

WORKafAIR

PREFACE

Based in the exhibition space rum46 the artist-curator team Anja Raithel and Grete Aagard are organising WORKafAIR, an international project which challenges and thematises social and political conceptions of work. During the period April to September 2007 we present a seminar, an exhibition, talks, conversation and a workshop.

Each contributor is invited on the basis of their diverse approach to, and perspectives on, WORKafAIRs. We believe that their research and/or artistic production, provide interesting and eye-opening perspectives to these problems; for example, by focusing on work ethics, self-empowerment, rights, social responsibility, new forms of organisation and practices.

BACKGROUND

For all people work is a central factor in life; whether one is currently employed or not. The concept of work is a fluid phenomenon with a content that changes and is reinterpreted over time. Now the value-based concept of work can be seen as a hot topic in today's Denmark and other Western countries. We are filled with stories where work is linked with empathy, flexibility, freedom, willingness for change and creative engagement. For some, work becomes a lifestyle. For others the capacious employment market is an empty phrase, which, rather paradoxically, might not be spacious enough for diversity in respect of qualifications, age, sex or ethnic origin, after all. It seems as if we have moved from a common "welfare" to individualised "workfare", which can be perceived as a threat to the cohesive power of the social aspect of society.

·If paid work is society's highest value, then does it - at the same time create social contempt?

·Is it only paid work that has utility value?

·What happens to the individual and society when the line between work and spare time is abolished and social life is privatised or institutionalised?

·Has the worker assumed the artist's lifestyle and is this necessarily something to strive for?

·Which strategies can the artist/curator select in a time where many of the "opposition strategies" previously utilised have been absorbed by the corporations?

For the majority in Western society, work is meaningful to the formation of our identity; yet in some low-income countries it is a question of survival. When Western countries transfer laborious work to low-income countries it can be seen as a positive increase in growth for both parties, whilst the negative consequences can result in greater inequality - the latter both in the country of dispatch where certain functions are rendered superfluous and with them certain workers, and in the recipient country where it can lead to the wearing-down and infringement of human rights. Therefore WORKafAIR also aims to put questions of global problematics into perspective.

·How can we challenge the labour market policy of new liberalism?

·Can one create a globalisation of equality and an international legal system which protects employees as well as the unemployed on a global scale?

·Have the national union movements played out their roles and what new (local/global) organising takes place?

·What values and practices can hold people together?