

Fail Again
Entrance Gallery, Prague
23/9-17/10/2010

Artists: Martin Horák, Marek Meduna, Jan Nálevka, Václav Stratil

The title of the exhibition refers to a modernism which, despite its mastery over form, likes to pursue its own incapability or failure so that in the end it almost becomes its own impossibility. Like characters in the novels of Robert Walser, who insist on their own unimportance, the works on display represent a counterpoint to the situation of the modern man who lacks self-understanding but never forgets to remind others of what he knows or can.

At first sight this exhibition offers itself as a statement of frustration over omnipresent and ever increasing pressure on achievement or, perhaps the appearance of achievement. On second thought, this frustration itself is an object of ridicule or of examination. Self-irony has two functions here: it helps to avoid pathos, which lurks behind anyway, and reveals a gaze that is not so much directed at the status quo as it is interested in the malcontent himself and the comedy that takes place between him and society.



Bartleby the Scrivener
Etc. Gallery, Prague
19/2-11/3/2011

Artists: Etienne Chambaud, Claire Fontaine
Curated by Tereza Stejskalová

I.

„I would prefer not to,“ replies Bartleby in a mild voice to a routine request to check copies raised by his employer, an elderly lawyer, in his office on Wall Street. The lawyer remains astounded. „I would prefer not to“ is a reply of two artworks by two French artists, Etienne Chambaud and Claire Fontaine.

II.

Who is Bartleby and what is the reason behind his peculiar behavior is a question that the eponymous story is reluctant to answer. Even though Bartleby has stopped working, he remains in the office which he has made his home. He lives only on ginger nuts, and does not say who he is or what he is after. His incomprehensible ways, stubborn but mild, question the world of his elderly employer and all that it takes for granted. The lawyer keeps running away from him only to always come back.

III.

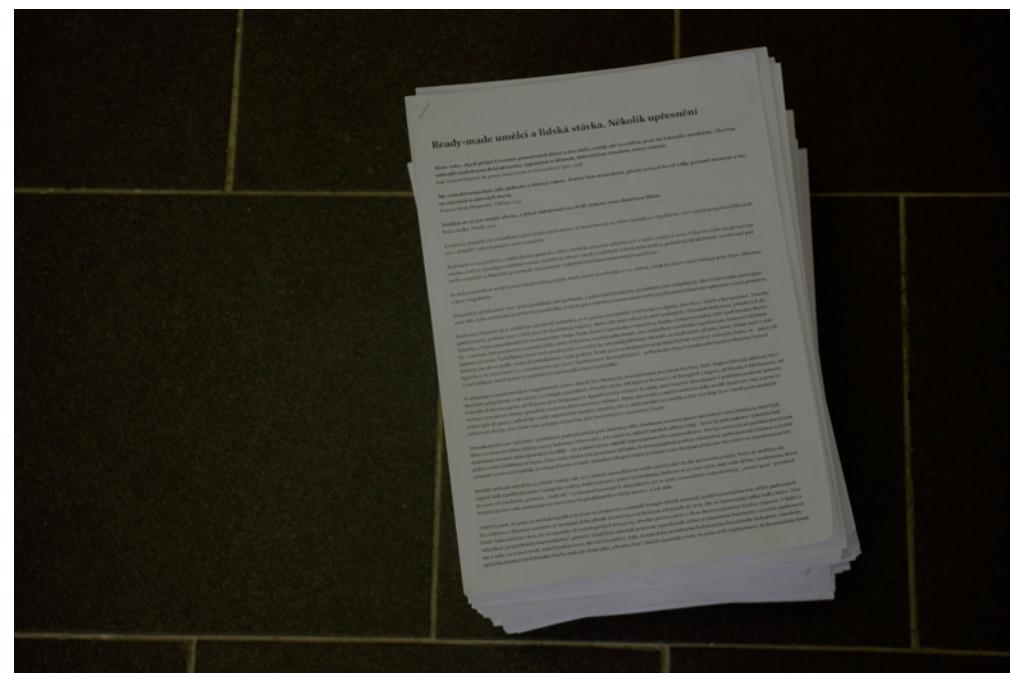
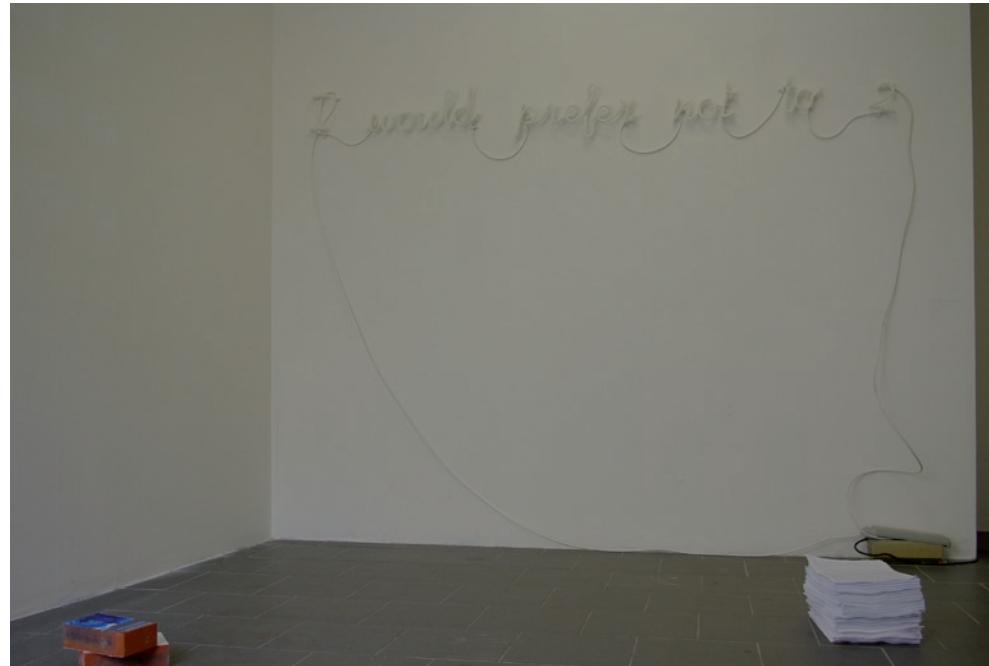
Reviewers of the story published in the 1850s were in agreement that the text is both entertaining and fantastic. Reading short fiction by Herman Melville, writes one of them, is a very pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon. The modern reader of the story, on the other hand, suffers from existential questions. Rather than a supernatural phenomenon, she perceives in Bartleby an embodiment of the emptiness of the modern capitalist life. The law office becomes a stage of alienation, of repressed, socially unacceptable impulses, a space that fails to cover up its own absurdity and contingency represented precisely by the scrivener. Bartleby meets Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Musil, Walser or Camus, and becomes the main character of a major and powerful novel of modern emptiness - *Life: A User's Manual* by George Perec. Modernity searches for its reflection in Bartleby and the fact that contemporary literature, theater, art or philosophy all like to reference the story, suggests, however commonplace it may sound, that modernity is still topical, that we still live it and that we suffer from it.

