

Dominic Palarchio

You had done nothing wrong

Untitled, 2022

Dye sublimation on aluminum,
white-out, artists frame
8.75 x 11.25 x 0.25 in
22 x 29 x 2 cm

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Locker, stainless steel, magnets, test
tubes, blood, plasma
17 x 66 x 13 in
43 x 168 x 33 cm

Peanut, 2020

Petroleum coke
4 x 5 x 7 in
10 x 13 x 18 cm

Untitled, 2022

Plastic, duct tape
40 x 24 x 1 in
102 x 61 x 3 cm

Dominic Palarchio

(b.1995 Brighton, Michigan) lives
and works in Brooklyn, New York.
He received a BFA at the College for
Creative Studies, Detroit (2018)
and an MFA from the Cranbrook
Academy of Art (2020).

Recent group shows include
Eponymous at M23, New York,
Homebody at the Cranbrook Art
Museum (currently on view), and the
FRONT International, Akron Art
Museum, Ohio (forthcoming).

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Across cultures and ideologies, the elephant represents wisdom, empathy, and memory. In the United States, the image of the elephant has been used for both amusement and politics. Think of the elephant frightened by a mouse, the elephant as an exotic circus act, or the elephant as the symbol of the “Grand Old Party.” Or, think of the elephant in the room.

The elephant in *this* room is roughly carved from petroleum coke, “petcoke.” This coal alternative and oil refinery byproduct produces a dust containing the carcinogen vanadium. Released when petcoke is transported or stored, this dust becomes an agent of environmental and health injustice, affecting primarily low-income neighborhoods in industrial cities. It is the material excesses of productive labor, transmuted into the body at home, at rest.

The artworks in Dominic Palarchio’s *You had done nothing wrong* are not metaphors. Their directness is important. Palarchio describes the existing objects that comprise his work as metonymic materials, reinscribed for their relation to lived realities and their specific position within a classed visual language. In concert with each other, the works in this room draw out the subtleties of the American working- and lower-middle-class in a moment of unfolding crisis.

Since the advent of capitalism, the worker’s body has been exploited for the value of its labor, increasingly mechanized over time. Frederick Taylor’s scientific management of the worker’s movements neutralized productivity in the name of profit. To be an efficient machine is neither good nor bad, it is simply a means to production. Workers trade autonomy for efficiency, gaining both wages and alienation from their labor. Today, whether scrolling on screens, taking a rideshare to a shift, or connecting to a sleep monitoring app overnight, we perpetually produce value through our alienation.

To this end, Palarchio’s framed and redacted resumes read like brutally honest epistles, baring it all to the hierarchy in hopes of brighter futures. Work experience describing jobs that don’t pay enough or poor working environments reflect the condition of the contemporary worker—a circuitous spiral of insufficiency. A locker—that transitional space in which one transforms from person to worker—locates this socioeconomic position spatiotemporally. The locker is scattered with a constellation of vials containing blood and plasma: *this is my body, this is my blood*. Our body made surplus; value for the taking. Stuck to the gallery window, a second, temporary window fashioned from plastic and duct tape as a quick fix for a busted car marks the personal vehicle as both a promise and a life-line. Gesturing towards the gig-economy and the precarity of the worker’s livelihood-cum-burden, this stopgap recalls the ineffective wages relied upon for basic mobility.

In a moment hailed for re-empowered workers, signaled simultaneously by the “great resignation” and the surge of union organization across the country, not all workers are reaping the benefits. The abundance of plasma “donation” centers nestled into strip malls between payday loan providers and fast food restaurants demonstrates this. Whether as a primary source of income or supplemental, selling plasma epitomizes the working- and lower-middle class situation in America. Workers are again cast as individuals, alienated from themselves and their labor, cyclically trapped by “easy” money and the possibility to transcend their socioeconomic position.

Like the American dream, the works in this exhibition are not without hope. Yet they beg the question: what is the cost of this hope? *You Had Done Nothing Wrong* reflects the contradiction of working class America: hope and hopelessness, the exercising of our bodily autonomy and the alienation from our bodies as a commodity frontier. By bringing together these various traces of embodied labor, Palarchio draws out the nuances of the contemporary proletariat position. In doing so, he also begins to unravel the worker from their reified labor, offering a path towards a new class consciousness.

-Thomas Huston