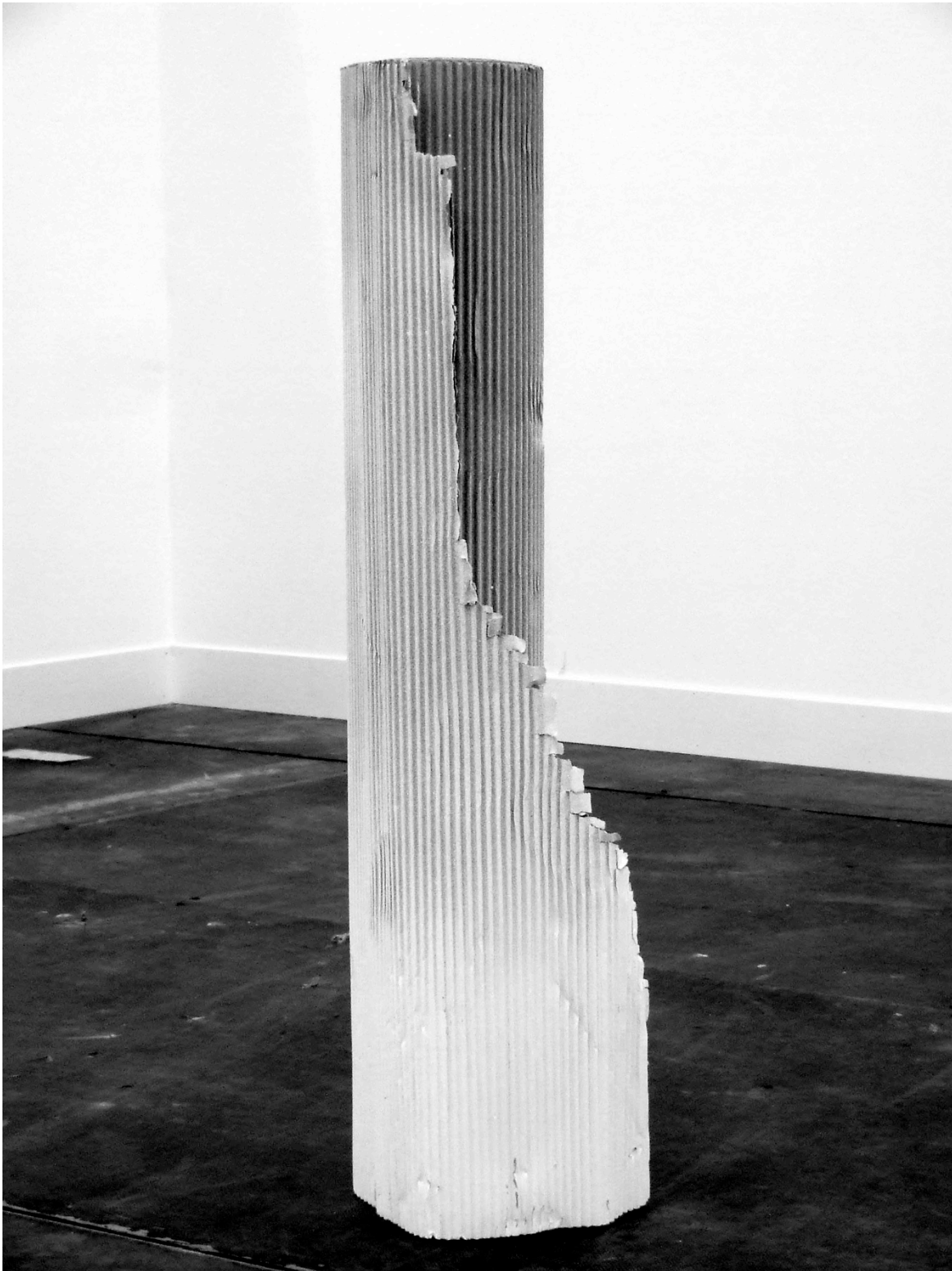


Frédéric de Goldschmidt Collection



Elena Bajo
The Pervasive Element
Frieze Frame London 2011
D+T Project Gallery

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The Pervasive Element, Frieze Art Fair, Tent One During construction, undergoing white spray painting on galleries booth walls, corrugated cardboard covering floor, Frieze Frame. Selected by Rodrigo Moura and Cecilia Alemani, D+T Project, London 2011. Courtesy of D+T Project. Photo by Elena Bajo

