cheekiness typical of survivors. And it is precisely in this where their radical negation resides, their profound rejection without concessions of the logic of neoliberalism which was to triumph with the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. To question what is taken for granted, to make a breakthrough into what we light-heartedly call common sense, implies a logical and urgent recognition.

Punk mutiny made it abundantly clear that those who had a problem were the people who submitted, more or less willingly, to this new and organised form of slavery, not them. You can't really ask much more of art... right?

**"We're pretty a-pretty vacant
We don't care."**

Sex Pistols, Pretty Vacant

Por favor estamos parados extolls the state of joblessness as a proud statement made by those who resist surrendering to "the rule of the Great Ones, to the lie that the world was made for anything other than one's

¹¹ The Lollard movement or Wycliffism was an ancient British heretical religious movement, a precursor of the Reformation which "equated work with sin and rejected both. Work, the Bible said, was God's punishment for Original Sin, but that was not the Lollard's bible. They said that God was perfect, men and women were God's creation, so therefore men and women were perfect and could not sin – save against their own perfect nature, by working, by surrendering their God-given autonomy to the rule of the Great Ones, to the lie that the world was made for other than one's perfect pleasure." Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1990.

perfect pleasure."¹² According to what they write in their collective texts, "APS does not actually produce works (that are consummated processes), but leave for good measure a trace, a trail of the always inconclusive process of its own creation. The real work of APS is APS."¹³ Personal authorship is rejected in favour of a shared effort, or even an absence of author. Words circulate freely and in that way their project consists in "multiplying the possible forms of participation into a generalised *potlatch*."¹⁴

According to the Situationist International, the inevitable development of an ever wider and more efficient automatization would free human beings from the obligation of work; as a consequence, "leisure and free time had converted into a fundamental battleground. It would be a question therefore to motivate an interaction between artistic/architectural practice, social research and technological progress in order to generate an infinite diversity of what they refer to as 'atmospheres' or 'situations' with the objective of helping 'to attain a richer, fuller life'. In 1966 **Constant** (Constant A. Nieuwenhuys) wrote that the principal merit of Johan Huizinga had been to recognise that every human being harbours a potential *homo ludens*; the freeing of this ludic power depended on social emancipation and this, as Marx and Engels had noted in *The German Ideology* (1846), should be propitiated by technical and scientific advances which in the future would permit separating the production of labour and in this way free human beings from any kind of workload."¹⁵ Whereas nowadays human beings frequently manage to separate production from labour, they are not yet able to separate work from the necessary income to live.

¹² Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 1990.

¹³ APS, "No somos nadie", in Various Authors, *Agustín Parejo School*, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Junta de Andalucía, Seville, 2017, p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵ Manuel Borja-Villel, in Various Authors, *Constant. New Babylon*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2015, p. 9.

In his fundamental text *Another City for Another Life* (1959), Constant put forward a new project for a city and social organisation where *homo faber* (man who makes or manufactures) could finally be left behind and convert at last into *homo ludens* (man who plays). In a previous text entitled *The Principle of Disorientation*, Constant comes up with the proposal that the guiding principle of urbanism needs to be changed, in other words the orientation itself. The opposite had to be promoted: disorientation. Its model was therefore “a labyrinthine social space”, “with countless centres and starting and arrival points, that would be in continual transformation and through which citizens freed from productive logic would be able to wander in an indefinite way.” Losing one’s way, abandoning logic solely orientated towards production, feverish blind activity in order to embrace the logic of laziness, of idleness, to wander around directionless and without any practical purpose, frittering time away and loitering around.

“In the older neighborhoods, the streets have degenerated into freeways and leisure activities are being commercialized and corrupted by tourism. Social relations become impossible. The newly built neighborhoods have only two all-pervasive themes: automobile traffic and household comfort – an impoverished expression of bourgeois contentment, lacking any sense of play.”¹⁶

Constant

Very close to the supposed links to growing automisation of the productive systems, *New Babylon* (1956–1974) has probably been the last great utopic

project up to this day. Spanning nearly thirty years, Constant was to produce texts, drawings and lithographs with which he was to develop a model of a planetary city based on the construction of modular structures, mobile and interconnected, with which he proposed to make possible a new model of ludic and creative life: “The reduction in the work necessary for production (resulting from extensive automation) will create a need for leisure, a diversity of behavior, and a change in the very nature of human behavior that will inevitably lead to a new conception of a collective habitat with a maximum of social space, in contrast to the garden city where social space is reduced to a minimum.”¹⁷

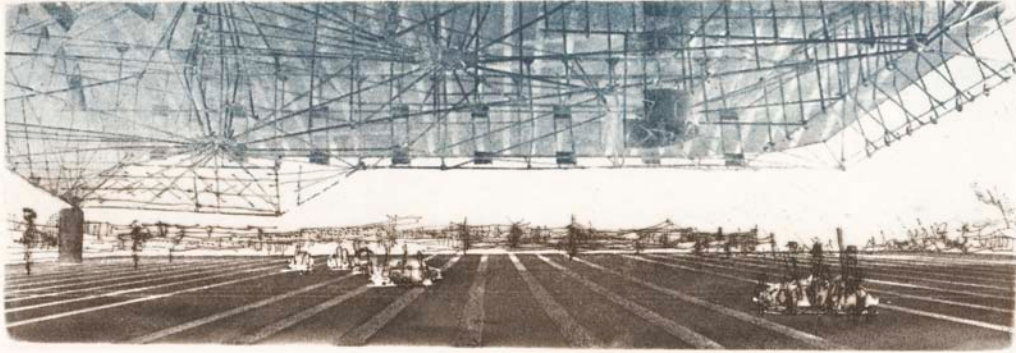
New Babylon came out of Constant’s experience living in a gypsy encampment in Alba, Italy, where he lived for a while at the invitation of the painter Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, and comes from the effort of theorising about a model town linked to the Situationist International and the theorist Guy Debord, not guided by the productive logic that would favour unique, communal and experimental situations. “In contrast to the garden city idea favored by most modern architects, we envisage covered cities in which the layout of roads and separate buildings will be replaced by a continuous spatial construction elevated above the ground, including clusters of dwellings as well as public spaces (permitting changes in use according to the needs of the moment). Since all traffic, in the functional sense of the term, will pass on the ground level below or on overhead terraces, streets can be eliminated. The multitude of different traversable spaces of which the city is composed will form a complex and vast social space. Far from a return to nature – from the notion of living in a park, as solitary aristocrats once did – we see in such immense constructions the possibility of overcoming nature and of regulating the climate, light and sounds in these different spaces in accordance with our desires.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Constant, “Another City for Another Life”, in *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006. Original text published in *Internationale Situationniste*, 3, 1959.

