

ArtReview Asia



Balance Sheets

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If the objective of *Balance Sheets* is to explore the relationship between art and economics, then the intimacies that it reveals seem to be those of a conspiring or mutually beneficial nature. The works in the exhibition attempt to draw parallels between the forms and aesthetics of economics and art, as if, in this late stage of capitalism, the two weren't already linked by more subtle and intrinsic ties. As critic Isabelle Graw notes, during the latter half of the eighteenth century the turn of art away from purpose and towards a purely aesthetic principle made it ripe for exploitation by capital. In other words, the autonomy of art, while ideal in theory and intention, also renders it the perfect object to which unbridled and unregulated value can be attributed. Yet the very literal treatment of the subject matter in this exhibition ignores their shared tropes and origins, supposing that art, through mimicry, implicitly seeks to transform, magnify or purify capital's exigencies. As such, critical commentary is at a distance.

Art comprises visual systems and codified meanings. Therefore, addressing the opaque processes of the market through the aestheticisation of its tools and functions seems an exercise in further abstracting the abstract. Perhaps pronouncing this attribute was the goal in itself,

though it is hard to distinguish the precise effect. For example, Toril Johannessen's *Expansion in Finance and Physics* series (2010) consists of highly stylised scientific and financial charts rendered large so as to reveal the fine print. Its aim is to show how the same language applied within positivist fields of finance is also frequently found in art-historical discourse, leading to the conclusion that art and science are not so diametrically opposed and may in fact rely on the same value system. Heidi Voet's scintillating constellation of faceless euro coins strewn across the gallery floor further indicates how art objects become innocuous forms in which value may be harboured.

Ximena Garrido-Lecca's traditional Peruvian hats, painstakingly photocopied and hand-coloured on the eponymous 'balance sheets', appear an attempt to rope a more sentient discussion of global capital and its effects on culture into what is a predominantly sanitised take on the world's financial systems. They therefore seem out of place, furthered by their somewhat diminutive placement on a backwards-facing wall. This disjuncture however is not the only one felt; all around the exhibition a vaguely anachronistic flavour is present. Gabriel Kuri's two *Coin and Cigarette Butt Board* (2014) works

are installed in antique-looking wooden cases, while Duncan Campell's 39-minute black-and-white film *Arbeit* (2011) compiles copious imagery of workers in a factory reminiscent of early-twentieth-century Europe set to a dry voiceover detailing the biography of a German technocrat. Both of these works share a constant, referring to an outmoded version of what 'the market' looks like.

Lia Forslund and Franek Wardynski's *R.M.B.S.* (2015), a receipt machine that bears instead a morose tale in which the protagonist details investments made before the financial crisis on printouts that visitors can take away is one of the more convincing transformations whereby a tool of exchange is effectively appropriated towards a means of critique. This stands apart from other works in the show, where economic mediums (coins, charts, accountancy reports) are inconsequentially altered, sometimes even inversely suggesting capital itself as an artform. If taken as such, *Balance Sheets* either misses the plot or successfully presents a very cynical take on the potential that art has to comment on or engender new feelings about our economic environment. If we were to assume this intention, then yes: it would appear that art and capital are indeed two sides of the same coin. *Ming Lin*



Heidi Voet, *Stars and Constellations*, 2013, coins and tokens, dimensions variable.
Courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong