

apexart

LET EVERYTHING BE TEMPORARY OR, WHEN IS THE EXHIBITION?

In 1917, Lenin ordered monuments of the revolution, including his own effigy, to be made in cheap, readily available, and ephemeral materials. The principal was simple, he explained, just “let everything be temporary.” His pursuit, perhaps aptly, was itself perfectly temporary: countless extant monuments attest that the imposing permanence of bronze won out over that particular refutation of bourgeois values. But, however short-lived, the directive meant to challenge one essential function of the memorial, a functioning arguably shared with works of art more generally: the message and aura of both are located precisely in their unflappable condition of timelessness (and this even when they might also be precisely “of their time”). Memorials, like artworks, are made to be eternal, unchanging, aesthetically fixed.

The advent of avant-garde performance and, later, certain practices such as Land Art or Conceptual Art introduced ephemeral actions, natural entropies, or intangible elements as art, thus shifting the traditional model of the artwork in at least one crucial way by breaking with its temporal definitions. Still, in more recent times, the production of objects of various mediums largely conforms to art’s typical aspirations to everlastingness. Their messages might be radical and their intentions critical, but their aesthetic forms are fixed forever.

Taking up Lenin’s call, this exhibition brings together the work of artists that consistently and very differently explore temporariness or, more specifically, the possibility of temporal instability in the work of art. This is manifest not so much as a theme or subject (although it is also sometimes also that), but rather as a constitutive element, shaping the artwork’s fragility as well as the indeterminacy of an exhibition visitor’s experience of it. LET EVERYTHING BE TEMPORARY OR, WHEN IS THE EXHIBITION? concentrates on objects that, whether primarily motivated by the political, aesthetic, or the intimate, literally perform their temporal questioning.

The artwork as a paradigm of such formal precariousness is perfectly captured by FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES’ famous candy spills, from which viewers are invited to take a piece of candy. An “ideal weight” for the work is given and its caretakers are meant to regularly replenish its voluntary evanescence, but in between its original state and its diverse states of undoing, the candy spills offer a model of the artwork as potentially unstable and unpredictable, like life itself; more recent works differently extend this, including MICHEL BLAZY’S wall of agar-agar or humid biscuits, in which the form and the function of the work as an architectonic structure and aesthetic object shows signs of progressive decay over time; GABRIEL KURI’S abbr., a shrine of fresh flowers that spells out the abbreviation for “abbreviation,” slowly withering as the exhibition progresses, and his Recurrence of the Sublime, a trio of avocados carefully wrapped (and thus encouraged to ripen) in newspapers dated 21 July 1969, effectively juxtaposing mundane development with that of the monumentally historic; OKSANA PASAIKO’S Short Sad Text (based on the borders of 14 countries), a bar of soap left in a public bathroom and on which the artist had attached hair that mapped the contours of the border of fourteen Eastern European countries, in which the effacement and transformation of actual borders is literalized in the soapy dissipation of the artwork itself; TOMO SAVIC-GEKAN’S Untitled, in which the form and function of his new site specific work for the show will be based on data recorded from a previous exhibition (in line with previous projects in which he progressively altered the temperature of a public pool or revised the movements of a shopping mall escalator based on data collected from still earlier exhibitions); and JOËLLE TUERLINCKX’S Confetti Square, an outline of a square formed with confetti on the floor, which is inevitably transformed—indeed nullified as a geometric form—by gushes of air or the footsteps of visitors, and her Solar Room Objects in which objects are exposed to both sunlight and an installation of UV lights so that they visibly age in tandem with the exhibition.

Uniting these works is the fact that exhibition (exposure) and duration determines—and sometimes undermines—their forms. As such, they are premised on their own fleetingness, instability and, at times, on their own destruction. Because they are, by definition, unstable and changeable, no singular visit or picture can fully capture or document the works or the exhibition as a whole. Visitors will thus be encouraged to return to see the show in its multiple states of evolution.