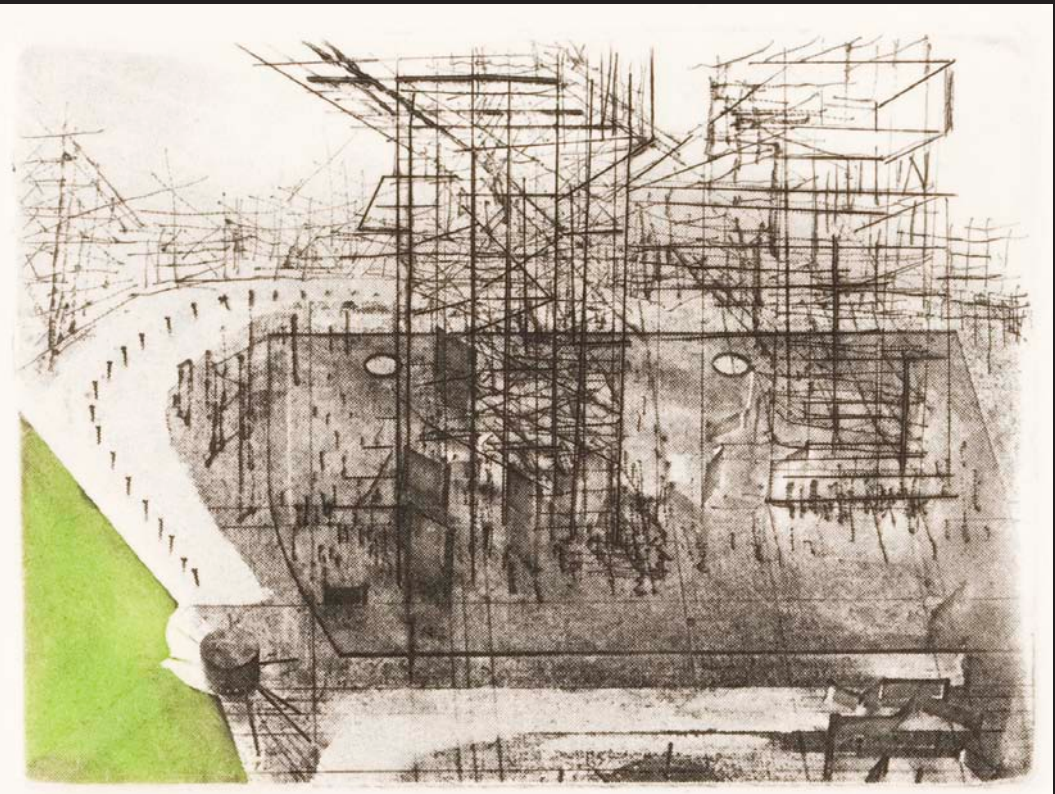
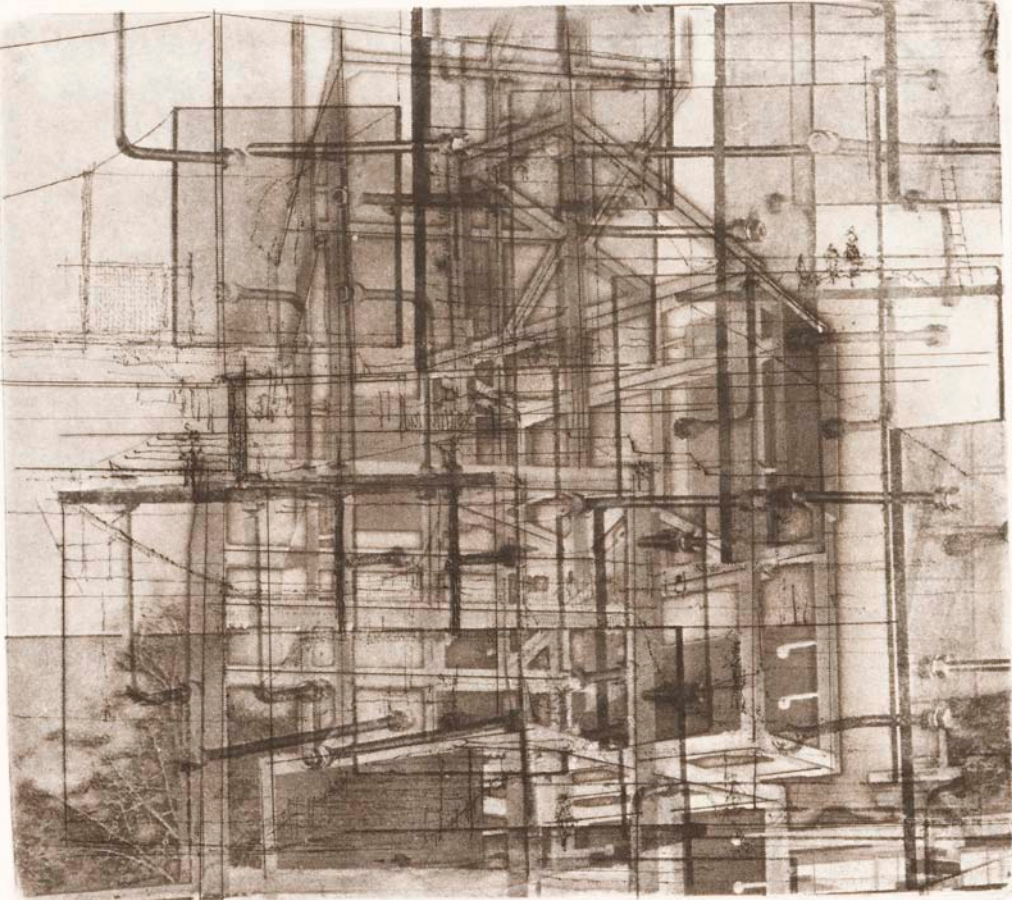
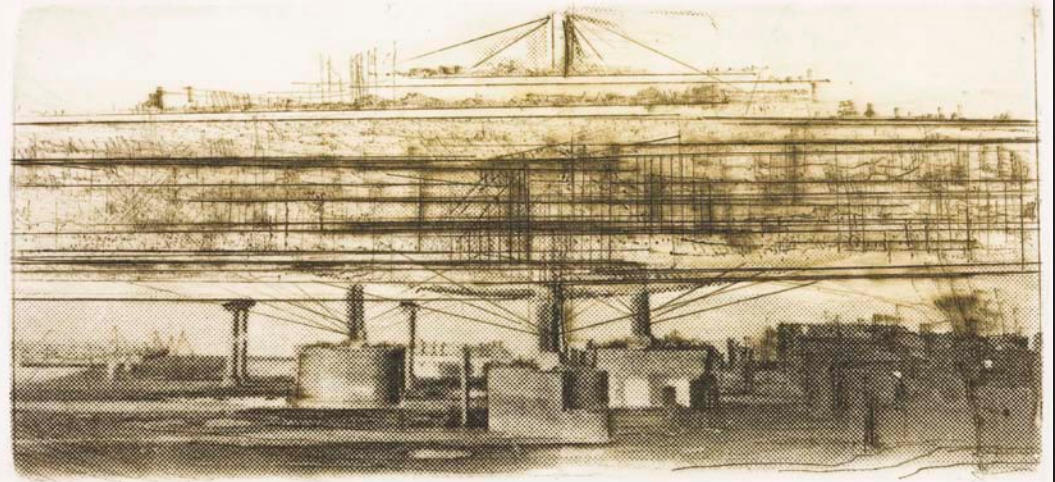
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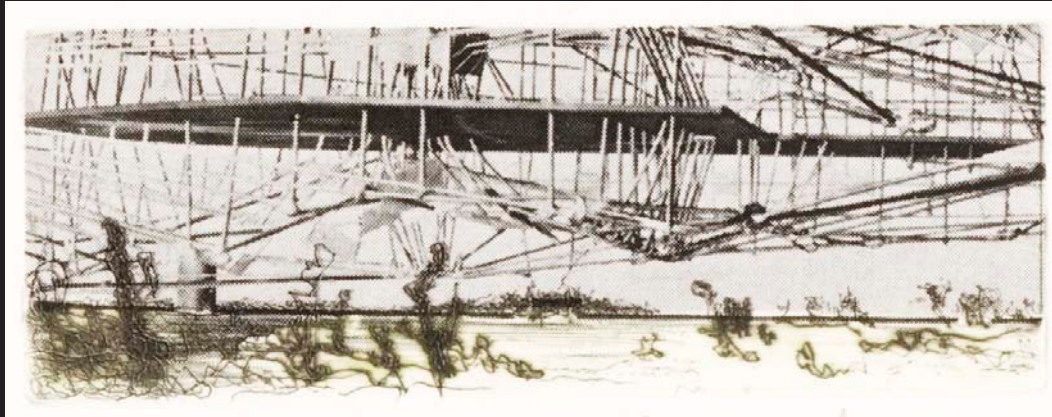
Constant, *Joyriding*, 1970
Constant, *Labyr*, 1970



