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ZACHARY FORMWALT

A WAY OF REMOVING AN ELEMENT
THAT INTERFERES WITH THE SUBJECT

PRATCHAYA PHINTHONG

A PROPOSAL TO SET $CH_4 \cdot 5.75H_2O$
ON FIRE (WORK IN PROCESS)

ENGLISH

KIOSK presents a duo exhibition featuring the work of American artist Zachary Formwalt (1979, currently based in Amsterdam) and Thai artist Pratchaya Phinthong (1974, currently based in Bangkok). Both presentations visualize less visible economic, social and political processes.

Zachary Formwalt's show *A way of removing an element that interferes with the subject* is conceived as a three-part video and photo series dealing with our contemporary global economy. The image of the stock exchange functions as a metaphor for the inability to visualize the perpetually circulating flows of capital in today's world of finance.

The first part of this show, the video *Unsupported Transit* (2011), focuses on the construction site of the new stock exchange in the Chinese city of Shenzhen, designed by Rem Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture. Formwalt uses time-lapse photography to capture the progress of the construction work. The tension between photography and film is further amplified by the narrative voice-over that links Eadweard Muybridge's sequential photography and the rise of film with the late-nineteenth-century changes in capitalist production. The narrative describes the shift of an industrialized society as characterized by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* to a more virtual knowledge economy, or as the voice-over states: "the workers have left the scene".

The second part of the show, the video diptych *In Light of the Arc* (2013), focuses on precisely this scene. While *Unsupported Transit* merely scans the outside of the building, this video piece also shows the interior of the now nearly complete stock exchange. It registers the materialization of a place that is paradoxically marked by an increasing dematerialization. As the stock trade is now entirely controlled by IT and advanced algorithms, the trade floor with its iconic opening bell has come to serve a merely ceremonial function. The camera attempts to analyse the continuous transition of production that hides behind the stock exchange's façade.

With the photographic series *De Nieuwe Beurs te Amsterdam en de Proletariërs* ("The New Exchange of Amsterdam and the Proletarians", 2013), Formwalt introduces new work concerned with architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage's commodity exchange in Amsterdam in the form of archival materials. The pamphlet of the same name and the public debate surrounding it in the architectural review *De Opmerker* (1904) contextualize the strained relationship between the capitalist function and the socialist symbolism of the building.

In the course of 2014, Formwalt's research materials will result in a film that will be set in the Grain Traders Hall of the Berlage Exchange. This hall was originally designed for the trade of grain but was eventually to house Europe's first options exchange. How does such a shift from grain to options, from physical quality control to abstract, mathematical formulas manifest itself within these late-nineteenth-century brick walls?

KIOSK

Pratchaya Phinthong initiates a new project dealing with methane hydrate or 'burning ice' at KIOSK. The artist is fascinated by the poetic image of burning ice, and also by its metaphorical potential in light of important current geostrategic and social issues such as the economy, energy and ecology.

Methane hydrate is a form of water ice that contains large quantities of methane inside its crystal structure. This mix of water and methane only forms under specific conditions: pressure of more than 50 bar and a temperature below 4°C. Only in recent years large deposits of it have been discovered in the permafrost and in ocean-floor sediments. These sedimentary deposits of methane hydrate are estimated to contain anywhere between two and ten times the amount of methane of the entire known reserves of natural gas. As such, they form a potentially crucial future source of fossil fuel. A realization that comes not without pressing ecologic issues, however. As a greenhouse gas, methane is twenty times as powerful as carbon dioxide, and global warming entails the risk of a melting of the permafrost, which would release methane on a massive scale. Some scientists fear that this would make the hothouse effect irreversible.

Phinthong is fascinated by this ambiguous relation between the economic potential and the ecologic consequences of methane hydrate. He deploys this thought-provoking idea as a conceptual framework for organizing his show *A proposal to set CH₄ · 5.75H₂O on fire (work in process)*.

The sound playing in the central hemicycle room functions as the starting point in this. It is a recording of a conversation that took place in Ghent on 12 November 2013 between the artist, maritime geologist Marc De Batist and curator Wim Waelput. This set in motion an exchange between the artist and a number of scientific research teams, dealing with a topic that is the object of worldwide study, but is here approached from an artistic perspective. Eventually a methane hydrate sample was set alight at the Russian lake Baikal under the supervision of geologist Oleg Khlystov. The experiment was carried out specifically for this exhibition project, under the precise conditions set by Phinthong. The action was documented on photograph and video, and the amounts of gas and water released from the 'burning ice' were measured.

The material remains of the action as well as the chain of dialogues and exchanges of ideas leading up to it were translated to the exhibition space. As such, the residue of the collaborative effort symbolically seeps into the room in the form of one small puddle of water – the exact amount of water measured after the combustion.

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