

CURE **(the Work)** **in Z33**

How did you experience the work?
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Intro

The American artist Sam Lewitt (1981) investigates the circulation of matter and capital in the global economy. His exhibition at Z33 departs from the recent closure and demolition of Ford Genk, formerly a major employer in the region.

As Ford Genk was undergoing demolition, the new wing of Z33 was under construction in the nearby city of Hasselt. Lewitt retools this economic transition in his exhibition. He uses elements of the demolished factory, as well as soil from the Ford site, to set up a production line for compressed earth blocks, a low-cost building material. Inside the galleries, the stages of the production process – compressing, curing, and stacking – are separated by doors and tarps from the former factory. This dispersed presentation raises the question of where we locate the ‘work’, as an activity and as a product.

Meet



Sam
Lewitt

“I want infrastructure to be reflected, thickened and delimited by the intervention of the work itself.”

Sam Lewitt

Sam Lewitt’s work often isolates industrial techniques and infrastructures. Using these systems as his source material, the artist rearranges their elements in order to alter their function and meaning.

Capital is an invisible force that organizes the visible world. Lewitt’s exhibition situates Z33 in the capital flows that are transforming the regional and international economy. In this way, his work begs the question of the place of art in society.

Sam Lewitt’s recent exhibitions include the BMW Open Work commission at the Frieze Art Fair in London (2018) and the Venice Biennale (2017). His solo exhibition *More Heat Than Light* traveled from the CCA Wattis Institute in San Francisco (2015) to the Kunsthalle Basel (2016), and finally, under the title *Less Light Warm Words*, to the Swiss Institute in New York (2016). Lewitt’s work is held in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the MoMA, and the Centre Georges Pompidou, among others.

Soil as stock?

“The forces behind the work are the same forces in the work, on its surface and in its organizational form.”

Sam Lewitt

In *CURE (the Work)*, soil from the Ford site is being compressed into earth blocks. Each room shows a different step in the production process. This dispersed presentation mirrors the ongoing outsourcing and decentralization of industrial work.

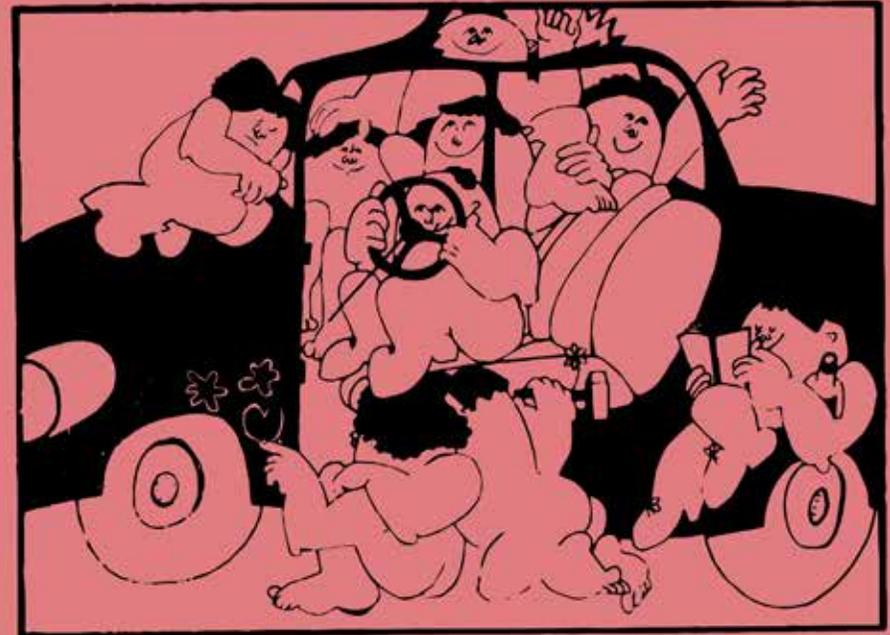
In 2014, Ford moved its production from Genk to Valencia in order to cut costs. The old factory site in Genk was subsequently converted into a logistics hub. Similar changes are occurring in many places. Industrial activities are outsourced to low-wage countries and are replaced by logistic services in order to minimize the costs of materials, transport, and labor.