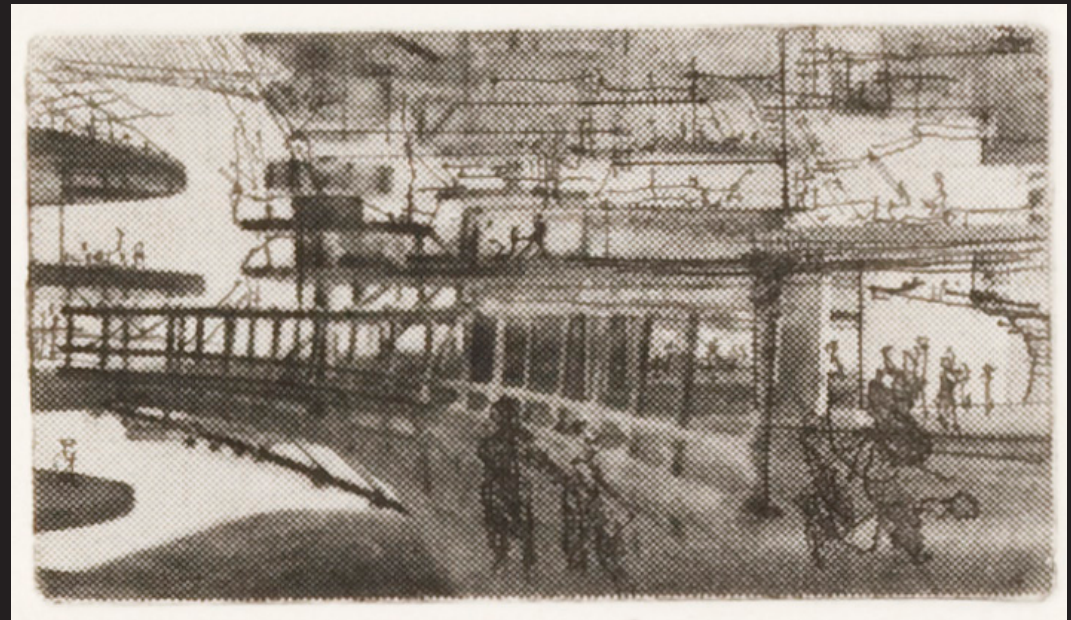
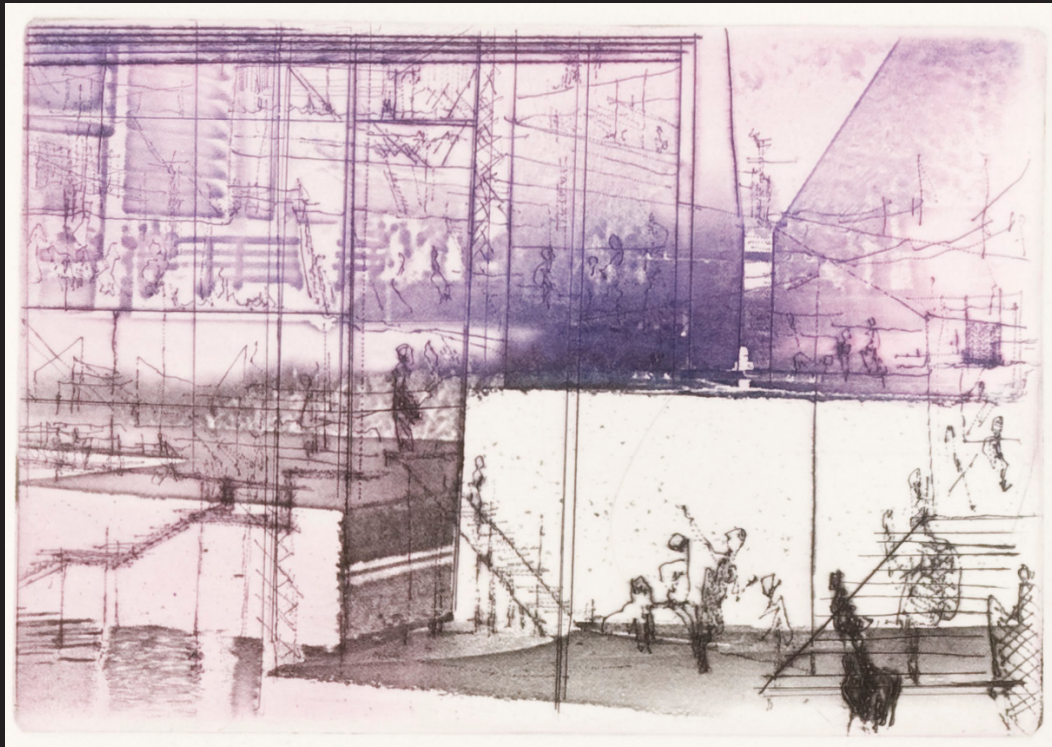
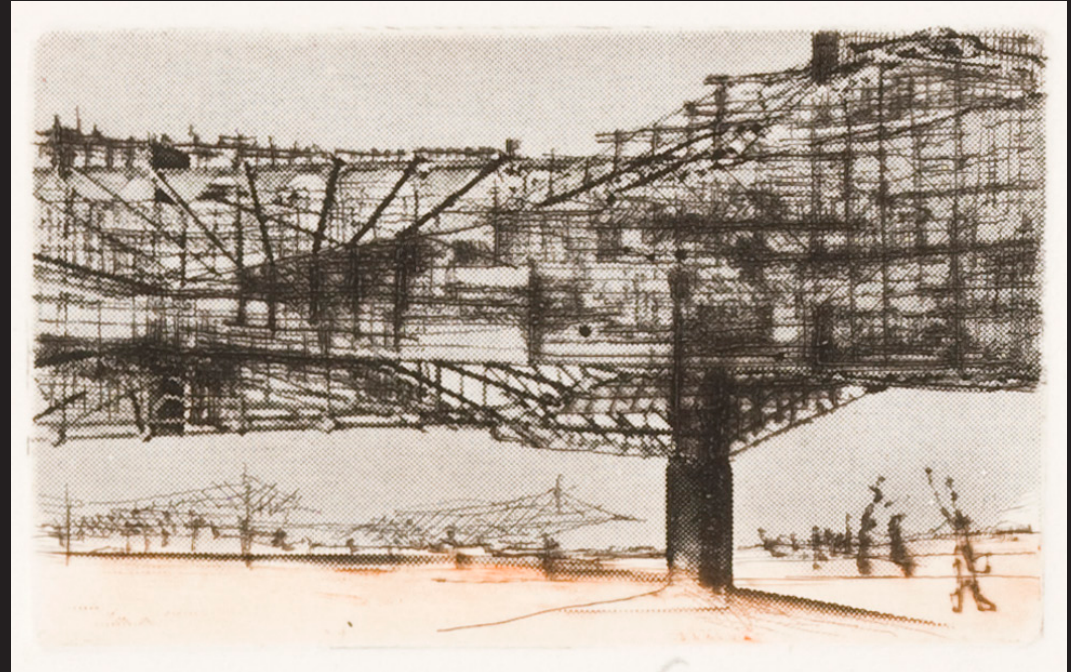
Constant, *Sector / secteurs*, 1970
Constant, *Tours*, 1970



Constant, Paysage avec secteurs, 1970
Constant, Intérieur, 1970



Constant, Détail d'un secteur, 1970
Constant, Intérieur d'un secteur 1 / New Babylon, 1970



In the lithographs on display in the exhibition the visitor can see some of the solutions designed by Constant and also detect the other great interest of the artist: breaking down the frontiers between different arts and creating spaces in which colour and form are combined (the so-called Spatial Colorism) so as to achieve a more intriguing and attractive architecture that stimulates creativity. In this work we can see the influence of another great architect of leisure, Aldo van Eyck, with whom he had collaborated in the past and who is known among other things for proposing a new kind of children's playground in the city of Amsterdam, becoming a model which would spread throughout Europe and which offers a humanistic alternative to functional modernism; he also formed part of the group Néovision, together with the artists Stephen Gilbert and Nicholas Schaffer with whom he developed the concept of construction and which can be seen in the work *Construction aux plans transparents* (1954), in the MACBA collection. Constant's project of social transformation of the city, far from remaining a purely artistic plan, provoked an intense debate in schools of architecture in the sixties, influencing among others the architect Yona Friedman and his project *Ville Spatiale* (1964).

Priscila Fernandes' piece *Gozolândia e outros futuros* [Cuckooland and Other Futures] reflects on the effects and consequences that industrial and post-industrial contexts provoke on peoples' lives and in the way they relate to the body. Through a personal viewpoint and an outsider's attitude, Fernandes' work proposes a political and social interpretation of modern art movements, often neutralised and relegated to a merely formal and stylised analysis. Her pieces are inspired by her understanding of work, free time, education, routine and other values linked to contemporary productivity. The theoretical sources the artist explores in her work are very similar to others in *Sooooo Lazy* (Lafargue, Malevich, among many others). The question Fernandes suggests and develops in the video shown here is the same one as Malevich deals with in his pronouncements: Why is idleness considered the mother of all vices when it is obvious that it is the objective that all human beings aspire to?

The film *Gozolândia e Outros Futuros* is the result of a commission for the 32nd Biennial of São Paulo. The title refers to Cocanha (in English translated as Land of Plenty), a famous medieval myth about an imaginary place where food abounded, the weather was always good and above all where it was not necessary to work. The idea put forward in this myth, common to many cultures and seen in the video showing in this room, is a representation in praise of idleness, of an earthly paradise. Furthermore the video weaves various narrative threads around play and leisure, and relates them with abstract art in an effort to place together the developments of this artistic movement and the different kinds of leisure. In the discussion concerning leisure as a political weapon and a creative process "Gozolândia raises pertinent questions about 21st century leisure options, including useful (working out), social (the role of the park in the city), contemplative, spiritual and regenerative activities. The history of modern art has many examples of this discussion, from the time of the industrial revolution and Neo-Impressionist painters, to the different schools of abstract art."¹⁹ The fundamental question sparked by this suggestion provides us with the opportunity to think how leisure and work dominate and shape the construction and perception of our society as well as the role played by the individual in society. Close to the video are some comfortable seats designed by the artist, completing the installation and providing a space for rest and relaxation as you pass by. A clear invitation to pause and quietly contemplate an audio-visual work that also contains many synaesthetic elements which the spectator can sit back and enjoy.

Xavier Ribas has always been especially interested by the notions of public space and daily life and his photographs track the life habits of the contemporary city. The photographic project *Domingos* [Sundays] (1994–1997) is one of his best known series and one in which he analyses family leisure time in the urban wastelands, industrial estates and vacant lots not

¹⁹ Marília Loureiro, *Priscila Fernandes*, <https://bit.ly/3o6HOFa> [Accessed 22/04/2020]





yet developed, all in Barcelona and its surroundings: picnics, games, relaxing, strolling, siestas or social gatherings.²⁰ The artist, influenced by the ideas of photographer Lewis Baltz, explores zones in the outskirts of the city that are not yet regulated or exploited by the tourist industry in which one can experience the absence of order and social rules. It is about spaces that have not been encrypted by the logic of maximum profit, that have become enclaves of social creativity.

