



pertaining to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous
_____ March 30 - April 16, 2011

Participating Artists

Étienne Chabaud, Irene Kopelman, David Levine, David Maroto,
Mladen Stilinović, Magnus Thierfelder and Carey Young
organized by Sarah Demeuse

Opening Reception

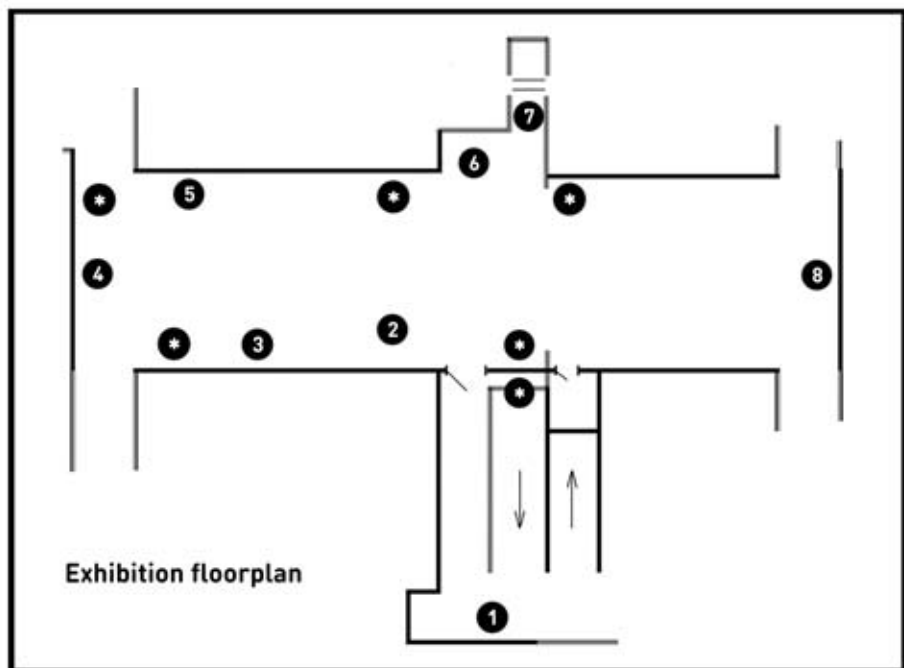
Wednesday, March 30, 6 - 8pm
Performance at 7pm

Gallery Hours

Wednesday - Saturday, 12 - 6pm

Panel Discussion

Tuesday, April 19 at 6.30pm
Sarah Demeuse and David Levine in conversation moderated by Kari Conte



- 1** Étienne Chabaud
Disclaimer 2 (2010)
Empty neon
Courtesy of the artist
- 2** David Maroto
Reviewed CV
[work in progress, last update 2010]
Laserprint, folder, marker, CD
Courtesy of the artist
- Reviewed CV* (2010-11)
Performance at ISCP
March 30, 2011 at 7pm
interpreted by Trong Gia Nguyen
- 3** David Levine
Actors at Work (2007)
C-prints (production stills, contract,
budget)
3 parts from a series of 8
Courtesy of the artist
- 4** Irene Kopelman
*Documenting Three Interventions in
a Space* (2003)
Published by Rijksacademie voor
Beeldende Kunsten
Edition of 500
- 5** Mladen Stilinović
Artist at work (1978)
Eight photographs
8^{3/4} x 11^{3/4} in. each
Courtesy of the artist
- 6** Magnus Thierfelder
A tension (2006-2011)
Cable, electrical outlets
Courtesy of the artist and ELASTIC Gallery
- 7** Carey Young
Optimum Performance (2003)
Documentation of video performance
at the Whitechapel Gallery
Color, sound, 14:35 min.
Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery
- 8** David Levine
Present/Not Present (2006-2009)
2 channel video, color, 5 min.
1 actor, acting; 1 non-actor, not acting
Courtesy of the artist
- * Punctuated throughout the gallery six
photos selected from ISCP's archive.
- An ELLE magazine (June 1998, German
edition), available upon request in the first
floor project space.

pertaining to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous brings together eight works of art, each of which foregrounds particular considerations about the artist at work. The exhibition mixes self-awareness with more allegorical and poetic approaches. Set in between the studios at ISCP, *pertaining to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous* seeks to bring an issue pertinent to artistic practice – that of the artist as potential model worker – into the gallery space. What follows are a few illustrative quotations and considerations prompted by the works in the exhibition to outline the horizon of expectations of those seeing and discussing the contemporary artist at work.

