

The Green Gallery is pleased to present *Exceptions*, a collaborative exhibition by Claire Fontaine and Lucie Fontaine.

Over the last five years Claire Fontaine, a “Paris-based collective artist” and Lucie Fontaine, “an art employer,” have been in dialogue at different times and places like Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, New York, Paris and Stockholm. Though both work with similar forms and formats they have entirely separate practices and modes of presentation. *Exceptions* is their first collaborative exhibition.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a collaborative product of the Fontaine dialogue. The piece is a neon sign, which continuously alternates its message from “employer” to “employee.”

Employer/Employee at once utilizes the rhetorical themes of Lucie Fontaine and the typographic styles Claire Fontaine has deployed in previous works.

Exceptions also features Claire Fontaine’s sound piece entitled *Clearstream/Whitenoise*(2008). This piece refers to Clearstream, a banking system specialized in settling and ensuring transactions. *Clearstream/Whitenoise* (2008) functions noiselessly in the background, helping people to concentrate and inducing children to sleep. The white noise also has a particular frequency that absorbs all the other sounds and makes speech inaudible. In relation to the impossibility of discovering the truth about the international speculations that surround us, the white noise is supposed to evoke the narcotic sound of a waterfall or a continuous refrain that doesn’t signify anything but keeps us in a state of wordless regression.

Responding to Claire Fontaine's video *Suicide Stack* (2010) is Lucie Fontaine piece *Stack got Stuck* (2012). Both pieces refer to tax protester Joseph Stack’s piloting of a small plane into the Austin, Texas branch of the Internal Revenue Service. Stack’s suicide mission resulted in the death of one IRS agent out of the 200 federal and non-federal employees at the office complex. Stack got Stuck—a bouquet of flowers presented on the floor and lighted from above—is a deliberate act of condolence to Joseph Stack’s loved ones and friends as well as a signifier of a-temporality and a disconnection from reality.

Accompanying the exhibition the artists will release a text entitled “Exceptions” published by the Green Gallery Press. The limited edition book includes Claire Fontaine’s “Footnotes on The State of Exception” (2007) and Lucie Fontaine’s “The State of Exception (After Claire Fontaine)”.

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Claire Fontaine is a Paris-based collective artist, founded in 2004. After lifting her name from a popular brand of school notebooks, Claire Fontaine declared herself a “readymade artist” and began to elaborate a version of neo-conceptual art that often looks like other people's work. Working in neon, video, sculpture, painting and text, her practice can be described as an ongoing interrogation of the political impotence and the crisis of singularity that seem to define contemporary art today. But if the artist herself is the subjective equivalent of a urinal or a Brillo box – as displaced, deprived of its use value, and exchangeable as the products she makes – there is always the possibility of what she calls the “human strike.” Claire Fontaine uses her freshness and youth to make herself a whatever-singularity and an existential terrorist in search of subjective emancipation. She grows up among the ruins of the notion of authorship, experimenting with collective protocols of production, détournements, and the production of various devices for the sharing of intellectual and private property.

[www.clairefontaine.ws](http://www.clairefontaine.ws)

Lucie Fontaine is an art employer who lives and works in Colmar, France. Describing herself as an “art employer,” Lucie Fontaine avoids harnessing her practice to a specific figure of the art field, preferring to cultivate a modus operandi driven solely by her relationship with two employees, a concept of self-generated labor similar to the Master-Slave dialectic presented by Hegel is his master-piece, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Her two art employees like to define her as the Jamie Lynn Spears of contemporary art: “pregnant and in search of easy success.” Thus, Lucie Fontaine incarnates the following three assumptions: 1) The anti-hierarchical perception of the art field, where artists, curators, gallerists, collectors, editors and critics are all considered “players” in the same game. 2) The theory of expanded practice, in which the artist is not only considered the “creator” of an artwork, but also a cultural operator able to write, manage galleries, curate, collect, and so on. 3) The consideration of the entire discourse around the artwork: conception / creation / production / presentation / distribution / communication / promotion.

[www.luciefontaine.com](http://www.luciefontaine.com)

### *Exceptions*

The division of labour has metaphysical consequences that no one should ignore. Eichmann was just “doing his job” when he was piling up numbers of people to transport to concentration camps, that is why Arendt calls him a “clown”, he was playing his role, exerting his function, obeying the orders, he was just an employee.