Far from wanting to show us a hopeless image of a section of disaffected society, the artist perceives in them more freedom than in the cathedrals of more organised leisure. In Ribas' own words: "The question is: Why do people turn these residual spaces into the centre of their leisure activity? We live in the society of leisure. However, the leisure here is not that of idleness, but of activity, the so-called 'active leisure', which, according to the sector's industries, forms the ideal complement to work. [...] Consequently, we get the production of areas for organized leisure which resemble the areas organized for production [...] However, when I've visited such cathedrals of organized leisure as Isla Fantasia, Port Aventura or Montigalà, I've found more tranquillity in the adjacent patches of wasteland converted into improvised Sunday dining rooms than in the park interior itself. It strikes me that behind this improvisation there lies more design than accident. It is possible, then, that the interest in these spaces is due more to people coming to see the periphery as a place of freedom. Or put another way, that freedom can only arise in a residual space, and therefore presents us with an image of desolation."²¹

²⁰ See details of the work on the MACBA website: <https://bit.ly/30eQRK8>
[Accessed 22/04/2020]

²¹ <http://www.xavierribas.com/Contents/Barcelona/Barcelona.html>
[Accessed 22/04/2020]

With his ironically scathing illustration *Just Do Nothing*, **Samuel Labadie** subverts in a jocular way the famous slogan of a well-known sports brand. The artist questions leisure as consumption, as a productive activity disguised as "free time".

With his irreverent and sharp drawings, Labadie offers a critical look at our current iconosphere. A visual horizon that we have to endure through a constant barrage of images and texts in social media and all the screens we use as interfaces with the real world. His works are incomplete fragments, unfinished pieces of deficient meaning. Just as these fragments are inevitably separated from a complex whole, human beings also find themselves increasingly separated from the chance of stopping to participate in the hyper-connected world of social media and mass media. Separated from any possibility of giving up seeing and being seen, of contributing their opinion, experience, mood and sharing it with others, and consuming at the same time the lives of the so-called "friends" and followers on social media, a person of today loses the possibility of being invisible and of not seeing, of not participating in virtualised, productive leisure.

Hardly anything influences in a permanent way, it becomes impossible to separate what is important from the intranscendental; nothingness itself disguised as frenetic activity while hiding an endless void makes the wheel of cognitive capitalism go round, unable to stop. If the product is free the product is you. Labadie's work demonstrates the way social media function, designed to trap and gratify through a continuous feedback system, as simple as it is effective: short term, dopamine driven, feedback loops.

Crazy circulation that doesn't leave you time to think and that functions through continuous stimulation. There's no time for real laziness. Authentic squandering will be disconnected or will not be.

In the midst of this scenario, Labadie's work puts forth a ritual catharsis that gives us sufficient distance to see where the problem lies. Distancing

Xavier Ribas, *Sin título (Familia leyendo)*. Series *Domingos*, 1994–1997



Xavier Ribas, *Sin título (Mesa picnic)*. Series Domingos, 1994-1997



Xavier Ribas, *Sin título (Picnic solar industrial)*. Series Domingos, 1994-1997



ourselves from our habits and ever-reducing horizons is the first step towards becoming aware and perhaps moving forward. In dialogue with Constant's *New Babylon*, which outlined new cities and structures with hope for the future, Labadie's work conveys an unrest about the individual's future, subjected without resistance to the stimuli received from their smartphone, constantly on the lookout for the dictatorship of clickbait and of the "likes" received on social media, entertaining themselves by reading the misfortunes of someone commenting on Tripadvisor, with a porn video, innumerable ads or the photo of the dog belonging to the neighbour they don't talk to any more.

"Human life can not under any conditions be limited to closed systems assigned to it within reasonable conceptions. The immense travail of recklessness, discharge and upheaval that constitutes life, could be expressed by stating that life starts only with the deficit of these systems; at least what it allows in the way of order and reserve has meaning only from the moment when the ordered and reserved forces liberate and lose themselves for ends that cannot be subordinated to anything that one can account for."

Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*

The exhibition *Sooooo Lazy. In Praise of Squandering* aware of being a contradiction in itself and of taking part in one of the prevailing formats of consumer leisure, longs to stop itself and dissolve, contemplating the vacuum that hides endless fundamental facets for human beings.

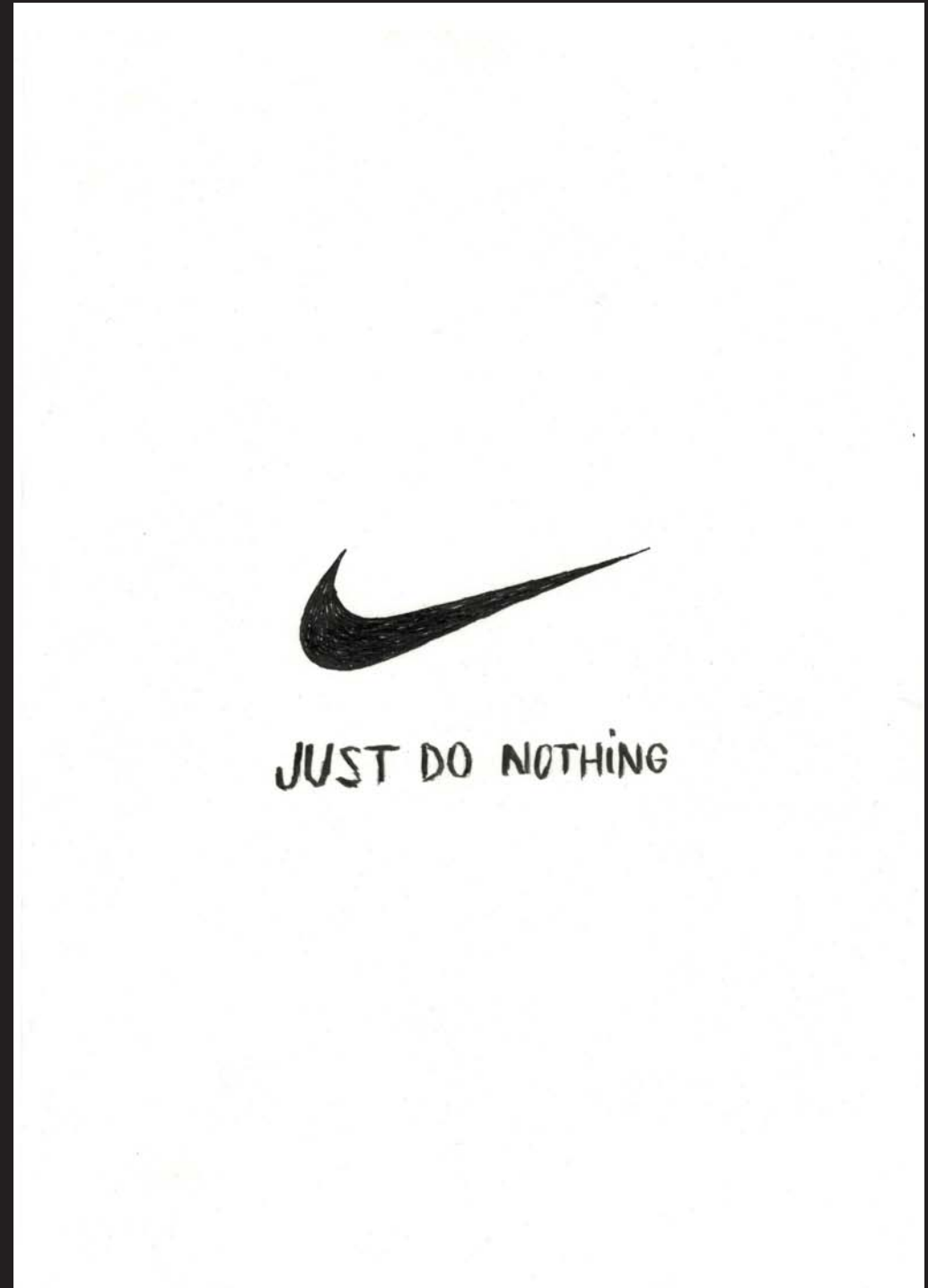
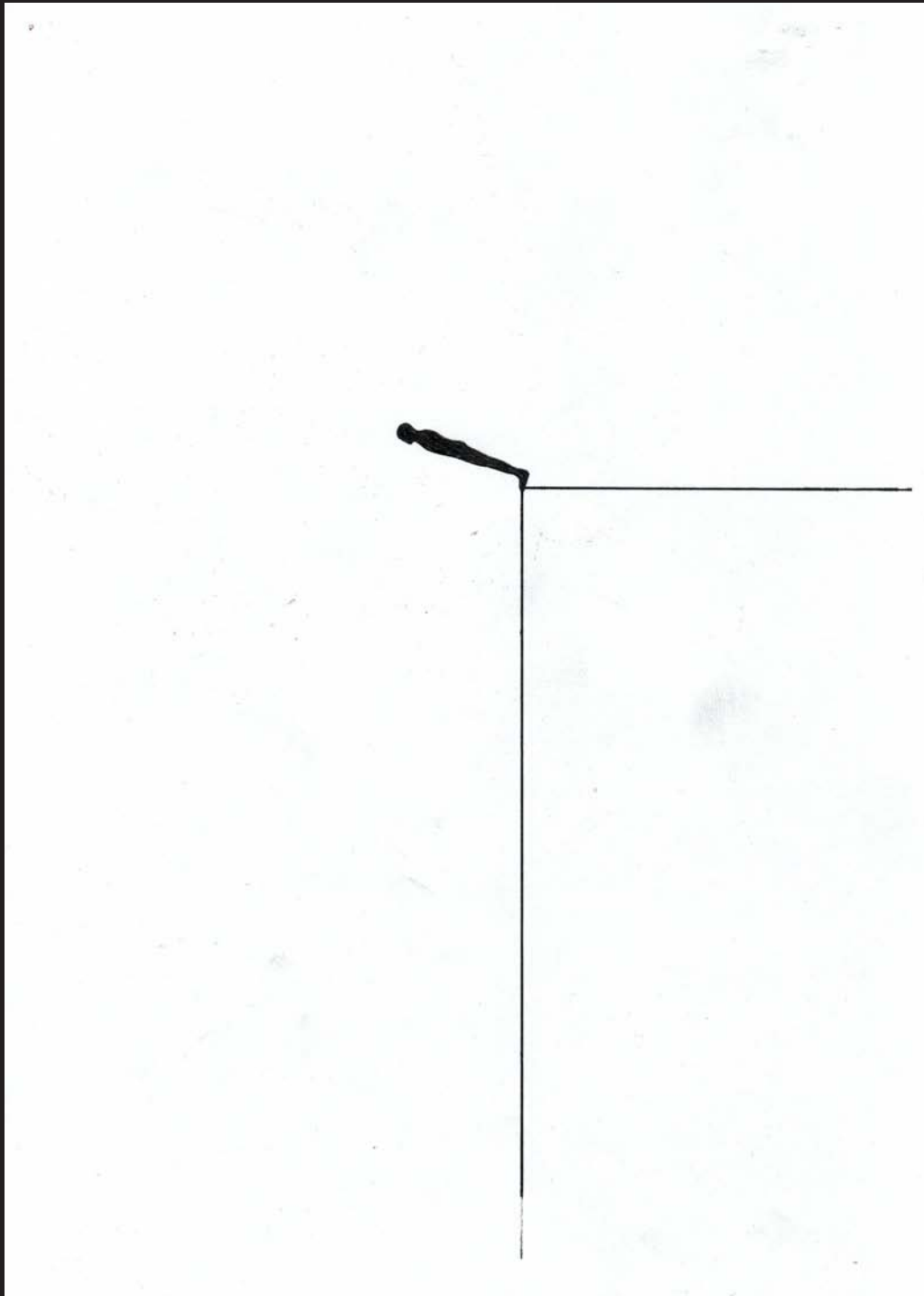
Mladen Stilinović, whose projects and writings are a fundamental reference for *Sooooo Lazy*, shows, in one of his most famous pieces, the artist at work, sleeping, stretched out on a bed. "As soon as you close your eyes, the

