



OLIVER RESSLER

Property Is Theft

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MNAC Central, The Palace of Parliament

Curator: Adriana Oprea

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This exhibition combines existing artworks and work specifically produced for this event:

Everything's Coming Together While Everything's Falling Apart, 2-channel video installation, 29' (combined); activist mannequins, 2016

The story of this ongoing project may turn out to be a story of the beginning of the climate revolution, the moment when popular resistance began to reconfigure the world. The project follows the climate movement in its struggles to dismantle an economic system which is heavily dependent on fossil fuels. It records key events for the climate movement, bringing together many situations, contexts, voices and experiences. The first two events – there is one film for each – are the action during the COP21 summit in Paris in December 2015 and a blockade of a fossil fuel extraction site in Germany in May 2016.

Everything's Coming Together While Everything's Falling Apart is presented for the first time in Oliver Ressler's solo exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest. The project will continue with further episodes to be added as the struggle against a fossil fuel-dependent economy continues.

Take The Square, 3-channel video installation, 88' (combined), 2012

The 3-channel video installation is based on discussions conducted with activists from 15M in Madrid, the Syntagma Square movement in Athens and Occupy Wall Street in New York. Re-enacting the format of the working groups of the protest movements, four to six activists discuss with each other as a group in front of a camera. The discussions cover issues of organization, horizontal decision-making processes, the importance and function of occupying public spaces and how social change can occur. The films were shot in the spring of 2012 in those places used by the movements of the squares for meetings and working groups. *Take The Square* is trying to contribute to spreading the organizational knowledge of the movements and translate the processes between these places in transition.

The Visible and the Invisible, film, 20', 2014

In recent years, Switzerland has become the global center for commodity trading. In no other country are there more commodities bought and sold; nevertheless, crude oil, copper, aluminum, coal or wheat never reaches Swiss territory because the deals are carried out completely in a virtual world. The film *The Visible and the Invisible*, addresses a relationship of exploitation between the toxic industries and inhumane jobs in the global South – where the majority of commodities are extracted – and the huge profits from commodity trading in the hands of a few people in the global North.

Property is theft, wall text, self-adhesive foil, dimensions variable, 2014/2016

The slogan "Property Is Theft" comes from a book by French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon from 1840. Proudhon opposed the idea of unused land being regarded as property, believing that land can only be rightfully possessed by use, while he considered the result of an individual's labor a legitimate form of property. Today's "accumulation by dispossession", a form of appropriation that involves not primarily the generation of wealth but rather taking possession of existing wealth, usually from the poor or the public sector, makes this slogan a perfect candidate for re-use in the context of global capitalism. The wall text carried out on the occasion of this exhibition interlaces the letters "property is theft" with the logo of Romanian's largest bank.

Occupy, Resist, Produce, 3-channel video installation, 97' (combined), 2014/2015 (with Dario Azzellini)

In most cases an occupation is not a deliberate step towards workers' control but a means of workers' struggle against the closure of a production site or company or the relocation of production to another country. *Occupy, Resist, Produce* focuses on the rare, better organized cases where the purpose of the struggle is to bring production under workers' control. The workers do more than protest, they take the initiative and become protagonists, building horizontal social relations on the production sites and adopting mechanisms of direct democracy and collective decision-making. The recuperated workplaces often reinvent themselves, building links with local communities and social movements. *Occupy, Resist, Produce* consists of three films on occupied factories in Milan, Rome and Thessaloniki. Each film is based on discussions with the workers. The workers' assemblies – always the main decision-making bodies – were recorded.

The Plundering, film, 40', 2013

Extreme levels of privatization can only be carried out under conditions where people are under severe pressure. Since the *Rose Revolution* in 2003, in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia one of the most extreme neoliberal projects in the world was implemented. While today, Georgia is 9th of 185 states in the World Bank ranking "Ease of Doing Business", the unstable situation in a radical, free-market economy and the liquidation of most social safety nets drove most Georgian residents into unexperienced levels of poverty. *The Plundering* focuses on four cases of aggressive, state-property privatization policies in Tbilisi and discusses them in interviews.

The Bull Laid Bear, film, 24', 2012 (with Zanny Begg)

In their second collaborative film, Zanny Begg (Sydney) and Oliver Ressler focus on the financial and economic crisis post 2008. *The Bull Laid Bear* is structured around a series of interviews with William K. Black, a white-collar criminologist; Yves Smith, the author of the blog *Naked Capitalism*; Tiffiniy Cheng, campaign coordinator for A New Way Forward; and Gerald Epstein co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute in Amherst, MA. The material gathered from these interviewees has been blended with hand drawn animations to create a quasi-fictitious criminal world of gangster bankers and corrupt courts. *The Bull Laid Bear* probes our collective "beliefs" in financial markets, unravelling responsibility for the 2008 financial meltdown and looking at some of the causes of the spiraling economic crisis in Europe.

Boom!, lightbox, 110 x 40 cm, 2001 (with David Thorne)

The project consists of photo-text works in various media designed for flexible production and application in a range of display contexts. The text "oppositions nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" is a modified quotation from *The Communist Manifesto*. In reference to the expansive, globalizing tendencies of capital, Marx and Engels write, "it must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere."

Stranded, photography, 2015

When thinking about dead bodies on the beach, nowadays most people think of undocumented migrants whose boats sank during the dangerous sea crossing to the European Union. *Stranded* shows men lying motionless on an empty beach. But unlike refugees these men wear business suits, the standardized clothing of politicians and managers. These images could be seen as depicting those responsible for the policy of drowning refugees. The photographic images point to something that might happen in the future as the collapse of the capitalist system continues. *Stranded* imagines what might happen if the managers of today's economy were themselves sacked and thrown overboard.

Oliver Ressler, born 1970, lives and works in Vienna and produces installations, projects in public space, and films on issues such as economy, democracy, global warming, forms of resistance and social alternatives. Ressler has had more than 60 solo exhibitions, among them in Berkeley Art Museum, USA; Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, Istanbul; Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid; Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, Egypt; Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk; Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo – CAAC, Seville; Foundation Fabbrica Del Cioccolato, Torre-Blenio (CH) and SALT Galata, Istanbul. Ressler has participated in more than 300 group exhibitions, including Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven; MASSMoCA, North Adams, USA; Centre Pompidou, Paris and at the biennials in Seville (2006), Moscow (2007), Taipei (2008), Lyon (2009), Gyumri (2012), Venice (2013), Athens (2013, 2015), and Quebec (2014). He is the director of 25 films. A retrospective of his films took place at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève in 2013. He is the co-curator of an exhibition cycle on the financial crisis, *It's the Political Economy, Stupid*, and co-curator of *Utopian Pulse – Flares in the Darkroom* at Secession in Vienna in 2014. Ressler is the first prize winner of the newly established *Prix Thun for Art and Ethics Award* in 2016. www.ressler.at