The employee, as Max Weber has shown in his analysis on bureaucracy, is someone incredibly able to limit his field of competences, at the point that he ignores the consequences of his acts and just functions in the most efficient and docile way. According to Kracauer, whatever happens, employees have a morally healthy glow.

The employee is the equivalent of the fordist worker on the chain, but his alienation is deeper, because it doesn't only apply to his gestures but to his all persona and behaviour. Employees are the anonymous and unpunishable authors of any state of exception. These questions were at the origin of the collaborative neon by Lucie and Claire Fontaine that reads alternatively Employee Employer.

That employee and employer can be inter-exchangeable positions is a recent achievement of the market economy: flexibility has made changing job into a necessity and a very common experience. Paolo Virno, in a collective volume published in 1990 entitled "Sentiments from down here" tried to make the toll of the Eighties without only focusing on the obviously negative aspects of the time. The Eighties have been times of major economical and ethical transformations, people from the western world brutally learned then about professional flexibility and existential metamorphosis. This change left three dominant affective tonalities that still persist and according to Virno are "opportunism, fear and cynicism in the age of disenchantment". These three types of affects, typical of the new worker – the one that must be able to easily switch from being an employee to becoming an employer and vice versa - are very much linked to each other: the fear of losing one's position or job leads to catch any available opportunity and the behaviour that accompanies this attitude is what is commonly defined as cynical.

There are in fact employees of a specific type that have been responsible for some major world changes in the past four years. Anonymous types behind their computer or their smart-phone, selling and buying "things" for banks and financial structures have caused the deepest economical crisis in history. The trader is the anti-hero of the twenty-first century, the irresponsible and cynical idiot that doesn't see the long term consequences of his acts, and the bank is his habitat, a place where the most anti-charismatic human beings have found their sordid den, from which they oppress and defraud everybody.

These silent movements of capital going from screen to screen, from an electronic interface to the other as anonymous numbers, like the ones that Eichmann was writing down and registering, are at the core of Claire Fontaine's sound piece from 2007 entitled *Clearstream*.

We can read on Clearstream's official website that "the world's entire financial system is built on trust. When assets are traded, both parties must be sure they will receive their part of the transaction. Given the complexity, speed and quantity of assets involved, a fast, secure and trusted third-party is absolutely essential for settling transactions." This third party is Clearstream, a banking system specialized in clearance and settlement. The poetical fusion of the words stream and clear recalls the sound and the image of a fountain, or the idea of a recycling system that enters exploited people's sweat and blood on one hand and miraculously spits out a transparent and healthy fluid on the other. In fact Clearstream is also the name of a wastewater treatment system that, "through aeration and clarification, provides a proper environment for aerobic bacteria and other micro-organisms that convert the incoming sewage into clear, odorless, and organically stable water." The ageless dream of quickly cleaning profit from the traces of pain and theft is perfectly exemplified by Clearstream this "third party" between exploited and exploiters. This system has been twice denounced as a source of major frauds in the past years. In *Révélation* (2001), by investigative reporter Denis Robert and ex-Clearstream banker Ernest Backes, Clearstream was accused of being an international platform for money laundering and tax evasion via an illegal system of secret accounts (the "Clearstream Affair"). In Spring 2004, a "Second Clearstream Affair" began, which attracted more attention in 2006. Peripheral to the primary Clearstream Affair, it accused several French political figures, industrial leaders, and members of the secret services of maintaining secret accounts at Clearstream, which allegedly were used to transfer kickbacks in a France-Taiwan frigates scandal.

Claire Fontaine gave the title of Clearstream to a sound piece, which consists in white noise diffused in the exhibition space. The peculiarity of the white noise is to help people's concentration and to induce sleep. The white noise also has a particular frequency that absorbs all other sounds and makes speech inaudible. In relation to the impossibility of discovering the truth about the international speculations that surround us, the white noise is supposed to evoke the narcotic sound of a waterfall or a continuous refrain that doesn't signify anything but keeps us in a state of wordless regression.

A bouquet of artificial flowers will be shown in the gallery in memory of the late father of one of the gallery owners who recently passed away. This simple homage by Lucie Fontaine evokes the tradition of still life but also the photograph by Christopher Williams of a bouquet of flowers in memory of the dead artists Bas Jan Ader and Christopher D'Arcangelo.

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