

CRISTINA LUCAS IT'S CAPITAL

CENTRO GALEGO DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEA
Santiago de Compostela

Curated by Manuela Villa

Opening: 17th October at 8 pm
From 17th October 2014 to 22nd February 2015
First floor

Produced by:



In collaboration with:



Supported by:



CRISTINA LUCAS IT'S CAPITAL

EVERYTHING IS CAPITAL. A POSSIBLE ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY OF CAPITALISM

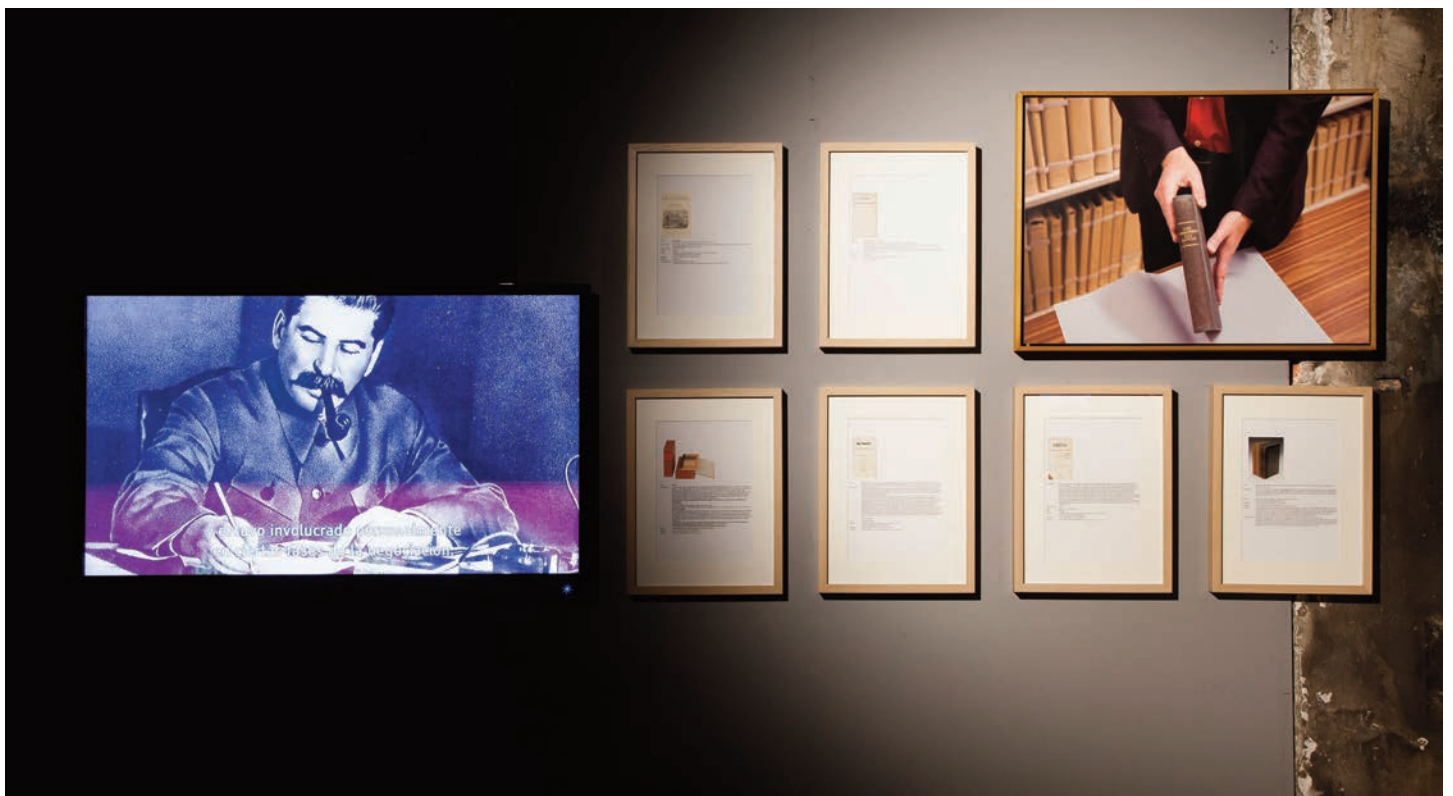
It's Capital revolves around the treatise on political economics which had the greatest significance throughout the 20th century, Karl Marx's *Capital*, the first volume of which was released in 1867. A treatise which was the fruit of Marx's perseverance in fathoming the workings of an incipient industrial capitalism, and the relationships between capital and workers in the great factories. Accordingly, *It's Capital* analyses the undue domination that capital has in our way of understanding the world, in our social relationships, in our aesthetic and philosophical perception, etc. It is this condition that the economic system has over the human being, individuals and societies, which Cristina Lucas highlights in this project.

