



[Front Cover]

# *Life of the Mind*

**January 20 - March 15, 2020**

**Burak Delier, Vesna Pavlović  
and Pilvi Takala**



Pilvi Takala, *The Trainee*, 2008 [still], QuickTime video 13:52

## Life of the Mind

*Life of the Mind* is an exhibition comprising three parts, each probing what exactly employers are asking of us while we are on the job. Any and all work requires an output, and when we sell our labor, that labor consists of some combination of physical and mental energies. Through the projects in this exhibition, Burak Deller, Vesna Pavlović and Pilvi Takala examine the context and costs of that transaction on our mental lives.

The title of the exhibition is taken from moral philosopher Hannah Arendt's (1906–1975) final work of the same name. *Life of the Mind* (posthumously published in two volumes in 1977 and 1978) begins with a quote from Cato the Elder (234–149 BCE) "*Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself*". Arendt saw modernity as an age of bureaucratic administration filled with anonymous labor, dominated by elites who manipulate public opinion. Arendt's perspective was shaped by her experience under totalitarianism, and it is as relevant in the present day as ever. Today, the consequences of neoliberal capitalism and increased authoritarianism here and elsewhere are exponentially amplified by deindustrialization, automation and Artificial Intelligence, which are reshaping not only workplaces, but the mental lives of white collar workers all over the globe.

We all seek to be free, and to think and do what we want, but in order to survive under any economic system, most of us need to go to work. Many of us take pride in our careers, and for those who do, it's an integral part of our personal identity. Through the work of these three artists, we don't find satisfying or tidy answers to questions about personal and professional boundaries, but instead are given further avenues of inquiry about the norms, compromises, and control that our workplaces offer in exchange for what we hope amounts to a living wage.

Paul M. Nicholson, Director Martin Art Gallery







Burak Delier  
*Crisis & Control*, 2013  
HD Video, 14:09  
On loan courtesy of the artist

Burak Delier's *Crisis & Control* fluctuates between performance video and documentary, and looks at how our professional careers shape our personal lives, expectations, and values. The performers in this piece are real office workers and managers who practice yoga, and these are their own unscripted statements in response to questions from the artist.

Workers twist and contort themselves while Delier interviews them about their careers, relationships in the office, and personal lives at home. Earnest responses are filled with corporate jargon that illustrate the personal and professional synergy required to advance in white collar professions. By hearing testimonials that describe professional aspirations and concerns mixed with management strategies, we gain insight into how an array of individuals constitute and perpetuate corporate culture. Each speaker is dressed for work while performing yoga poses in an office environment which results in a humorous juxtaposition against the professional backdrop. The absurdity of this scenario reminds us of short-lived corporate wellness trends, but leaves us considering the frame of mind required of individuals aspiring to be successful in corporate capitalism.









Vesna Pavlović  
"¡No pasarán!" and "Kolona", Đorđe Andrejević Kun.  
Inside the Federal Executive Council Building, Belgrade, Serbia, 2003-2005  
ed. of 12, Archival Pigment Print 31" x 44"



Vesna Pavlović  
Collection/Kolekcija  
Archival Pigment Print, 31" x 44", Ed. of 12  
Martin Art Gallery Permanent Collection, gift of David Trachtenberg.

This series of photographs looks into two important art collections, The Chase Manhattan Art Collection, in New York, and the Palace of Federation, in Belgrade, Serbia. Both collections are important to the idea of the post WWII cold war culture. Both were established with the idea to beautify the working environment, but also to establish a system of power, in two different social, political and economic systems. After many attempts to gain permission to photograph inside the Chase Manhattan building, in downtown Manhattan, in itself a famous architectural monument, I found out that the art of the collections had shifted to different locations, following the logic of capitalism and technology of rapid change, whereas the rooms and collections of former Yugoslav republics stayed intact, facing an unknown future of concession among former republics.

Text courtesy of the artist





From: X  
Sent: 26. helmikuuta 2008 15:00  
To: Z  
Subject: Markkinoinnin trainee  
Importance: High

Moi

S krs:n aulassa on koko päivän istunut tyttö, joka kertoo nimekseen Johanna ja on kuulemma markkinoinnin trainee. Olsin vaan kysymyt, onko teillä trainee kateissa ja onko ok, että hän tekee ajatustyötä koko päivän?

X

From: X  
Sent: February 26 2008 15:00  
To: Z  
Subject: Trainee at marketing  
Importance: High

Hi

A girl, who said her name is Johanna, has been sitting in the 5th floor hall. She says she is a trainee in Marketing. I just wanted to ask, did you lose a trainee and is it ok, that she is doing brain work all day?