[Lucy Le Feuvre in ELLE Germany, June 1998]

A woman, crouched on a concrete floor, her red pants nearly fully speckled with white paint, a white shirt that serves as apron. She holds a piece of curved wood – possibly an enlarged bow. The caption tells you she is hard at work. The space around her consists of simple white-primed walls, high ceilings, concrete floor. Clearly, you are in what used to be an industrial space, re-purposed to be inhabited by an artist. There are sufficient traces of early industrial production to imbue the space with an odor of abstract labor. You fall for the rawness of the architecture. The floor around her features additional stains (did she make them or do they signal the activity of previous wage laborers?) as well as materials reminiscent of real-world production – a pot of gesso, a screwdriver, a cinderblock. The soft light on her face, the clean hands and a restrained smile, though, turn this hardworking woman into one of the many posing women in art, or, better even, into one of the many artists modeling as artist.

The studio is most continually interesting for the way in which it embodies two things: the relation between production of art and other kinds of production in a society at a given moment, and the relation between work and life. [Katy Siegel, "Live/Work" in *The Studio Reader*, Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (eds), U Chicago P, 2010, p. 311]

[David Levine, *Present/Not Present*, 2004-2009 and *Actors at Work*, 2007]

David Levine sits on a chair. In the frame next to him sits another guy. On a chair. One works, the other doesn't. One is a paid actor, the other simply idles in front of the camera. Together they prompt a few self-reflexive questions: What does an actor do when working? Where does the minimal difference between sitting on a chair and acting this sitting on a chair reside? What does one expect from a hardworking actor, or from a "good performance"? Set in a larger art context, you may add: What does one want to see when a contemporary artist is at work? What or who, besides the professional visitor and conversation, legitimates their being-at-work – dirty overalls, after all, hardly tell the story of today's art practitioner?

And then there are other actors sitting – one on a bench, another one on an office chair. They, together with the pilates teacher, are all at their day jobs. Their creative acting time tends to be before 9am or after 5pm. Yet, what happens when they enter this day-job workspace as professional actor, equipped with a legitimate Actors' Equity contract? Will their performance change? How will the actor fare at word-processing in comparison to the professional word-processor? Besides the bureaucratic terms and paperwork, does it make a difference that one now performs as word-processor? And could this conceit shift something in the way we understand performance in the workplace at large?

[Irene Kopelman on, Documenting *Three Interventions in a Space*, 2003]_____

If an actor somehow needs an implied viewer to be officially at work, the artist as worker rarely works in front of an audience. Cliché has it that creation happens elsewhere, behind closed studio doors. Only a privileged art-world insider [see ISCP photos hung throughout the gallery] can peek into this space. It is typically seen as the environment for outbursts of energy, irregular hours, for under- or over-production, but rarely for streamlined efficiency.

Bring a scientist into the studio and have him photographically register the stains, cracks and minute irregularities in the entire space, and have him map these out. Proceed to duplicate this register through rigorous concentration and observation. The result of such collaboration and intervention may be near to invisible, the process that brought about these minimal products, however, is synonymous to planned method, self-discipline and the outcome of sticking to a predetermined game-plan [possibly even to a time-schedule].

There is something to be said about the artistic endeavor and the expenditure of energy, consider Francis Alÿs's *maximum effort minimal result* approach – in 2002, he had a large group of volunteers, all with shovel in hand, move a mountain by a near-to-invisible distance [*When Faith Moves Mountains*].

_____ **[Magnus Thierfelder, *A tension*, 2011]**

An artist stands for potential energy and carries this potentiality, epitomized in a MacbookPro, everywhere with him/her. If the Fordist assembly-line model assimilates a 9-to-5 kinetic dynamic, it is also the foil against which the contemporary immaterial worker defines him/herself. The creative class, in other words, thrives on spurs of electrified intensity. Its seeming non-product-oriented activity could in fact be foreboding of, or part and parcel of, a contemporary economic model.