Assessing the Works of Elena Bajo

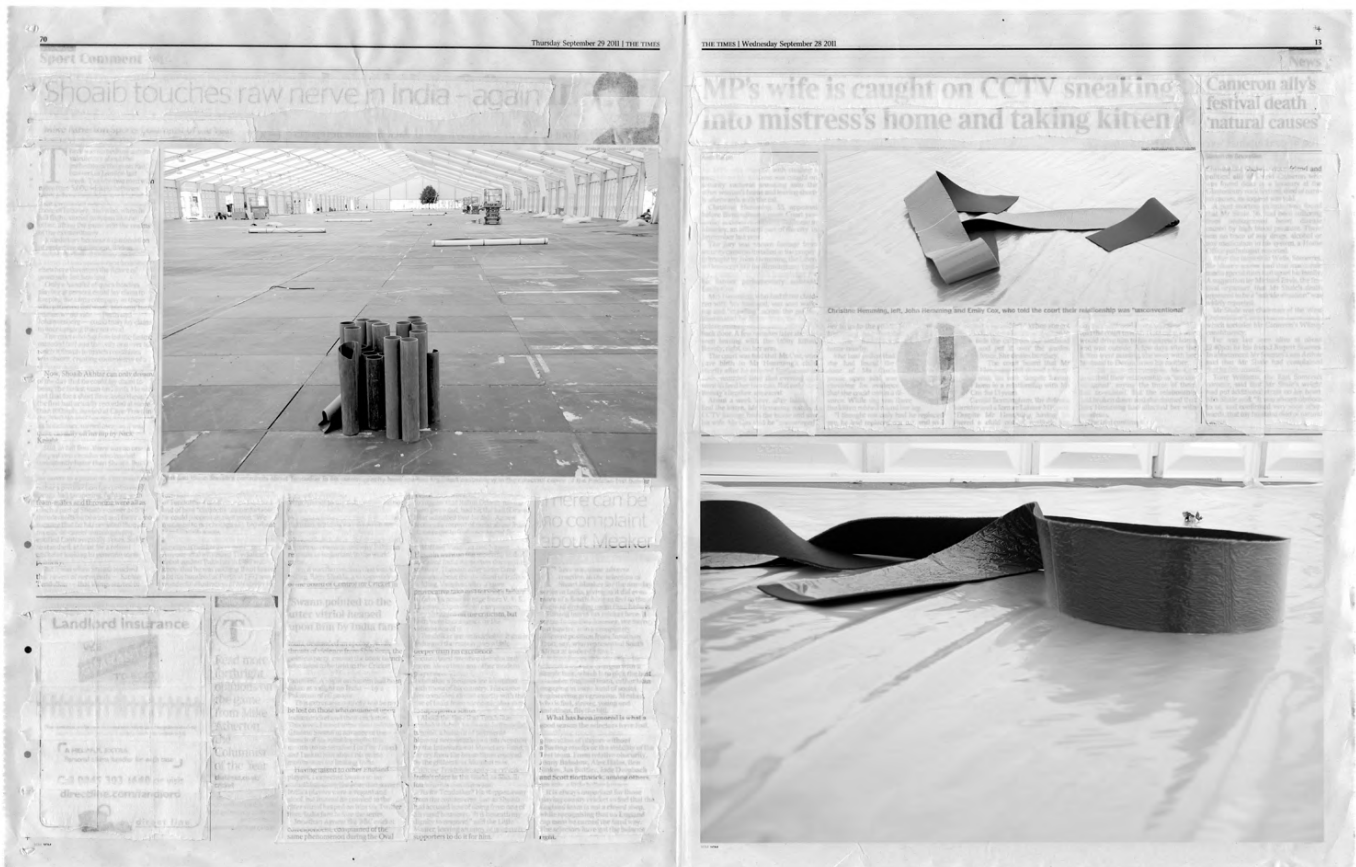
By Mathieu Copeland

For the Frieze London art fair of 2011 — another moment in the art calendar where hyper commercialization is the norm and when all work that is not art work is carefully kept out of sight — Elena Bajo, who was present during the entire period of setting up the fair, decided to reveal some of the residue of the event's construction by displaying, in her piece "The Pervasive Element," a scrap of rolled-up protective cardboard. The artist, investigating the possibility of social change, set herself the task of uncovering moments of "fracture and repositioning in an attempt to entertain fissures in a world of crystallized sensibility, investigating the archives of discarded political ideas that are connected to utopian and dystopian communities and political facts that affected the course of history, recontextualizing them in a dialogue with the past and present industrial histories."

Such projects bring to mind Philippe Parreno's *Werktische*, in which, on May 1, 1994 — a worldwide day of commemoration of labour — he assembled a workforce and transformed the Schipper & Krome gallery in Berlin into a temporary factory. They also recall another utopian project proposed by Parreno along with Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, the designers M/M, and gallery owner Monica Manzutto, which sought to document, in the form of an unrealized film that was to be called *La batalla de los patos* ("The Battle of the Ducks"), the story of a Mexican soft-drink co-operative from which Disney was seeking massive compensation for copyright infringement. The dream of and struggle for another possible model of world organization to replace the established one also recalls both Naomi Klein's seminal book *No Logo* and the film *The Take*, co-produced by Klein and Avy Lewis, which documented the experiences of workers in Argentina who came together in order to reclaim the factories where they worked after they had been abandoned by their owners.