X

Pilvi Takala  
*The Trainee*, 2008  
QuickTime video 13:52  
On loan courtesy of the artist

*The Trainee* has been produced in collaboration with international accounting firm Deloitte. In order to realize the project, the artist worked for a month as trainee 'Johanna Takala' in the marketing department of Deloitte, where only a few people knew the true nature of the project.

During the month-long intervention, an initially normal-seeming marketing trainee starts to apply peculiar working methods. Gradually she shifts from the position of someone others believe to be normal, to the object of avoidance and speculation. The videos and slideshow reveal a spectrum of ways of handling the odd member in a group. Sincere interest and bewildered amusement are juxtaposed with demands directed at the superior regarding the strangely behaving worker.

We see the trainee sitting at her workstation in the consultants' open-plan office space, or in the tax department library all day doing nothing. One of the videos shows her spending an entire day in an elevator. These acts or rather the absence of visible action slowly make the atmosphere around the trainee unbearable, forcing the colleagues to search for solutions and to come up with explanations for the situation.

Masking laziness in apparent activity and browsing Facebook during working hours belong to the acceptable behavioral patterns of a work community. However, sitting in front of an empty desk with your hands of your lap, just thinking, threatens the peace of the community and breaks the colleagues' concentration. When there is no ready method of action, people initially resort to avoidance, which fails to set their mind at ease if the situation drags on.

What provokes people about this 'non-doing', aside from the strangeness, is the element of resistance. The non-doing person isn't committed to any activity, so they have the potential for anything. It is non-doing that lacks a place in the general order of things, and thus it is a threat to order. It is easy to root out any ongoing anti-order activity, but the potential for anything is a continual stimulus without a solution.

Text courtesy of the artist

**Burak Dölier** (Turkey) lives and works in Istanbul and Berlin. His work explores the notions of freedom, spontaneity, improvisation and creativity - believing that freedom is not the outcome of a pre-determined script, but is created from incertitude, suspense and desire. By incorporating guerrilla art tactics and employing the strategies of the neo-liberal media, his artistic practice questions his position as an artist and the difficulties associated with negotiating the politics of this situation. His works have been exhibited at the Taipei Biennale, Taipei, Taiwan; 'Save As' Triennale Bovisa, Milano, Italy; Museum Bochum, Bochum Germany; the 7<sup>th</sup> Bucharest Biennial; the 10<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial; Whitechapel Gallery, London UK; at Basis BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht NL; and at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo NY. His writings on art and politics have been published by Koç University Press, under the title "Scenarios of the Art World" (2016). Currently he is an Assistant Professor in Fine Arts Faculty, Sakarya University.

**Pilvi Takala** (Finland) is an artist living and working between Berlin and Helsinki. Her video works are based on performative interventions in which she researches specific communities in order to process social structures and question the normative rules and truths of our behavior in different contexts. Her works show that it is often possible to learn about the implicit rules of a social situation only by its disruption. Her work has been shown at MoMA PS1, New Museum, Palais de Tokyo, Kiasma, Kunsthalle Basel, Manifesta 11, CCA Glasgow, International Film Festival Rotterdam, HotDocs, Witte de With, and the 9th Istanbul Biennial. Takala won the Dutch Prix de Rome in 2011 and the Emdash Award and Finnish State Prize for Visual Arts in 2013. During the run of this exhibition, it was announced that Pilvi Takala will represent Finland in the Venice Biennial in 2021.

**Vesna Pavlović** (Serbia) lives and works in the United States, where she is an Associate Professor of Art at Vanderbilt University in Nashville TN. Her projects examine the evolving relationship between memory in contemporary culture and the technologies of photographic image production. Her investigations of photographic representation in political and cultural histories focus on photographic archives and related artifacts. Pavlović was a Fulbright Scholar Award for 2016 and has exhibited widely, including solo shows at the Phillips Collection in Washington DC, the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Museum of History of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, and the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento. She participated in a number of group shows, including the Untitled, 12th Istanbul Biennial, 2011, in Turkey; The MAC – Metropolitan Arts Center in Belfast, Northern Ireland; Württembergischen Kunstverein, Düsseldorf, Germany; KUMU Art Museum in Tallinn, Estonia; Zachęta, The National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, Poland; City Art Gallery, in Ljubljana, Slovenia; the New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall, UK; the Bucharest Biennale 5, in Bucharest, Romania; Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, USA; Le Quartier Center for Contemporary Art in Quimper, France; NGBK in Berlin, Germany; Photographers' Gallery in London and Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, UK; and FRAC Center for Contemporary Art in Dunkerque, France.



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