The work by Cristina Lucas to which we have become accustomed is not immune to a certain irony and subtle sense of humour. In *It's Capital* the artist analyses some of the current capitalist system's

principal unknowns, paradoxes and challenges, in a work which could be labelled political, insofar as it concerns citizens of the polis's responsibility to understand the society around them. From the distance afforded her by her role as an artist, and which for Jacques Rancière is precisely what renders art political, Lucas always seems to have one eye on history, availing herself of it to improve our understanding of the present.

As a nod to this narrative interest, I would propose interpreting this exhibition as a sort of subjective (fictitious) historical account of capitalism. Thus, at the outset, during industrial capitalism, the key element for analysing the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist in Marxist theory was surplus value. The story continues with the disappearance of the gold standard during the inter-war period, and moves onto speculation-based financial capitalism. A thirst for profit which even has a bearing on absolute concepts, such as death, art and life. The account ends with a reflection on the future of a system based on the physical impossibility of access to wealth being global. This historical account coincides with the four works which make up *It's Capital: Plusvalía* (Surplus Value), *La cámara del tesoro* (The Treasure Vault), *Capitalismo filosófico* (Philosophical Capitalism) and *El superbién común* (Super Common Good).

Plusvalía comprises a video and a set of documents which, as a whole, refer to a concept coined by Marx. Surplus value is defined by Marx, in Volume I of *Capital*, as the excess of value produced by the labour of workers over the wages they are paid. A value which the capitalist gratuitously appropriates. Marx warns that 'Without this value there would be no capitalist society.' The 22-minute video recounts the history of the manuscript of Marx's



Cristina Lucas: *Plusvalía*, 2014. *Cristina Lucas. Es capital*, exhibition view, Matadero Madrid, 2014. Photo: Paco Gómez / Matadero Madrid



Cristina Lucas: *La cámara del tesoro*, 2014. *Cristina Lucas. Es capital*, exhibition view, Matadero Madrid, 2014. Photo: Paco Gómez / Matadero Madrid

Capital: his research in the Library of London, his multiple revisions, the relationship between Marx and Engels, the latter's difficulty in reading the former's complex manuscripts, the resting place of the manuscript throughout the inter-war period, and its current location. The video revolves around a wonderful, unique interview given by Marien van der Heijden, Head of Collection Development at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the institution which currently preserves what remains of the original manuscript. Van der Heijden relates, at times in the first person, an absorbing story seen through the eyes of the artist.

The video is the result of Lucas' determination to ascertain the price (exchange value) that the famous treatise on political economics would have today. A price which highlights the perverse nature of an economic system which transforms a text that arose from the very need to denounce capitalist speculation into a fetish. Thus, in addition to the video and a copy of the manuscript, we are shown some of the valuations that Lucas obtained from auction houses such as Christie's, which in 2012 sold a first edition of the trilogy for 61,673 US dollars. An open investigation which runs its course.

RELICS OF MERCANTILISM

The relationship between the use value and the exchange value in a society governed by the regulations of financial capitalism is also at the foundation of *La cámara del tesoro*, two photographs of the gold stored in the Bank of Spain's Reserve, and which appear to be relics of the gold standard system, the period during which this precious metal set the value of the country's currency

and its wealth. An image which in the current crisis setting does not cease to have a melancholic aura which harks back to supposedly happier times.

The Treasury Vault is a 2,500 square-metre space located 48 metres below the Bank of Spain building in Madrid. The strong room, which survived the bombardments of the Civil War, was inaugurated in 1936 and houses 7,400 gold ingots. A place full of curiosities. The gold is reached by way of two lifts, a 15-tonne armour plated door, a moat and two other armour plated doors, each weighing 13 tonnes. Between the first and second doors, we have to cross a bridge over a moat which would be flooded at the first sign of danger. After overcoming these obstacles, accompanied by members of the bank staff with their respective keys for opening the doors, we are confronted by gold coins and ingots piled on shelves designed by the engineer, Alexandre Gustave Eiffel. It is somewhat heart-warming to see how handwritten notices inform us of the contents of the packets holding the gold coins. This is the first photograph ever taken by an artist in the tunnels leading to the Treasury Vault. A work which recreates one of an artist's principal functions, that of popularising what the State hides away.

If for Marx, surplus value would seem to explain the principal form of the capitalist system's exploitation of the citizen in mercantilism and industrial capitalism, after the Second World War, and with the onset of the financial capitalism that we know so well today, the forms of exploitation begin to be somewhat subtler. The free movement of capital, globalisation and the control of the productive economy by large financial corporations

all alter the relationship the worker has with capital, as well as our social and personal relationships. Thus, there are also thinkers who explain the new forms of domination using terms such as 'biopower.' Described by the creator, Michel Foucault, as the practice by modern states of exploiting 'numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations.'¹ The worker would be dominated by capital, not now through the expropriation of the value of his work, but through his desire. Thus, capitalism would dominate our bodies through capital bursting into concepts such as love, life, death, art, fear or pain.