Because Elena Bajo's work is about reconstructing a commonality, it produces a plurality of voices. This polyphony of sounds and repetition directly evokes Phill Niblock's series of films *The Movement of People Working*, in which the visceral, layered experience of long drones and ringing, beating overtones echoes the repetitiveness of the daily tasks carried out by workers; the evolution of the films, combined with the many different pieces of music, results in a constant renewal of forms, of new juxtapositions of sound and image. *The Movement of People Working* offers powerful social and political commentary, reflected in the title and in Niblock's close relationship with the workers. In this respect, the series echoes the work of filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker, who in 1967 turned movie cameras over to workers and instructed them in cinematic technique so that they could create their own films. In a fascinating turn of events, rather than doing fictional or purely documentary film, some of the workers formed the Groupes Medvekiné and decided to film themselves at work.

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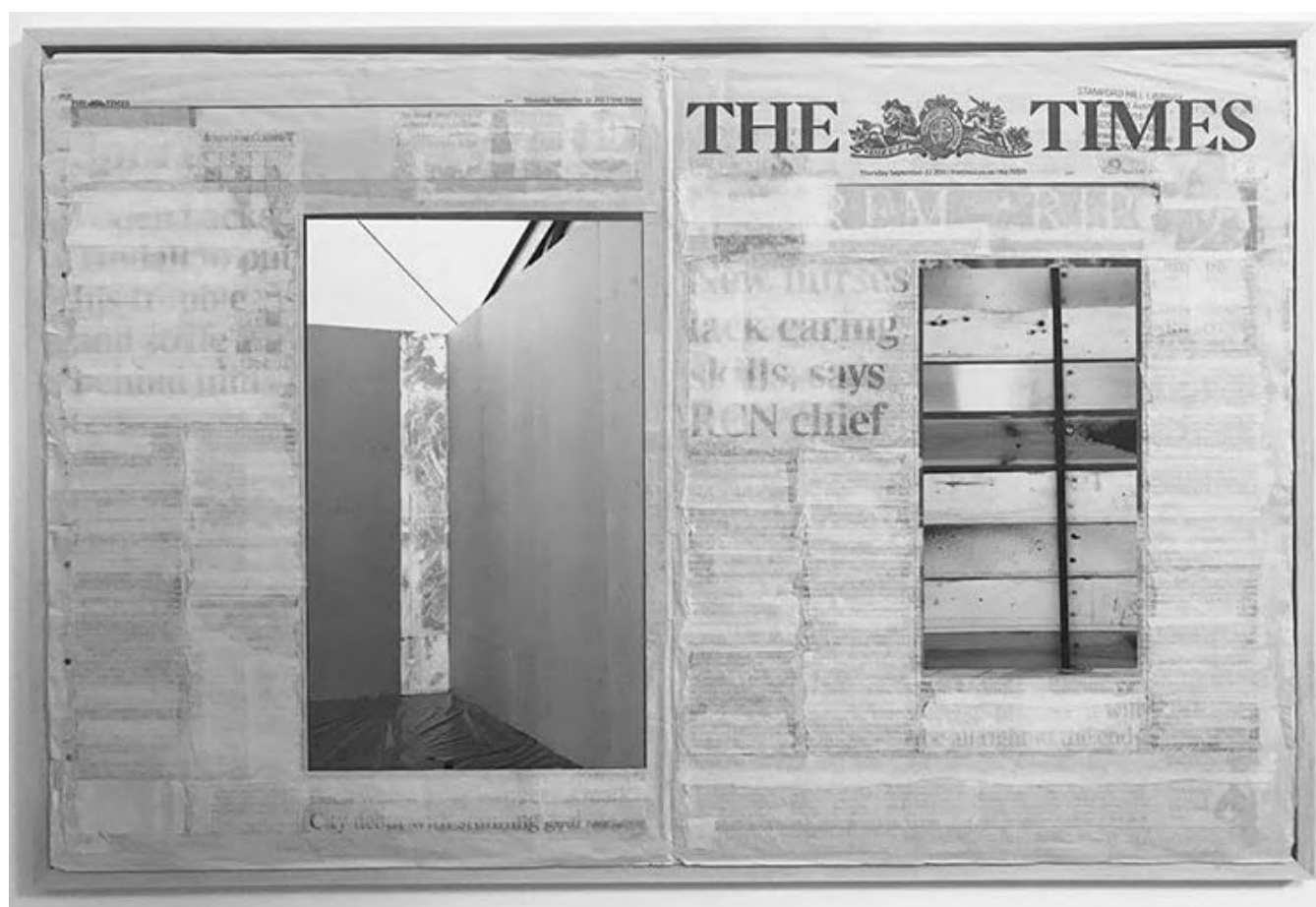


