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Monument to the 8-Hour Day
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Screen Space

All images of works courtesy of the artist

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SCREEN SPACE

Monument to the 8-Hour Day

Michelle Sakaris

On Sunday the 15th of July from 10 am to 6 pm, Michelle Sakaris sat with a clock for eight consecutive hours at the base of a monument. Located diagonally opposite Trades Hall in Melbourne, the monument commemorates the introduction of the eight-hour workday. Emblazoned with “888” and a text encircling a globe, it invokes the ideal division of the 24 hour day into “Work, Recreation, Rest”. The video document of the eight-hour-long performance is exhibited at Screen Space in real-time, coinciding with gallery hours, noon to 6 pm.

What does sitting for eight hours with a clock at the base of the 888 Monument say? Or does it sing? If so, is it singing *The Internationale*, celebrating the reining in of excessive work hours, or is it singing the song of the cicada? In one of Aesop’s Fables, the cicada is too busy singing to store grain for the winter, in contrast to the industrious ant. This fable is usually interpreted as a reproach of idleness. But how can there be song without the idleness that affords the opportunity for singing? The singing cicada transgresses the natural laws of survival, the world of prohibition that is the world of work.

We may ask of the idle artist, if art is a kind of idleness, can a nonwork be a work? And is the nonwork of idleness the one kind of work that remains un-alienated when “proper” work is accounted for by clocking-in and clocking-out, with every hour between ideally filled with efficient action whose products are for someone else? We should further ask whether the title *Monument to the 8-Hour Day* is a reference to the granite column commemorating industrious labour, or the eight hours of idleness the artist spent at its base. And what are we doing viewing her work if not reproducing in our idleness the experience of the artist in her idleness?

Evangelos Sakaris, 2012



A work of art, a sacrifice contains something of an irrepressible festive exuberance that overflows the world of work, and clashes with, if not the letter, the spirit of the prohibitions indispensable to safeguarding this world.

Georges Bataille, *Lascaux or the Birth of Art*

External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self sacrifice, of mortification . . . the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person.

Karl Marx, 1844 *Manuscripts*

In 1913 Duchamp jotted a note to himself: "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?" Can one make something that has no function, that performs no work, that is not beholden to a purpose, even that of art? Something not beholden to leisure either?

Helen Molesworth, “Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades”

Socially the clock had a more radical influence than any other machine, in that it was the means by which the regularisation and regimentation of life necessary for an exploiting system of industry could best be attained. The clock provided the means by which time—a category so elusive that no philosophy has yet determined its nature—could be measured concretely in more tangible forms of space provided by the circumference of a clock dial. Time as duration became disregarded, and men began to talk and think always of 'lengths' of time, just as if they were talking of lengths of calico. And time, being now measurable in mathematical symbols, became regarded as a commodity that could be bought and sold in the same way as any other commodity.

George Woodcock, “The Tyranny of the Clock”