The two portable earth ramming machines in room 4 are another cost-saving technique. They were designed for self-help housing projects in so-called developing countries. The machines enable the direct use of local soil for shelter and road construction. They rely on the free labor of prospective homeowners to reduce the costs of development aid. In resource scarce contexts, these devices mobilize the economic potential of underemployed populations and transform the soil into a stock of supplies.

Inside the galleries of Z33, the earth ramming machines raise the question of how artistic production is tied to a specific place: the machines are meant to be used with local soil, but can be used anywhere in the world. In this respect, Lewitt's work differs from site-specific art that is made for one place. The Ford site in Genk – a future logistics hub – is already connected to numerous other places of economic activity. Lewitt uses this site as raw material to be transformed throughout the exhibition.

SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETIN 1. FORD STRUGGLE 73

ANTWERP • GENK • BORDEAUX • COLOGNE • MELBOURNE • AMSTERDAM



5p

Solidarity Motor Bulletin 1. Ford Struggle 73 (1974)

Work or artwork?

CURE (the Work) integrates industrial elements from the demolished Ford factory into the Z33 building. They frame the earth ramming machines that compress soil into building blocks in the exhibition spaces. Placed together, these elements collapse different modes of production.

Mass production and production by the masses

Ford introduced a revolutionary method of mass production that came to be known as Fordism. All work was broken down into numerous repetitive tasks that could be performed by separate workers. Every task was standardized, leaving factory workers little freedom to decide how they did their work. This led to spontaneous and organized forms of labor struggle. In the 1960s, the Italian 'operaismo' or 'workerist' movement promoted the idea that employees should resist wage labor. Such ideas spread internationally through pamphlets like *Solidarity Motor Bulletin* and inspired actions at Ford Genk in the early 1970s. Here, workers not only demanded higher wages and slower production speeds, but also another organization of production in a context where the pace of the machinery exceeded their physical limits.

By contrast, the earth ramming machines for *CURE (the Work)* are pieces of 'intermediate' or 'appropriate' technology. These devices adjust the scale of production to the size and capacities of the human body. They leverage the force of the user's arm to compress soil into standardized building blocks. This low-cost technology substitutes mass production with 'production by the masses'. This is however an ambiguous legacy as the 'mass' is reduced to fairly small groups of individual local producers. Originally invented for self-help housing in so-called developing countries, the earth ramming machines were also embraced by practitioners of small-scale ecological

self-sufficiency, because they hold the promise that users can reap the fruits of their own labor. This history contains yet another historical echo with the local economy of Limburg, marking an important difference from the time before coal was discovered in Genk. At that time entire families flocked from the Meuse valley to the Ruhr region to make bricks in field kilns, but they couldn't afford to live in brick houses themselves.

Artistic and non-artistic labor

CURE (the Work) frames the art institution as a site of material production, yet it is generally accepted that art does not satisfy material needs. This idea derives from a distinction between manual and intellectual labor, itself a product of the division of work within society. Lewitt complicates this distinction by implicating the art institution – a place of reflection – in the production of compressed earth blocks. He intentionally collapses artistic and non-artistic production, thereby changing the meaning of 'work' within and beyond the work of art.

Talk to us

Z33 is a House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture. We reflect with you as a visitor and with artists such as Sam Lewitt on the social questions of today and tomorrow.

Did you see anything that could make your visit even more enjoyable? We value your feedback. Please contact us @z33be or send an email to hallo@z33.be

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Published by Z33. 1st print 2020.

This folder is published on the occasion of *CURE (the Work)* (October 4, 2020 – January 3, 2021) at Z33, Hasselt, Belgium.

Special thanks to

Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Galerie Buchholz, Berlin / Köln / New York

De Vlaamse Waterweg nv

Genk Green Logistics:

MG Real Estate, Intervest Offices &
Warehouses, Group Machiels, DEME

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