IV.

The strange mixture of power and powerlessness hidden in “I would prefer not to” is the main theme of the exhibition. Hence, it also involves politics. In fact, Bartleby today becomes more and more a political figure, an example of authentic resistance against the status quo. It is a key reference in the political theory of two philosophers, Slavoj Žižek and Giorgio Agamben, who both follow up the two key projects of modernity – psychoanalysis (Žižek) and Heidegger’s philosophy (Agamben). Face to face with the failures of the leftist experiments in the twentieth-century and with the contemporary capitalist crisis, both attempt to formulate a new “Bartlebian” politics; both insist that politics lies on a false foundation; its presuppositions regarding the nature of human being are fatally mistaken. Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to”, on the other hand, stages an act that speaks the authentic nature of man, a traumatic nature that we do everything to avoid.

V.

Claire Fontaine is a Paris-based collective artist, founded in 2004. After lifting her name from a popular brand of school notebooks, Claire Fontaine declared herself a “readymade artist” and began to elaborate a version of neo-conceptual art that often looks like other people’s work. Working in neon, video, sculpture, painting and text, her practice can be described as an ongoing interrogation of the political impotence and the crisis of singularity that seem to define contemporary art today. Etienne Chambaud is a French artist, who lives in Paris. His works explore the relationship between themselves and other artworks or the process of creation as such. His art repeats elements of the classical conceptual alphabet yet aims, at the same time, at a difficult-to-grasp negativity, which may take the shape of mechanical copying, destruction or self-reflection ad absurdum. Chambaud’s work insists on its own enigma and reminds one of “mise en abyme”, which makes any escape impossible.



Brno Cultural Center

31/08-12/10/2011

Artists: Bureau of Melodramatic Research (Irina Gheorghe, Alina Popa) RO, Martin Vongrej SK, POLE

Curated by: POLE

Today, diligence no longer means what it used to. Success without strenuous effort seems much more attractive. To admit that we have nothing to do and plenty of time, however, seems also improper. As if we were not desired, not important. We do not want to be busy as a bee but we would not wish to be unemployed either.

Bees work ceaselessly and rhythmically and they do not care about an individual. They exist and die for the sake of the whole. Why not be diligent bees, join the hive. We explore the images of various forms of social organization as they are mirrored in the beehive, the reason for their disappearance and the possibility of their return. The exhibition introduces the human relationship towards the bee utopia or dystopia as a symptom of the social atmosphere.



Distrust of Intelligentsia

Open Gallery, Bratislava
2-30/9/2011

Exhibiting artists: Vasil Artamonov and Alexey Klyuykov, Ivars Gravlejs, guests of Barbora Klímová, Václav Magid, Marek Meduna, Alice Nikitinová, Jiří Skála, Avdey Ter-Oganian

The works on display make an ironic comment on knowledge, intellectualism, and intellectuals in art or society. Through her sadomasochistic gesture, the (post)conceptual artist undermines not only his own position and the tradition forming his background but also the situation of his intellectual audience.

Curated by Tereza Stejskalová and Pavel Sterec