adventure of sleep begins."²² And that is how Georges Perec's story, *A Man Asleep*, begins, providing a good introduction to **Camila Cañeque's** work, discreetly installed in a small area of floor space in the exhibition room. Her contribution is almost hidden, willingly marginalised, because laziness, despite the intention of this exhibition project, continues to be seen as a terrible vice. Two closed eyes are laid out on the floor in a static, humble way. Eyes that don't see and don't move, as if they were refusing to take part in such institutionalised leisure as this exhibition. Both the work and its title refer to a voluntary escape, determinedly self-exiling from productivity and spectacle.

Close to the wall label of the work, a QR code takes us out of the exhibition room. A video transports us to a shore, nearby, deserted and attractive; and beyond the shore a wide-open sea, bathed in a gentle, calming light. A locked-off shot on a loop: an endless escape. Inner thinking requires space and breadth to bud... It's the right setting for giving in to laziness and contemplation. Such kinds of inactivity demand attitude. There is no chance, for example, of killing time considering the waves, as Mr Palomar would. The main character in Calvino's eponymous book has an objective that is a far cry from laziness and true *otium*. As the author sees it: "Mr Palomar is standing on the shore, looking at a wave. Not that he is lost in contemplation of the waves. He is not lost, because he is quite aware of what he is doing: he wants to look at a wave and he is looking at it. He is not contemplating, because for contemplation you need the right temperament, the right mood, and the right combination of exterior circumstances; and though Mr Palomar has nothing against contemplation in principle, none of these three conditions applies to him. Finally, it is not 'the waves' that he means to look at, but just one individual wave: in his desire to avoid vague sensations, he establishes for his every action a limited and precise object."²³ Cañeque's

²² Georges Perec, *A Man Asleep*, translated by Andrew Leak, David R. Godine Publisher, Boston, 1990.

²³ Italo Calvino, *Mr Palomar*, 1985, translated by William Weaver, Vintage Classics, 1994.

