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Museum für Zeitgenössische Kunst
/ Musée d'Art Contemporain
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Press release

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Arthur Cordier

FREE COFFEE** NO SMARTPHONE FOR ETERNITY



Arthur Cordier. Kunst_Pflanzen. Exhibition view at Hgtomi Rosa, The Hague. 2021 © the artist

Arthur Cordier does to advertising what advertising does to public space.

“FREE COFFEE** NO SMARTPHONE FOR ETERNITY” is Arthur Cordier’s first solo exhibition in a museum. For the duration of the exhibition the artist provides IKOB with office plants and free coffee with a twist – making the institution’s public lobby ironically efficient and commercially welcoming. The artist’s analytical, playful approach to cycles of labour, advertising and consumption runs through each element of the exhibition. The artist is fascinated by flimsy motivational-management, corporate rhetoric, and self-proclaimed economic studies – the latter of which inspires the title of this exhibition.

The exhibition includes a new iteration of *Kunst_planten* (2021-22), for which Arthur Cordier borrows plants from creative agencies around Belgium and displays them in the exhibition space, inviting visitors to water them – again with a twist. Similarly to coffee, office plants are thought to increase employee productivity and satisfaction. By displacing these office plants into the exhibition space, companies may become less efficient themselves by transferring their productive tools to the exhibition space. These subtle transfers of immaterial resources – efficiency, attention, care – are among the artist's key competences.

Vinyl lettering on the vitrine of the museum acts simultaneously as a title, a promise, and an invitation to visitors, who are encouraged to enter the exhibition to receive free coffee, albeit with a caveat. A beverage that is considered key to the productive functioning of office workers, it is provided to the audience through an array of borrowed machines, a work entitled *Cofficeïne and Photosynthesis* (2022). The coffee cups remain attached to each machine, limiting the visitors' movements as they consume it (*when something is free, you are the product*). In turn, the coffee grounds will be collected and used as fertiliser to the office plants of museums and institutions in the region.

Cordier's practice is heavily invested in corporate language, often exposing its ubiquity and absurdity. The title of the exhibition is a reference to a study about the supposed sacrifices office workers would be willing to take to not have to give up on their daily coffee, and a sky-blue wall in the exhibition camouflages motivational quotes about optimizing management and efficiency. Meanwhile, the artist's series of 'landscape paintings' speaks to the less articulated aspects of our consumer economy. They are made of stretched truck tarpaulins, acting as a record of the essential but often overlooked labour related to shipping and logistics.

The artist's practice and his presentation at IKOB is motivated by a desire to counteract the efficiency of advertising by using commercial strategies against themselves, often in a tautological and parasitic manner. A *plant* is as much a term that defines a living organism characterised by photosynthesis, as it identifies a place where industrial or manufacturing work takes place. Drawing attention to our cyclical relationships with plants and coffee, the exhibition questions the notion of *growth* both as a botanical term and an economic conception of the future.

Arthur Cordier's solo exhibition at IKOB is a continuation of his Very Contemporary residency, realised in collaboration between Greylight Projects (Heerlen, NL) and IKOB. During the residency, spanning from September to November 2021, the artist was invited to develop research offering a new perspective on the particularities of the Euregio-Meuse-Rhine, responding to the distances, landscapes, and borders between the institutions of the Very Contemporary network.

This exhibition is realised with the support of Mondriaan Fonds and Very Contemporary.

Biography:

Arthur Cordier's (b. 1993, BE, lives and works in The Hague, NL) practice tackles the aesthetics of bureaucracy, entrepreneurship, and efficiency through relational, situational and context-specific works. They often self-reflect upon artistic practice and the entangled economies of art in a production-driven society. In addition to his practice he co-initiates the studio & project space The Balcony, The Hague (NL), and contributes as guest curator to Art au Centre Liège (BE).

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