"... on the one side we find the description of work, at least in the conventional sense; on the other side, that of leisure ... But the phenomenon we are interested in here is this: a society in which intention and focus are on top and intensity and wastefulness are at the bottom—also existing, perhaps, on the romantic margins of leisure, of bohemianism and puberty—is being reshuffled into a society where all these relations are reversed. And if we accept that this is a social fact, we can describe this development in terms of a larger diagnosis of the transition from

Fordism to post-Fordism, from a society of discipline to one of control, as the victory of artistic critique as described by Boltanski and Chiapello, or in terms of the much-touted ideas of the artist as entrepreneur and of the creative cities in which the creative class allegedly leads a life that is as creatively intense as it is economically productive and successful." [Diedrich Diedrichsen, e-flux journal, October 2010]

[Mladen Stilinović, *Artist at work*, 1978]

Set the Nietzsche economy of the early 21st century against Zagreb of the late 1970s. The artist is deliberately (or deliberately posing to be) asleep in his studio. Acting against a socialist ideology of collective productivity that ruled the order of the day? And/or commenting on the increasingly prominent self-fashioning of the hardworking, successful artist within capitalist economy? While the West is diligently at work (producing, buying, trading), the East is languidly asleep. Evoke laziness as a strategy to counter production and as an homage to life (Kazimir Malevich, *Laziness as the Truth of Mankind*, 1921).

"... art cannot exist anymore in the West. Why can art not exist anymore in the West? The answer is simple. Artists in the West are not lazy. Artists from the East are lazy; whether they will stay lazy now when they are no longer Eastern artists, remains to be seen. Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time. It is also indifference, starting at nothing, impotence ... Knowing about laziness is not enough, it must be practiced and perfected. Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists but rather producers of something." [Mladen Stilinovic, *The Praise of Laziness*, 1998, www.guelman.ru/xz/english/XX22/X2207.htm]

[David Maroto, *Reviewed CV*, work in progress, last update 2010]

If praise brings you to a level of timeless transcendence, the CV invokes the past, present and potential future in bullet-points. Its absolute nemesis is laziness – each bullet-point is the proof of hard work and merit (NEVER sheer luck). An artist's CV should suggest or promise international recognition, travel, financial solidity (grants), with a splash of youthfulness [quick emergence into the public eye after graduation] and a hint of surprise. The flip-side of this coin are numerous rejections, unrealized projects, and irreversible aging.

A search for "young" on a well-known online art-announcement platform yields over 1,200 finds. Creative production should be nested in youth, anchored on a retrofitted 19th-century model of industrial production. It should also vibrate of cultural mixing, similar to the characteristics commonly associated with an immigrant laborer's community. Suffice to read a few sentences culled from one such ad: "*The CENTQUATRE is a unique venue, in the lively 19th arrondissement, where half of the residents are under 30 and more than 30 cultural communities live together. The establishment is housed in a 19th-century industrial building with a surface area of 39,000 square meters dedicated to the creation, production and dissemination of art. ... Dedicated to contemporary creativity, the CENTQUATRE invites international artists to work on site*"

[ArtAgenda, Dec 10, 2010]

[Carey Young, *Optimum Performance*, 2003]

Place your CV in a larger lucrative culture of self-help and performance management. Your motivational programmer would advise you to constantly review, take your failures as challenges, resubmit, AND hire a coach, OR sign up for a boot camp. There is always room for improvement, so the motto goes. What if such speech of unlimited incentives and benefits is presented in an art gallery? Could one's participation in contemporary art events (or market) be understood as part of one's overall drive to optimize performance? What are the crossovers between a regular exhibition opening and the day-to-day enacting of this self-controlling structure of improvement? What happens when the insistence on perfection, self-evaluation and the rhetoric of mutual success and benefit are presented to you in an art performance – does it produce that much-needed theatrical moment of self-recognition, prompting you to distance yourself from a professional attitude you have all too willingly internalized?

[Étienne Chabaud, *Disclaimer 2*, 2010]

Perhaps you'd like to sit on it for a while and have a glass of wine (as suggested by the motivational speaker in Young's video). You might prefer not to answer the above questions – showing you are applying a lesson learned from *Bartleby the scrivener*.

While the prototype of the artist who identifies with the factory worker (author as producer) and actively participates in emancipatory struggles was a model pertinent in much of the 20th century, the way in which artists now focus on process and delivery (vis à vis the notion of "mode of production") has become hyper-self-reflexive, less directly related to a question of rights or representation, but more to an awareness of how their own way of working epitomizes contemporary ideals. Some indeed claim there is a feedback loop between bohemian artistic models and late late capitalist notions of productivity. Over the last few years, Melville's *Bartleby*, but mostly his polite yet insistent resistance to production ("I would prefer not to"), has become a common reference for those toiling with art's exemplarity for precarious forms of post-Fordist labor. Welcome to the world of self-employed freelancers, post-factory, post-studio, doing flexitime from our local coffee shop post-modular office. *Bartleby's* systematic obstinacy, though utopically invoked, hardly seems a viable position to assume – didn't he die in the end, at the most successfully haunting his employer's conscience?