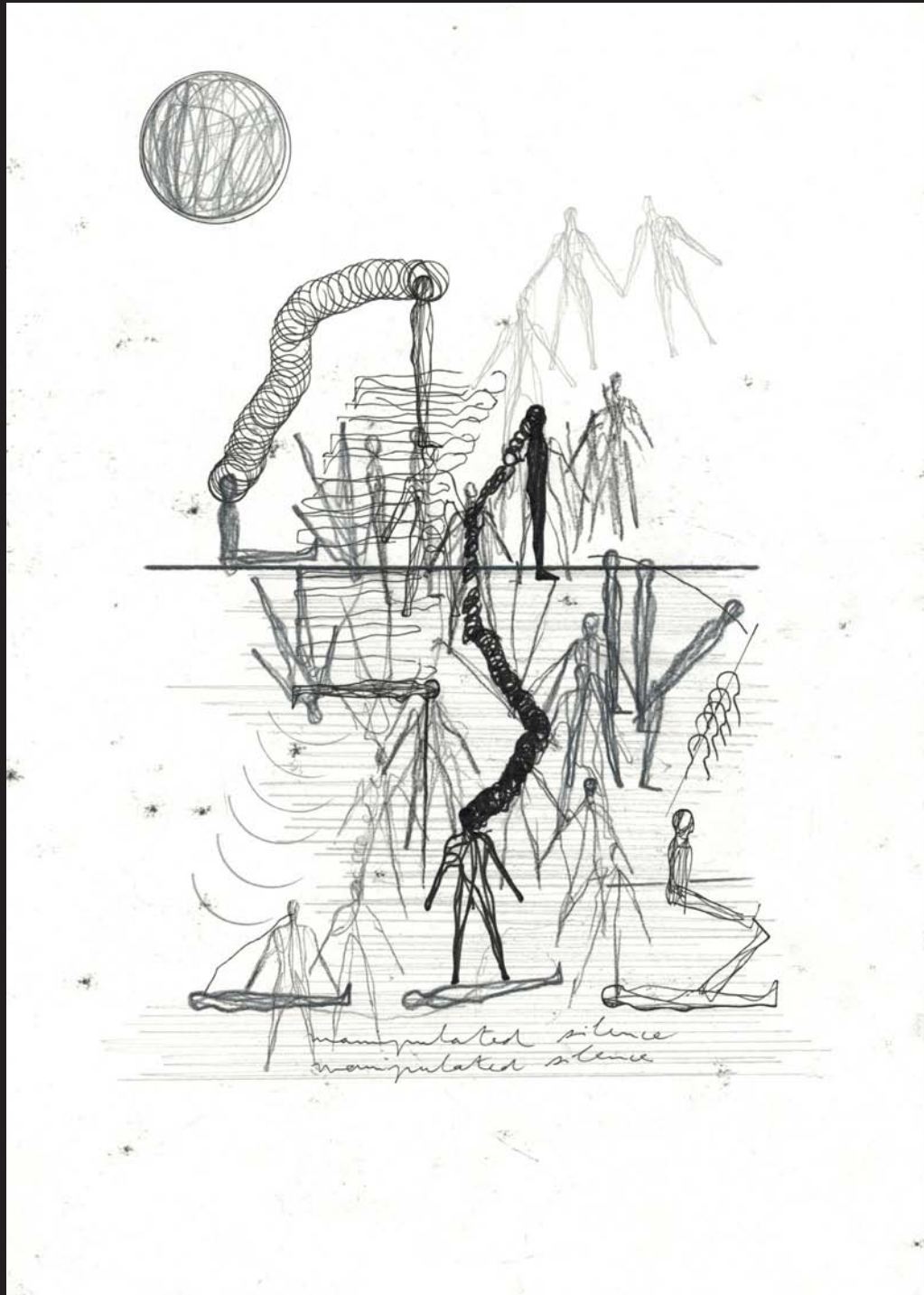


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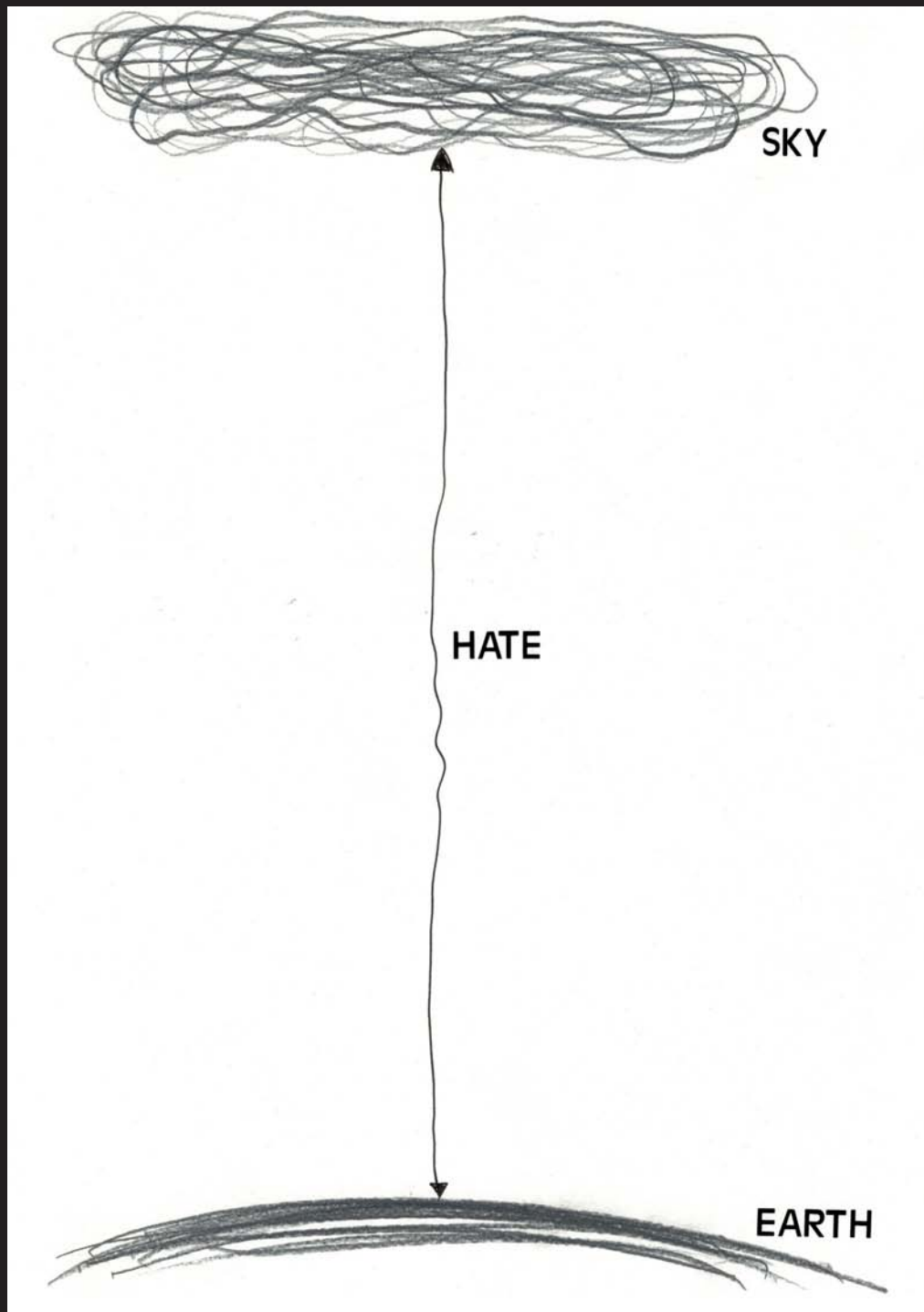


FROM NOTHING TO NOTHING

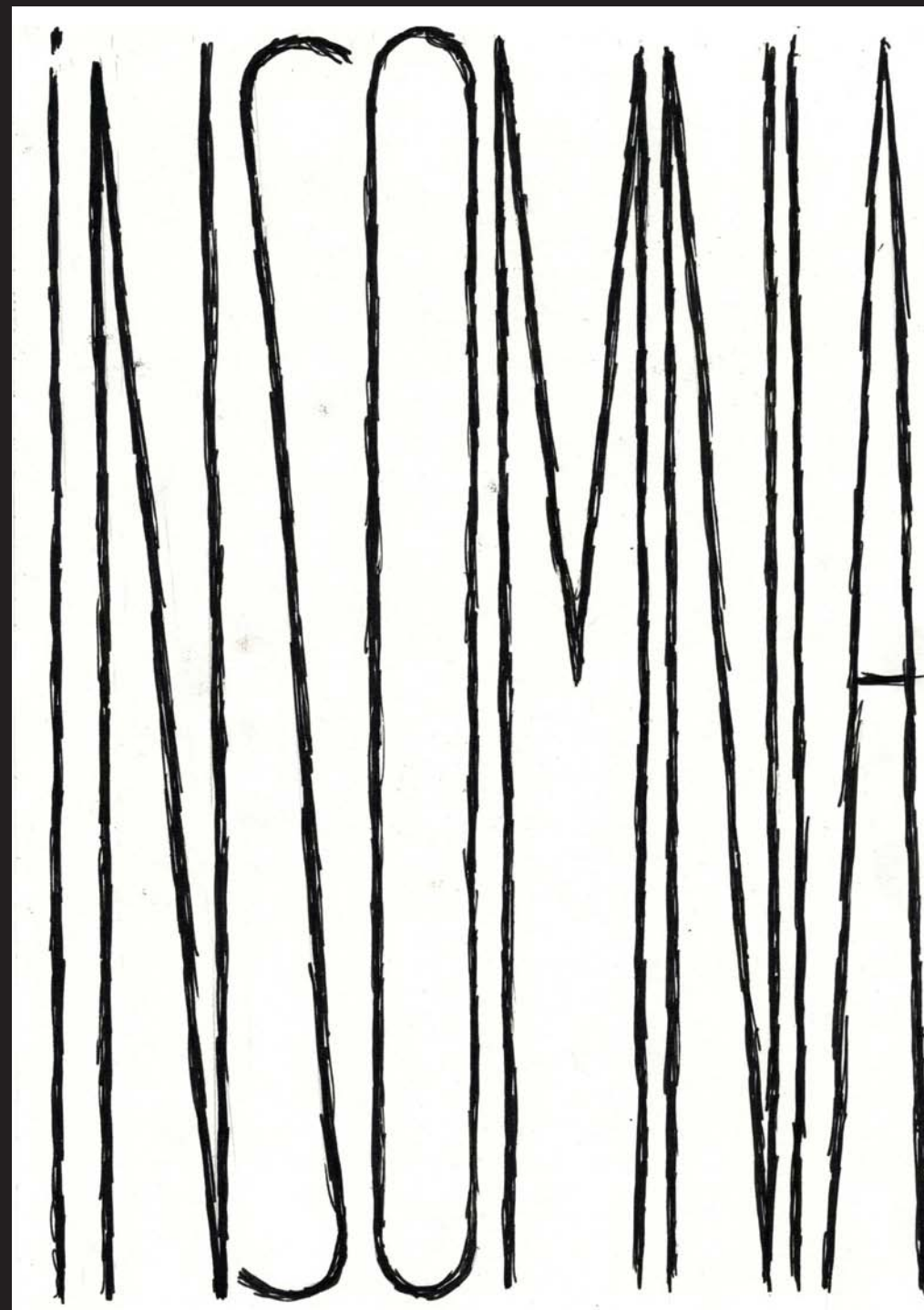
COOOOOOL



Samuel Labadie, *Hate*, 2019



Samuel Labadie, *Insomnia*, 2020



proposal puts forward the exact opposite of what Mr Palomar is seeking. Her work suggests rejecting seeing or contemplating so as to go towards an inner, intimate, vague horizon, let's say unlimited... pure contemplation in search of an inner balance, a kind of *mystic laziness*.

This work is a precise counterpoint to leaving a cigarette butt on a pedestal, to a chair waiting for someone to sit on it for ever or to paint left to dry in pots. The remains of someone going by who is resisting the frenetic activity of the society of tiredness. A visit to this exhibition may be that "right combination of exterior circumstances" that allows us to get closer both physically and mentally to contemplation. The lights fade and we move towards the conclusion of this tribute to waste and justification of laziness.

