

instigated by the East German system but also the very banal nature of what was being monitored: historically insignificant, dreary lives, much like the ones eventually imposed upon those West German militants who traded martyrdom for safe refuge in the East.

—*Michèle Faguet*

David Levine

GALERIE FEINKOST

Desire for success is as integral to the economy as money. The same applies to the so-called cultural economy. Both, however, evince a yawning gulf between expectation and return. The number of those who just about get by—let alone “make it”—is dwarfed by the armada of unknowns who labor for years, agonize, and fail. Nevertheless, with sheer tenacity, they write yet another application and throw themselves at the mercy of the market for the umpteenth time. David Levine’s exhibition “Hopeful” picks up precisely from this point: Its only materials are applications written by actors to a New York theater agent, unanswered and thrown away. Since May 2005, Levine has literally been pulling them out of the trash, collecting, and cataloguing them.

And so the walls of the gallery are full of cover letters, envelopes, and, most strikingly, more than two thousand head shots, simply sorted into chronological blocks. Sometimes appearing amateurish, sometimes very serious, relaxed, or even in specific roles—banker, dreamy guy with naked torso and coffee cup in hand, soldier—these actors offer themselves to us. The images are all extremely different in spite of their largely standardized formats. But each tells the same story of the absolute desire to succeed, the irrepressible hope of being signed by an agent, gaining professional representation, and thus being anointed a “real” actor.

You observe this panorama of self-salesmanship with a mix of sad empathy and voyeurism. And, above all, you wonder at this unbelievable mass of cultural waste. It is possible to read Levine’s installation as a critique of an economic system that produces this discarded heap of hope, not by chance, but out of necessity. You could transpose this entire ensemble from the world of film, television, and theater to the art market, in which the rules are not so different. Or do these different worlds actually extol different values, even if linked here by a path leading from the expensive investment in the application folder to its “invalidation” by the agent, and finally to its “revaluation” as part of an artwork? And, moreover, is it actually morally acceptable to show these applications without their authors’ knowledge? Can you “illegitimately” appropriate rubbish?



David Levine, *peful*, 2005–2009. Installation view.

ARTFORUM

The installation’s “medium” is clear: At heart, it consists of nothing more than a kind of sociological archive. This overwhelming accumulation and the plethora of questions it provokes appear to have a powerful effect. And yet, contrary to the formal reduction on which it is based, this exhibition overreaches in terms of its content. It draws so much of its charge from the frisson of authenticity—from the fact that this is a piece about “real” applications and the “real” fates of “real people”—that, unfortunately, it cannot bind the affective potential sparked here to a deeper message and to its own “positioning,” its implication in a system comparable to the one it takes as its subject. What remains is, in its visual and material vehemence, an emphatic visualization of the abstract rules of an economy in which all must sell themselves, and yet only a few find a buyer.

—*Dominikus Müller*

Translated from German by Emily Speers Mears.

COLOGNE

Sarah Ortmeyer

FIGGE VON ROSEN GALERIE

For the work that lends its name to Sarah Ortmeyer’s most recent show, “SABOTAGE,” the artist filled the floor of the gallery’s front room with chopped-up shoes made of light-colored wood. The shoes were actually French *sabots*, peasant’s clogs—the little-known root of the word *sabotage*: French agricultural workers defended themselves against the mechanization of farming by tossing their *sabots* into the new threshing machines. In the nineteenth century, it was relatively simple to throw a wrench into the machine of the powers that be; if only it were so easy these days. In this sense, the entire gallery room made a strangely nostalgic impression. At its center stood a white pedestal on which four small matchboxes were arranged beneath a protective glass cube. Their tiny black-and-white labels show photos of people making clenched fists—that universally comprehensible symbol of resistance—with explosive force. But why does the artist place the outstretched fist of Lee Harvey Oswald, the handcuffs clearly visible on his wrists, beside the Black Power salute of runner Tommie Smith, held proudly aloft as he receives his gold medal during the 1968 Olympic Games? And what are we to make of the juxtaposition of George W. Bush greeting a young boy by bumping fists with the affectionate fist bump shared by Michelle and Barack Obama? These are parallels that aren’t actually parallel, fleeting similarities that reveal the abyss of misunderstanding and misuse that have surrounded this gesture. Who is misappropriating this gesture? Who is a true victor?

OKKUPATION KOLLABORATION RÉSISTANCE, 2008, in another room, is a work with a distinctly poetic aura—typical for Ortmeyer—that formally recalls Minimalism: A mass-produced table with steel legs is covered with a red and white-checked tablecloth, the



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