As a parting thought, a score for an action poem:

LE__IDEAL

*It is an action poem, and I am
going to perform it.*

Its score is:

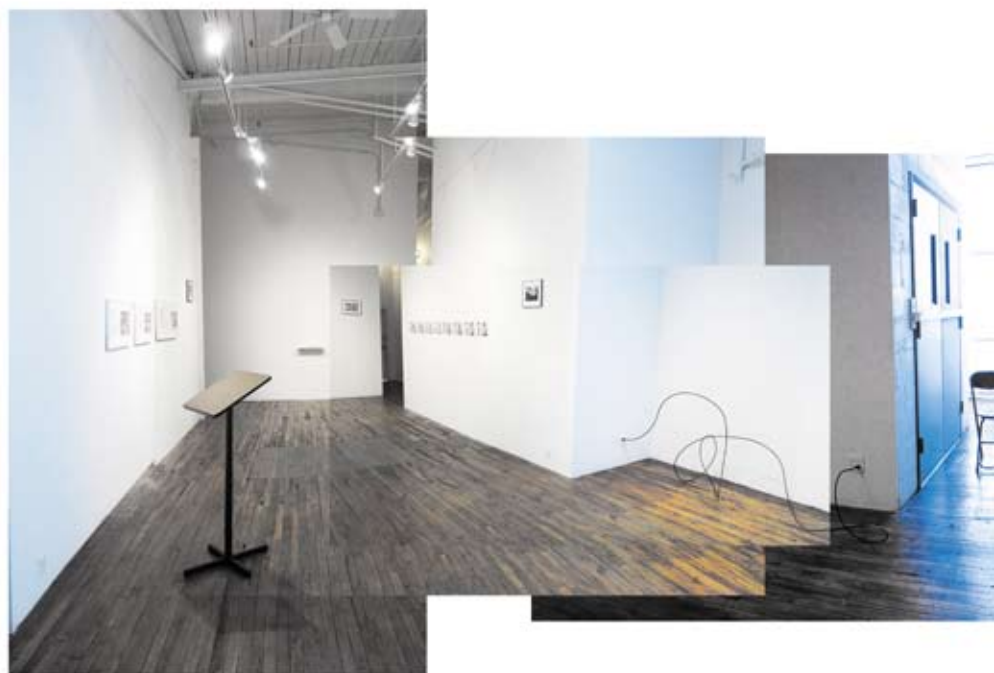
*not deciding
not choosing
not wanting
not owning
aware of self
wide awake
SITTING QUIETLY,
DOING NOTHING*

[Robert Filliou, Paris, 1964]¹

Note: This work was conceived for performance, and was interpreted by Robert Filliou and Alison Knowles at the Cafe au Go-Go in New York, on February 8th, 1965, the first part (not reproduced here) was read by Alison Knowles, while Filliou sat cross-legged upstage, motionless and silent. For the second part (reproduced here), Filliou stood up, spoke the words printed here, then returned to his former position. It should be noted that the original title given names Filliou as "Le Filliou Ideal," but this title should be changed to designate any adult male poet who performs this work as "Le (name) Ideal." (from *A Filliou Sampler* ubuclassics 2004)

text by Sarah Demeuse

**You are invited to join us for a conversation with David Levine, Kari Conte and Sarah Demeuse on Tuesday April 19th at 6:30pm.
Bring questions and friends.**



pertaining to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous is the second installment in a year-long exhibition series dedicated to notions of production and work. As a whole, this cycle takes ISCP's site of production, a historic printing factory as its starting point. The first exhibition, *Factory Makers*, curated by Kari Conte, predominantly featured work by artists who went into the industrial workplace or manufacturing room. Mladen Stilinović's *Artist at work* was also exhibited in *Factory Makers*. Presented anew, this work not only suggests the overlap between work in general and artistic work, but also hints at the continuation of this series' curatorial framework. The third exhibition in the series, *In back of the real* curated by Necmi Sönmez opens on May 12, 2011 and will look at the invisible border between economic production and the artistic imaginary.

Many thanks go to the artists.

This exhibition has been made possible thanks to the support of _____
Brooklyn Arts Council, The Greenwich Collection, National Endowment for the Arts
and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

1040 Metropolitan Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11211 t: (718) 387 2900 www.iscp-nyc.org