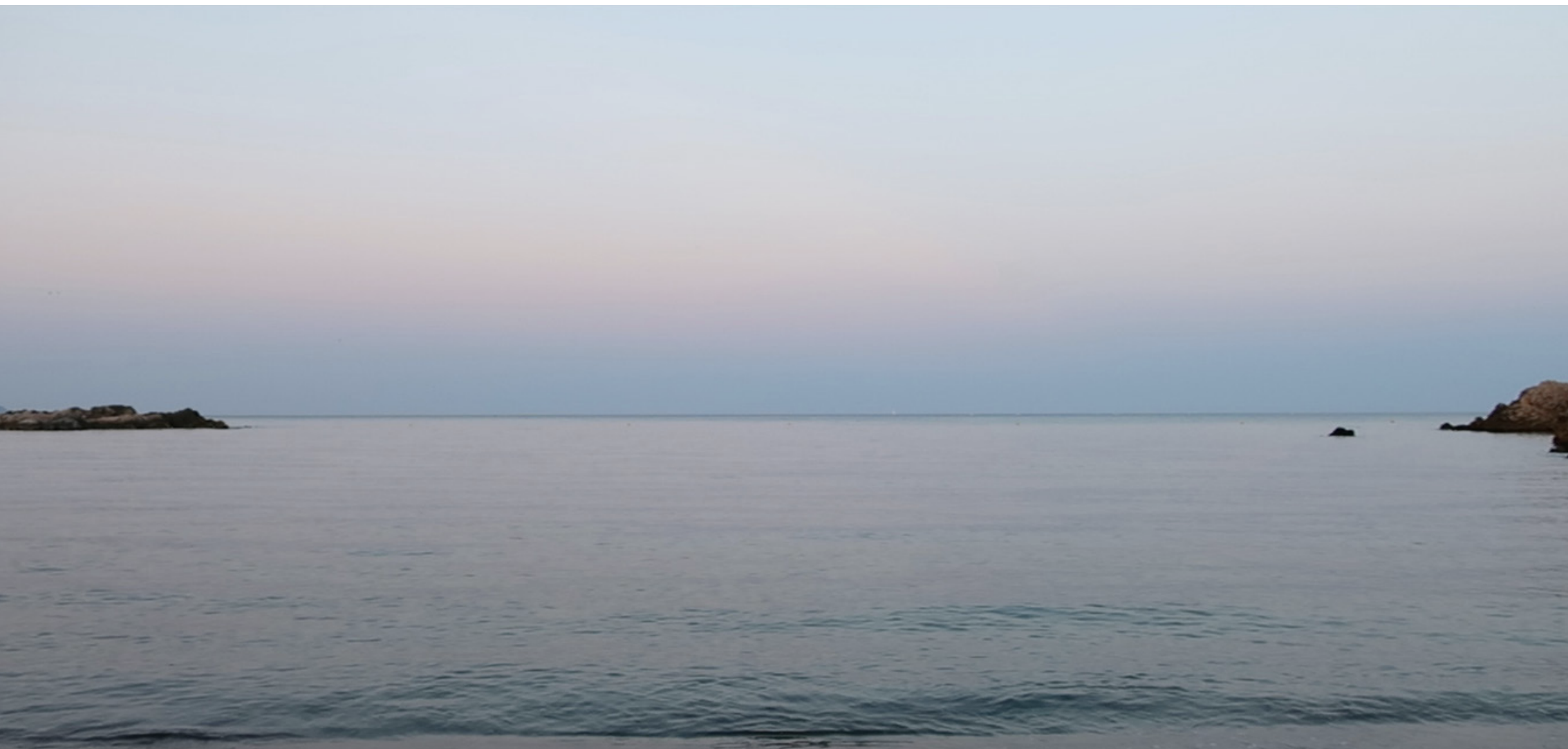
In the final part of this visit, we come across two very large, almost monochrome, canvases by **Agnes Martin**, *Untitled No. 5* and *Untitled No. 7*, isolated in a room of their own that feels like a small chapel. An ideal space for meditating and pondering on other possible outcomes for a life that is well worth living.

In 1971 the artist wrote that looking at art is "a simple direct going into a field of vision as you would cross an empty beach to look at the ocean."²⁴ According to Martin the vision is therefore a way through to a wider dimension. Her work has been described by Briony Fer as "a surface that invites a contemplative gaze, bolting the viewer to it, as if the work of the work were to open on to an immaterial and meditative space."²⁵ Martin's square canvases invite spectators to let go of their daily grind; they call out for disinterested attention and need tranquillity and, above all, plenty of

²⁴ Agnes Martin quoted in *The Infinite Line*, Briony Fer, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004, p. 57.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 47.





time to observe. It is impossible to pick out what's almost imperceptible with a quick glance. These need dedication so as to discern the tiny variations in light and other details. In the same way, the lack of peacefulness and time to think in our daily life makes it complicated to understand the subtleties, differences and needs in our relationships with others. Speeding up makes us become indecipherable, without time to devote ourselves to even sharing disinterestedly.

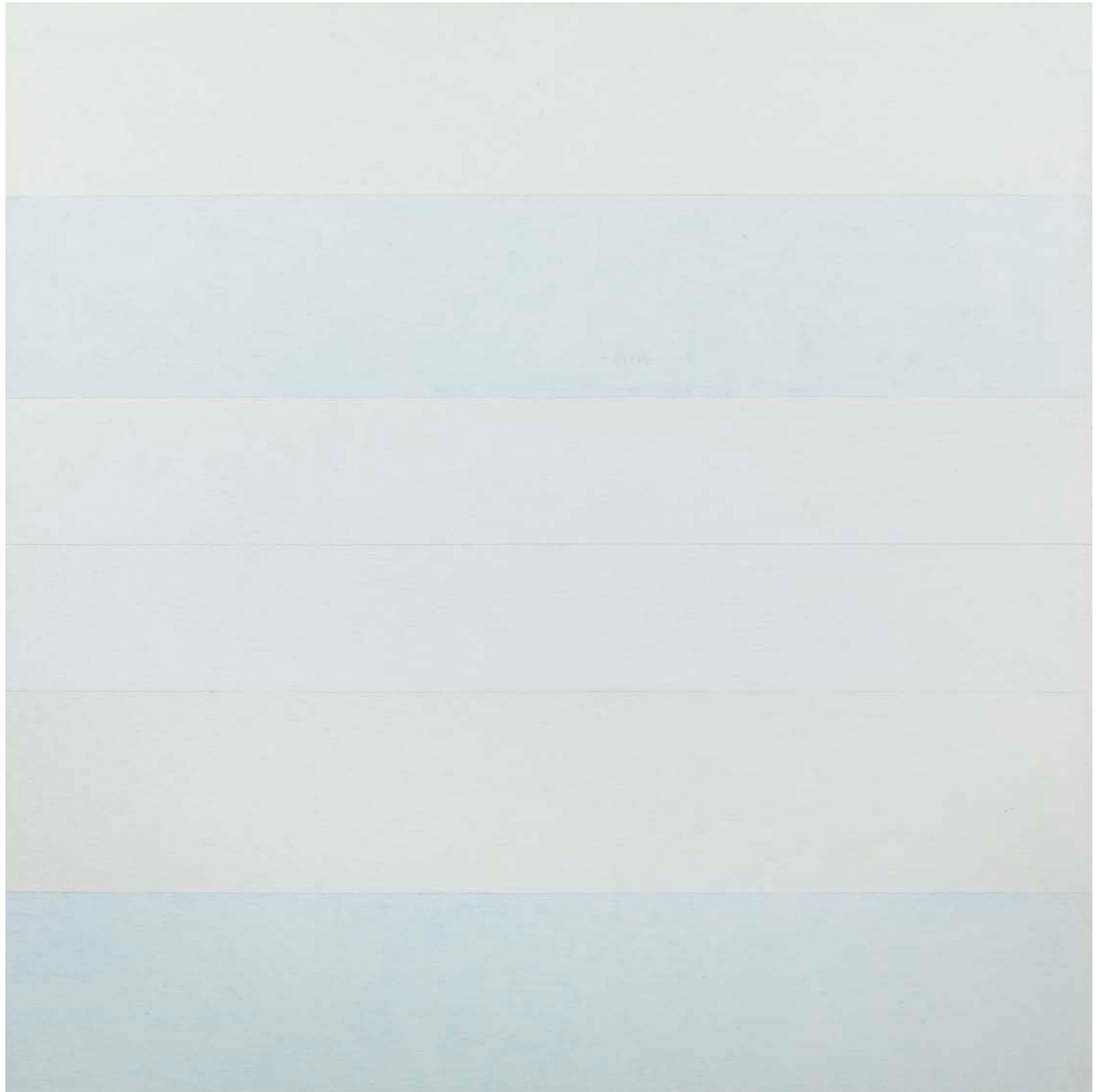
Some believe that in the absence of any productive activity they can find perfection of the human being reaching pure contemplation and abandoning their role as *animal laborans*. Time for thinking and contemplation, the privilege of very few now, is put forward here as a possible way of reclaiming, demanding even, a world finally liberated from work. Could laziness (there's no art without laziness!) be a way to escape from the incessant logic of productive and consumerist life? Wasting time might make us able to open a gap so as to consider alternatives to the one dominant ideology, that which condemns us to work (even when there won't be any work...).

These objectives, transcendental and at the same time highly practical, can be found both in the short text by Malévich which we mentioned at the beginning, and in Agnes Martin's two canvases that close the exhibition. These two pieces exemplify the progressive and radical abandonment of any representational element, at once mundane and useless. And yet these paintings, like all the works in the exhibition "Sooooo Lazy", are pure immanence. There is no possibility of waiting for some revelation, but instead it is time for radical doubt and to demand other urgent proposals on questions such as whether to go on producing by piecework is the best way to reach well-being for all, or, returning to pre-COVID-19 normality is the only solution for a better world?

Contemplation reigns on the last wall of this exhibition. In a very clear way it takes us in the right direction: laziness and squandering as ways of resistance and opposing endless productivity that uses limited resources. The dissipation of all that is left over and the wasting of time through

laziness finally rescued from social anathema become thereby the effective truth of the human being. The real truth that is well worth while searching for actively.

Agnes Martin, *Untitled No. 5*, 1997



Agnes Martin, *Untitled No. 7*, 1997



LIST OF WORKS

SO L Y
 LAZY
 S LAZ
 O L ZY
 SO LAZY
 SO A IN PRAISE OF
 S A Y SQUANDERING
 O LAZY
 SO LA
 SO A Y
 O LAZ
 SO LAZ
 S L Y

LIST OF WORKS

95

Francesc Abad

Nòmines. El meu espai productiu / econòmic
 [Payslips. My Productive / Economic Space]
 1973–2009
 Inkjet print on paper
 300 x 1,000 cm
 MACBA Collection
 MACBA Foundation

Ignasi Aballí

Malgastar
 [To Waste]
 2001
 20 dried white paint cans
 Variable dimensions
 Cal Cego. Contemporary Art Collection

Agustín Parejo School

Por favor estamos parados
 [Please, We're Stopped]
 1987
 Stencil
 40 x 60 cm
 Adaptation of an original edition in postcard format
 Courtesy of the artists

Misha Bies Golas

Untitled
 2012
 Pedestal and cigarette
 Diverse materials
 Courtesy of the artist

Camila Cañeque

La huida inmóvil. La huida
 [The immobile escape. The escape]
 2020
 Eyelashes: hair and latex (strip)
 Length of eyelashes: 1.4 cm; length of strip: 3 cm; thickness of hair: 0.05 mm
 Video on a continuous loop, hosted on web and only accessible through the QR code
 15 min
 Courtesy of the artist

Constant

Détail d'un secteur
 [Detail of a Sector]
 1970
 Etching and drypoint on paper
 56.3 x 38.2 cm
 MACBA Collection
 MACBA Foundation
 Fundación Repsol Collection

Joyriding

1970
 Etching and drypoint on paper
 23.6 x 26.3 cm
 MACBA Collection
 MACBA Foundation
 Fundación Repsol Collection

Paysage avec secteurs

[Landscape with Sectors]
 1970
 Etching and drypoint on paper
 56.3 x 38 cm
 MACBA Collection
 MACBA Foundation
 Fundación Repsol Collection

Sector / secteurs

[Sector / Sectors]

1970

Etching and drypoint on paper

23.6 x 26.2 cm

MACBA Collection

MACBA Foundation

Fundación Repsol Collection

Intérieur d'un secteur 1 /**New Babylon**

[Interior of a Sector 1 /

New Babylon]

1970

Etching and drypoint on paper

52.5 x 38.5 cm

MACBA Collection

MACBA Foundation

Fundación Repsol Collection

Tours

1970

Etching and drypoint on paper

23.7 x 26.1 cm

MACBA Collection

MACBA Foundation

Fundación Repsol Collection

Labyr

1970

Etching and drypoint on paper

23.5 x 26.3 cm

MACBA Collection

MACBA Foundation

Fundación Repsol Collection

Intérieur

[Interior]

1970

Etching and drypoint on paper

56.4 x 38.3 cm

MACBA Collection

MACBA Foundation

Fundación Repsol Collection

Priscila Fernandes**Gozolândia e Outros Futuros**

[Cuckooland and Other Futures]

2016

Installation

Variable dimensions

Gozolândia

[Cuckooland]

Video in full HD, colour and sound

17 min 35 s

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist

Ergonomia do abstracionismo

[Ergonomics of Abstractionism]

Teak wood and print on fabric

120 x 100 x 70 cm

Fundação de Serralves Collection

– Museu de Arte Contemporânea,

Porto, Portugal. Acquisition 2018

Esther Ferrer**Silla Zaj**

[Zaj Chair]

1974

Wood and paper

79 x 34 x 45 cm

MACBA Collection

MACBA Foundation

Ângela Ferreira**Fábrica colapsável**

[Collapsible Factory]

2012

2 mobile sculptures, 28 slides
(sector J, Factory ASA), wood and
other materials

Variable dimensions

"la Caixa" Contemporary

Art Collection

Alberto Gil Casedas**147710 [Blank Sundays]. Prueba
de Leucofobia: 40 h en blanco**

[147.710 (Blank Sundays).

Leukophobia Test: 40 h in White]

2016

Paper, glass pots and magnets

180 x 700 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Samuel Labadie**Sick**

2019

Graphite and ink on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Hate

2019

Graphite, ink and Letraset
on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Fall

2019

Ink on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Cats Look Like Cats

2019

Marker on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Smoke

2019

Pencil, marker and acrylic paint
on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Insomnia

2019

Ink on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Cooooool

2019

Ink on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

From Nothing to Nothing

2019

Paint marker on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Paradise

2018

Paint marker on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Human

2018

Ink, pencil and Letraset on paper

29.7 x 21 cm

Dark and Depressing Room

2018
Graphite and ink on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Human 02

2018
Ink and pencil on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Nightmare

2018
Ink on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Eye to Mouth

2019
Acrylic paint and ink on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Human 03

2018
Ink and pencil on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

2018
Ink on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Just Do Nothing

2020
Ink on paper
49 x 29.7 cm

Brain

2018
Ink, pencil and Letraset on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

**There Was No Wifi,
I Will Never Come Back**

2019
Acrylic paint, pencil
and ink on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Lost in Alibaba.com

2017
Letraset on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Untitled

2019
Ink on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Puti Club

2018
Ink and pencil on paper
29.7 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Sharon Lockhart

**Lunch Break Installation,
Duane Hanson: Sculptures of Life,
14 December 2002 – 23 February
2003, Scottish National Gallery
of Modern Art**

2003
C-print
4 units; 189.2 x 307.3 cm each
"la Caixa" Contemporary
Art Collection

Agnes Martin**Untitled No. 5**

1997
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
152.4 x 152.4 cm
"la Caixa" Contemporary
Art Collection

Untitled No. 7

1997
Acrylic and graphite on canvas
152.4 x 152.4 cm
"la Caixa" Contemporary
Art Collection

Aernout Mik**Pulverous**

2003
Overhead projection in 3 DVD
Colour, silent
23 min 26 s in loop
3 180 x 700 cm screens
"la Caixa" Contemporary
Art Collection

Xavier Ribas**Sin título (Familia leyendo)**

[Untitled (Family Reading)]
Series *Domingos* [Sundays]
1994–1997
C-print
120 x 140 cm
MACBA Collection
Consortium MACBA

Sin título (Mesa pícnic)

[Untitled (Picnic Table)]
Series *Domingos* [Sundays]
1994–1997
C-print
120 x 140 cm
MACBA Collection
Consortium MACBA

Sin título (Pícnic solar industrial)

[Untitled (Picnic on Industrial
Land)]
Series *Domingos* [Sundays]
1994–1997
C-print
120 x 140 cm
MACBA Collection
Consortium MACBA

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SO LAZY
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SO LA SQUANDERING
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BIOGRAPHIES

BIOGRAPHIES

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Beatriz Escudero Beatriz Escudero has a degree in History of Art from the University of Barcelona, a diploma in Cultural Management and a Master's degree in Direction and Design of Exhibition Space from the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, and Independent Studies Programme Master's degree in Advanced Museum Studies, Theory and Art Criticism from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). She has curated exhibitions at the Bienal de Cuenca (2019), Trastero 109 (2019), the Addaya Centre d'Art Contemporani (2017), Sant Andreu Contemporani (2016), La Casa Encendida (2015) and Fundació Antoni Tàpies – Sala d'Art Jove of the Generalitat de Catalunya (2013). She is also the co-founder of www.site-specificconversation.com, an online project that holds conversations with artists in their workplace.

Francesco Giaveri trained in Conservation of Cultural Heritage at Venice's Università Ca' Foscari and in History of Art at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, where he obtained the DEA in Contemporary Art. He has been a lecturer at the Universidad Antonio de Nebrija (2016–2018), director of the gallery L21 Madrid (2013–2016) and, since 2016, gallery manager of ADN. He has curated exhibitions in Piramidón (2020), Centro de Arte Alcobendas (2018), Baril (2017), ADN Platform (2019 and 2017), Salón (2016–17), Sala de Arte Joven of the Madrid Regional Government (2014), Espacio Trapezio (2013), Espacio F (2012) and Galería Marta Cervera (2011).

Francesco and Beatriz have worked together since 2017, organising exhibitions in Madrid's Institut Français (2020), Barcelona's Museu del Disseny (2019), the Galleria Macca (2018) and the Galería José de la Fuente (2018). They regularly contribute to various forms of media, writing about exhibitions and the history of galleries.

