

Legible Labor

by Hong-An Truong

Group Show

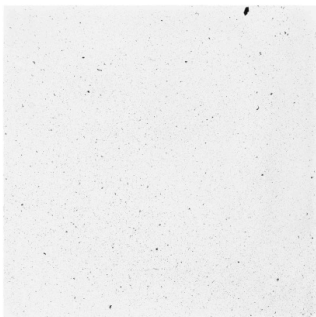
Simon Preston

301 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002

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In a show that connects three disparate artists through a kind of spare visual aesthetic, Simon Preston Gallery presents works by Mary Kelly, Christian Capurro, and Klaus Mosettig. Exploring various material processes that create a kind of residue or trace, the show alludes to the possibilities of transforming materiality into abstraction, to a concept of evidence through material remains, and to the idea of labor and value in types of 'work.'

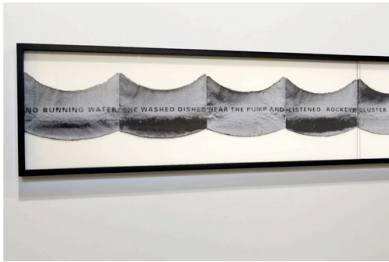


The most abstract in both content and execution of all the works are Klaus Mosettig's large-scale works on paper. Three drawings are included in the show. Using old slide projectors to throw empty beams of light on his paper hung on the wall, Mosettig traced the tiny specks of dirt and fibers that were visible upon close inspection. From a long distance, the final drawings on the wall look like ready-made sheets of fibrous hand-made paper; closer still they look like simple drawings of starry constellations; and finally with your eyes up on it they are clearly what they are: hundreds, maybe thousands of pencil marks that trace what one could only guess to be dust or dirt, an undeniable index of hours and hours of labor. The drawings call attention to what is typically imperceptible and deemed a visual interference, and imbue them with a higher kind of value and importance.

Entitled *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette*, Christian Capurro's work in the show is the manifestation of a nearly 10-year massive collaboration project that involved over 260 people. Capurro asked various people to completely erase by hand a single page of the 246-page, 1986 issue of *Vogue Hommes*. Upon completion, each person wrote the length of time it took to erase the page, and the amount that they were monetarily compensated for the task on the emptied, ghosted page. The resulting book, completed after 5 years, is displayed open to two facing pages on a pedestal with its front and back covers visible from behind, along with a single framed image that is a digital composite of 125 photographs, each a double page layout of the entire magazine.



The title of the work refers to the 18th century French economist who worked as France's controller-general in 1759 under Louis XV. He raised taxes against the rich during the Seven Years War against England, which eventually led to his downfall. The word we now know as silhouette is actually an eponym after the economist, which refers to the cheap alternative to expensive portrait painting and a derisive comment on his economic policies, his love for creating them in his spare time after getting released from 8 months in jail, or his 8 months in office, during which his chateau's walls were covered in them. While attempting to comment on the inequities of exchange and value, Capurro's work suffers from a weak link between the materiality of what's left behind and the grand reference to a complicated historical figure.



Mary Kelly's 1999 work, *Mea Culpa, Beirut 1982* rounds out the show. Created using a massive amount of compressed lint, leftover from her drying machine after washing countless loads of laundry, the horizontal scroll-like piece reads like a poem with text attached as vinyl letter intaglio: "No running water / She washed the dishes ... Rockeye cluster bombs / dispersed their submunitions ... 200,000 shrapnel fragments / armed with aluminum pan / four unmatched plates / two glasses / three spoons / and a kitchen knife / she held her child and waited." Incorporating extracted media accounts of military atrocities from Beirut, Lebanon within a domestic context (both textual and material), Kelly's piece connects two concepts of labor, referencing what is evidenced from work – the lint from washing clothes and the documented accounts of war violence.

While the three works in the show operate to varying degrees of success, all of the work questions the relationship between the legibility of labor and its monetary and cultural value.

--Hong-An Truong, artist and writer living in New York