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Monstrous Corporeality by Tom Trevatt

Monsters are variously characterized by accident, indetermination, formlessness; by material incompleteness, categorical ambiguity, ontological instability. One may create monsters through hybridization, hypertrophy, or hypotrophy; through lack, excess, or multiplication; through the substitution of elements, the confusion of species, or the conflation of genders and genres. (Ten Theses on Monsters and Monstrosity, Allen S. Weis 2004)

Things fluctuate, tessellate and become manifold, repeated patterns and unique forms dissipate. Exuding a powerful terror characterised by the monstrous void in the name of the thing, the thing in question recuperates itself into a value forming regime, making matter matter. In the redetermination of the thing as it traverses categories, as it lives and breathes through the environment, as it percusses against thought, against other things, the world is reproduced through itself, through the hinge of the thing. Substance, the formation of touchable, excitable matter into discreet parts, is expressive of this terror of the unnamable, as yet unknown or simple thereness of the thing as it compounds and conjoins elements into folded and repeated tentacular parts, each determined by and determining environment. Merely arresting these parts and redetermining them, Elena Bajo presents a sculptural work comprised of discarded cardboard used to cover the floor in the Frieze Art Fair as the walls are painted. These accidental paintings form the almost unlimited edition sculpture, as individual, singular units, at the same time sculpture and multiple rolled paintings, part of a whole and multiple fragments expressive of the infinite perseverance of matter. This mere presentation of the accident as artwork, a repeated gesture in Bajo's practice, is contingent explicitly on the by-products of labour. Somehow both interrupted and allowed to continue, this labour, the act of constructing and installing the art fair, is supportive of the work but is also a reminder of the enormity of the commercial art scene in which Frieze partakes. Bajo's work exists in an interstitial space both inside the market place, but continually breaking from it. Neither explicit attack nor thoroughgoing critique, the project Bajo engages in is sympathetic towards a certain political anarchism.

Acting as witness to the construction of the art fair, slipping between the workers and engineers, Bajo is both complicit in the process and an antagonistic element. Distanced from the workers but at the same time thrust into their midsts, sharing a common but dislocated ground, Bajo performs a dual role that understands the contradiction at the centre of our relationship to the art fair. Produced both for the fair and by the fair, by the fair's materials and by the work of the fair, the sculpture/painting is a recuperation of the mere-ness of things recognised as part of the aesthetic realm. The work is determined in the first instance by the site, but more than that it is shaped and formed by the materials of the fair's installation, the labour of the workers on site and their choreographies as they perform for no audience. It is made not only from the art fair itself, but by the art fair. Aesthetic formations are produced as by-products of erecting the tent frames, arranging lights to be installed or hauling the canvas over the roof. These formal arrangements inflect the construction site with elements of the studio, producing temporary assemblages or performances that percuss against Bajo's own work. She lightly frames these accidents of labour, witnessing the workers and claiming their superfluous products as her own work. Focusing her attention on the 'hard graft' of the build, on what comes by the way of the manual labour, on the poetic or sculptural qualities of work as such, Bajo presents the fair to itself by the slightest motion.

The movement of this back on itself is important. The artist's materials are contingent on the production of the fair, she waits for fragments to be discarded and merely presents the real to itself as an abstraction of the making process of the fair itself rather than a response to it. As such the responsibility for production is distributed non hierarchically across the site, allowing chance operations and non-intentionality to determine the work. As the body, the corpus, of the art fair rolls onwards, collecting, preserving and persevering, the excretion is discarded, laid to waste, collected, recycled or trashed. The corpus, so close to corpse, the abject, petrification of work into solidity, the object, temporarily halting the flow of work and then abandoning it back into the fluctuating marketplace, the fair is the attempt to arrest contingency or to produce value ex nihilo. It is the attempt to hold off the unknowns, the monstrous outsideness of that yet to come, both of art and commerce. To hypostatize. But at the same time to ascribe value to those same unknowns, the as yet uncreated work by an artist becomes a promise towards a futurity we must believe in to agree to the central conceit of the fair itself. We must believe in the value of the yet to be made. But the fair's by-products, the made but unthought of, are here reinserted into the scheme. The abject is bought to the fore, expressing itself without intention or telos, as the matter it simply is. Multiple, these sedimentations, an abstracted record of work done, stack and approach formlessness, singular, the painting/sculpture proposes a precarious minimalism characterised by an ambiguous relationship to the booth and the other exhibits in the fair.