

Capital On/scenities

Alicia Herrero's *Museo de la Economía Política del Arte* [Museum of the Political Economy of Art]

I.

If for author Linda Williams, investigations into the performativity of sexually explicit images, or *on/scenities*¹, became, in the late 1990s, the sources for legitimizing pornography in the academy, the installation of a Museum of the Political Economy of Art such as Alicia Herrero presents, supposes making manifest and explicit research into the images and mechanisms of the art market, the legal nature of the institutional relations that define it, and the degrees of perceptual affectation that enter into this game. Involved here is a kind of enactment*, a founding one that *reappropriates surplus value*, and establishes a precedent for explaining the oligarchic relations of power and dominance that operate in the artistic, the social, and the economic.

In this paradigm, the Museum is intended, on one hand, to give evidence within the art system to the global relations and influences of the market and a group of multi-millionaire collectors: public museums, non-profit cultural institutions, money, power, canon and their legal nature. Furthermore it intends to show the possible strategies of reappropriation of symbolic capital and surplus value that Works of art resolve by creating new rules, documents, and enactments* (graphic charts, objects, video, performativity and actions)².

Opting for an aseptic presentation in the white cube, the *Museo de la Economía Política del Arte* organizes a tour for the viewer through certain practices from the series *Arte & Capital*. It exposes the artistic *corpus* with an epistemological value, maps the performativity of capital as a commodity of liberalism, and defines the formal bonds of power and exchange of a non-emancipated system. Documents, graphics and inferences construct a scenario of multiple *evidence*, the appearance of a new *legal status* and a reappropriation of value, in dialogue and in tension with certain postulates of Marx and Engels concerning capital, surplus value, and private property in contemporary life.

II.

At the entrance, a display case shows us an *Errata Catalog (in progress since 1998)*. A corrected version of auction catalogs – it documents and meticulously adjusts what the markets make invisible, through a sampling of pages that stretch and diminish to scale images of art works (according to their sale price) . To annex a page that unfolds the image – in the manner of a porno magazine – is to return to the circuit a statistical gaze that inscribes those productive forces whose images are censored or hidden by an expert class.

Opposite, *Plus-valía* [Surplus Value] (2012)³, a statistical display* laid out like a pie chart – dialogues with the other piece that expands upon the concept. The first piece provides a set of monochrome values about variation and distribution of hegemony, collecting and the museum (its public and private status), whereas the second piece lays out a set of relations that, from indicators in this space, show not only the 200 top collectors and their 25 most lucrative businesses, but also their combinatory forms in percentages associated with their participation on museum boards, the museums themselves, those that have foundations, and finally, the philanthropists. *Surplus Value* (2012) documents, measures, and gives scaled visibility to the growing dependence on the market, the pornographic *on/scenities* between art and capital.

¹ WILLIAMS, Linda, *Hardcore*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1999. ² Conversations held with the artist in October, 2012.

³ *Plus-valía* [Surplus Value] finds an antecedent in Herrero's 1997 work *Mi Botín* [My Booty], in which the notions of 'extractivism' and collecting are connected as founding/instituting ones, from a post-colonialist and 'museumized' perspective.

At the front and rear of the gallery, a video, pieces of evidence, commentaries, and a woman *performer*- promoter presents a box: *Action Instrument Box* (2011), an *auteur* object that gives us a view of a small hidden collection of ten graphic documents. Through a multiple, travestied pop fetish, midway between a brand of soap and the reminiscence of another box, Warhol's Brillo box, *Action Instrument Box* conjures up the legal potential of its pieces' artistic value. Proffering this, it reviews the judgments of the histories and discourses of the art connected to the post-feminist principles and action art, generating a performance on view [*asistida*], with which to enter the museum and new collections⁴.

On the left, a series of disjointed judgments – generated, once more, from a performance practice – this time, drawing, completes the set of works exhibited in the *Museum of the Political Economy of Art*. Performing these live in the auction houses of Sotheby's and Christie's in London and Milan, the artist captures and records, on site, the movements of the machinery of art and its spectacle. Simultaneously she records herself 'on stage,' as it were, 'in the scene,' for a camera. In this way, in *Suite Auction Drawings [Auction Drawings Suite]* (2010), Herrero, occupying various symbolic positions as viewing public, artist, and object of art, observing herself critically, not only challenges the intellectual confinement of "how to escape from the system" but also the artistic condition of "self-changing" in her own field.

III.

This being so, the critical scenario that the *Museo de la Economía Política del Arte* develops is not exhausted by an episteme articulated in the obscene staging of capital, the *corpus* and work of the artist, but rather is set up as an enactment* whose act of *reappropriating surplus value* operates by tactics of creative legality. These acts which self-manage a legal status proceeding from the museum thus present their foundations, their legal precedent.

We might say, by way of concluding, that *Museo de la Economía Política del Arte* inaugurates a series of questions about the act of collecting and exhibiting not just objects, but rather the relations those objects suppose, in order to be able to make themselves visible to our gaze. The Museum as such gradually creates the appearance of the object, its fascination, and the act of collecting the fetish, yet at the same time it also exhibits the surplus value connected with the artist's own subjectivity and work, which the market relegates or reappropriates. If the *Museum of the Political Economy of Art* stages the obscenity of art and capital, it does so mainly out of an emancipated praxis, in order to lay bare the consequences of neoliberalism, the normative power of the gaze, and possible new epistemological driftings beyond art.

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*[English in original – trans.]