It is precisely this speculation with intangibles which *Capitalismo filosófico* analyses. A search to understand the relationship between philosophical concepts with which companies trade and their trading activity. Nine videos comprising a series of interviews in which Cristina asks spokespersons from more than 70 companies what for them constitutes death, beauty, art, life, truth, justice, the citizen, space, time, fear and pain. A subtle, elaborate exercise in maieutics (i.e. of 'giving birth' through questioning) which highlights what each individual truly believes—or fails to believe—about these concepts. In order to extract these definitions, Lucas prepares a lengthy journalistic interview on matters that are vital for companies. She asks them whether their companies are flourishing, if they are being affected by the economic crisis, or whether there is anything about which, as a brand, they feel particularly proud. And within this long

questionnaire, she inserts, as a just another question, something which a journalist would not normally ask, but if we think carefully about it, it makes good sense to inquire about: What is death for a funeral company? What is beauty for a cosmetic surgery clinic or a model agency? What is truth for a notary's office? What is time for a watchmaker?

The result is a series of random subjective definitions, which brings us closer to an overriding definition of some of the matters which have concerned humanity since the dawn of civilisation. Lawyers, gallery owners, managers of insurance companies, notaries and make-up artists bring us closer to that notion of the world that we have constructed in capital-dominated societies. Thus from a model agency we learn that 'a beautiful person is one who transmits some type of feeling to you or whose marketed product has a real impact on you'² or from a cosmetic surgeon that 'beauty lies in maintaining certain patterns.'³ A real estate agent will tell us that space is 'one of the greatest luxuries'⁴ and the watch-making company that time 'is being transformed into slavery because we have to live in *real-time*'⁵, or that 'in our society, wasting time is the same as wasting your life.'⁶ This series of definitions gives shape to a fairly approximate (and devastating) portrait of the role these concepts have in our societies, highlighting the fact that understanding how capitalism works, as Marx realised, is capital for understanding our world.



Cristina Lucas: *Capitalismo filosófico*, 2014. Cristina Lucas. *Es capital*, exhibition view, Matadero Madrid, 2014. Photo: Paco Gómez / Matadero Madrid



Cristina Lucas: *Superbién común. Abrigo de linca*, 2014



Cristina Lucas: *Superbién común. Manolos*, 2014

SPECULATION IN A WORLD OF LIMITED GOODS

In *El superbién común* the artist analyses, through five photographs mounted on five light boxes, one of the principal paradoxes of the capitalist system: the scarcity of resources and our planet's inability to generate sufficient wealth if all its inhabitants aspire to a model of life based on the unlimited consumption of goods and services. A series of individuals with Asian features struggle to use a European luxury object, such as an Eames armchair, a lynx coat, a luxury Mercedes motorcar, a thoroughbred horse or Manolo Blahnik footwear. These are the lucky ones who have managed to reach the level of well-being enjoyed in wealthy countries. Nonetheless, behind this worldwide—and apparently democratic—craving for comfort is an environmental impossibility, measured through values such as the carbon footprint, an indicator which evaluates the impact of a determined way of life on the planet, comparing it with the ecological capacity of the Earth to regenerate its resources. According to data from the Global Footprint Network for 2007, it is calculated that we would need two planets like our own to enable six billion human beings to live like a typical middle-class French citizen.⁷

The photographs in *El superbién común* are presented in the same format as the millions of advertising posters that flood our streets and, through striking colours and canned smiles, manage to awaken in the viewer an initial reaction of desire, which within a few seconds is transformed into uneasiness, as we realise that this is, in fact, an acerbic criticism of our exacerbated and individualistic consumerism.

A piece of bitter depth whose title, nonetheless, would appear to open up a space of opportunity. The common good, defined by dictionaries as 'the advantage or benefit of all people in society or in a group', is a concept which is enjoying increasing prominence in the political debate. Thus, for the American philosopher, Michael Sandel, the renunciation of moral and religious argument in politics, in the decades following the Second World War, prepared the way for the market triumphalism of the past three decades (health, justice, culture). But, like others, Sandel defends policies for the common good, which entails thinking of ourselves as citizens and not simply as consumers.⁸ Something which is extremely difficult in a setting in which everything 'is capital.'

Manuela Villa

- 1 Michel Foucault, "The Will to Knowledge", Vol. 1, *The History of Sexuality*, Penguin, London, 2008.
- 2 Tony Parra, manager of Stars Model Agency.
- 3 Dr. Moisés Amselem, cosmetic surgeon at the Moisés Amselem Clinic.
- 4 Kristina Szekely, sole director of KS Kristina Szekely.
- 5 Yann Reznak, director of Grassy.
- 6 José Carlos González Prieto, workshop manager of El Maestro Relojero.
- 7 <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/>.
- 8 *A New Politics of the Common Good*. Michael Sandel: *A New Citizenship. The Reith Lectures*. BBC Radio 4. (Recorded at George Washington University in Washington DC). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00lb6bt>.

CGAC

PRESS & COMUNICACION DEPARTMENT

Rúa Ramón del Valle Inclán 2

15703 Santiago de Compostela

Ph.: 981 546 632 / Fax: 981 546 625

cgac.prensa@xunta.es

www.cgac.org

galicia



**XUNTA
DE GALICIA**

Supported by:



moure