

Editorial

Exhibition title: The Gearwheel, Hardworking Hands, and the Tired Exhibition Visitor
Artists: Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė and Petras Kalpokas, Irena Haiduk, Morta Jonynaitė, Tomasz Kobialka, Ieva Rižė, and Șerban Savu
Curator: Vaida Stepanovaitė
Dates: 2025.09.11 – 10.31
Venue: Editorial (Latako str. 3, Vilnius)
Photos: Editorial

A hearty welcome, dear visitor! Please make yourself comfortable on that chair in the middle, you must be tired after a long day's work. Below are a few words about what a century-old fresco has to do with all this, how the artworks you see navigate the tension where the body and labour meet, and how a chair ends up in the middle of the exhibition display instead of being relegated to an invisible corner as usual.

Everything began unexpectedly: with stumbling on a fresco in Kaunas, a city in the middle of Lithuania. If you are ever there, make your way to the city centre where the Chamber of Trade, Industry and Crafts towers over the street, and go into the public library nestling on its corner. On your right, there will be three shirtless men holding a gearwheel above their heads. The scene is quite striking: bulging muscles and solemn faces, the men are straining under the act of the salutation of progress, incessant growth and mass production. The labourers look eerily alike, even their trousers are tied in the same way. They have been stripped of their identity, appearing only in a productive function, the hands having become a work tool not unlike the gearwheel on a production line.

There is no name for this fresco. On asking around, a poignant title comes up, Labour, and the year 1938. It is more surprising to find out that the fresco was created by Petras Kalpokas, a well-known painter in modern Lithuanian art history for his symbolic country landscapes. For this commission for the Chamber of Trade, an institution aspiring to national economic prosperity in a city with a significant industrial present (now the past), the artist's eyes saw labour in its utmost drudgery.

The exhibition is not meant to be a serious historical survey of Kalpokas' work, even if an appropriate inquiry into the letters and other archival material has been made. Nor is what you see a collection of artists' responses to it. Labour is rather a thread pulled by nimble fingers through diverging narratives: the history of art and labour, their polished surfaces, and all that is lurking beneath them. And of a body amid all this labour, especially the tired body glistening with sweat and tears, nursing sore limbs after a day in an unheated studio, and rubbing the eyes drying out in front of a laptop screen.

Serious historical survey or not, there is a lot to say about the timing. Creating the fresco in 1938, Kalpokas did not know that he was monumentalising labour just before it was dragged through decades of great ideological reorientation, brought to the region with Soviet and

socialist times. Passing away in 1945, he did not witness what happened afterwards, when political and economic systems that were regarded as too large to fail did indeed fail, and the flow of capital took labour in all directions. Nevertheless, the artist might have guessed that the wheel was to go on spinning, ever faster, before slipping from its sweaty grip and taking off on its own.

Let us now delve deeper into our imagination. After finally confirming the sketches, and agreeing on the payment by the clients, one morning Kalpokas drags large bags into the Chamber of Trade, Industry and Crafts. He has many tools at his disposal: brushes and paint thinner, and work boots and shirts that do not mind being splattered with paint, a tight bunch of rags, and metal buckets. He sets up the scaffolding by the entrance, leaving only a narrow way through for the staff at the Chamber of Trade flowing in and out their offices, and begins painting. As the hours pass, the artist feels his wrist getting sore and his elbow tingling, and the wheeze where the spine crooks into his right lung is climbing octaves. While he is on the scaffolding, he regrets the time he has lost painting to his heart's desire, idyllic scenes of birch trees leaning over a languid bend in a river in the Lithuanian countryside. But they do not pay well, if at all. On the other hand, the fee for this fresco will go into finally building a house in Kaunas for him and his wife. Partly evidenced by the archives, and partly a figment of the imagination, the scene is not so distant from artists' labour today. Just with more project applications.

While you feel your body sinking into the softness of the chair, or maybe you are standing around with a piece of paper in your hands searching for a spot to lean on, labour peeks at you through a crack. Don't worry: hide yourself away, and enjoy this side of the curtain for once.

The exhibition 'The Gearwheel, Hardworking Hands, and the Tired Exhibition Visitor' is created by and dedicated to workers: the archivists, the readers and writers of letters, the budget calculators, the artists, their childminders and family members, the technicians who are also or primarily artists, the curators, the visitors who drop in on the exhibition after a long day's work, and the gallery attendants who are quietly observing them.

The exhibition features the artists **Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė** and **Petras Kalpokas**, **Irena Haiduk**, **Morta Jonynaitė**, **Tomasz Kobialka**, **Ieva Rižė**, and **Şerban Savu**. It is curated by **Vaida Stepanovaitė**. The fresco Labour by Petras Kalpokas was researched by **Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė**. The exhibition architecture was designed by **Gabrielė Černiavskaja**, with technical implementation by **Matas Šatūnas**. Communication design was by **Nerijus Rimkus**. The texts were translated and edited by **Rosana Lukauskaitė** and **Joseph Everatt**. The exhibition is overseen and visitors are welcomed by **Anna Chostegian**.

The participants would like to thank the IDEA Foundation (the initiators of the Romanian Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale), the Art Workers' Union of Lithuania, Edgaras Gerasimovičius, Nida Art Colony, FINTA+ BAUEN, Rupert, Radio Web MACBA, Conditions Studio Programme and Yuri Pattison, Vitalija Jasaitė and Neringa Černiauskaitė, and the staff of the Kaunas Studies Department of the Oak Grove (Ažuolynas) Kaunas County Public

Library for their kind assistance in finding material about the life and work of Petras Kalpokas in Kaunas.

The exhibition is funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture and Vilnius City Municipality.

The exhibition can be visited at Editorial Wed–Fri 3–7 pm, Sat 12–4 pm, until October 31.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a program of events – follow for updates.

Captions:

01. *The Gearwheel, Hardworking Hands, and the Tired Exhibition Visitor*, 2025. Exhibition view at Editorial, Vilnius.
02. Morta Jonynaitė, *Dimpa*, 2025. Dyed hand-woven linen, 61 x 63 x 20 cm, 61 x 63 x 20 cm
03. Morta Jonynaitė, *Dimpa*, 2025. Dyed hand-woven linen, 61 x 63 x 20 cm (detail)
04. Ieva Rižė, *Swallow 1* and *Swallow 2*, 2024. Wood, metal, synthetic hair, adaptable height, 35 x 14 cm, 33 x 12,5 cm
05. Ieva Rižė, *Swallow 1*, 2024. Wood, metal, synthetic hair, 33 x 12,5 cm
06. Ieva Rižė, *Swallow 2*, 2024. Wood, metal, synthetic hair, 35 x 14 cm
07. Tomasz Kobialka, *The Optimal Design of Ponzi Schemes in Finite Economies*, 2025. CNC milled aluminum, enamel paint, 30 x 21 x 2,6 cm, 30 x 21 x 2,2 cm
08. Tomasz Kobialka, *The Optimal Design of Ponzi Schemes in Finite Economies*, 2025. CNC milled Aluminum, enamel paint, 30 x 21 x 2,6 cm
09. Tomasz Kobialka, *The Optimal Design of Ponzi Schemes in Finite Economies*, 2025. CNC milled Aluminum, enamel paint, 30 x 21 x 2,2 cm
10. Șerban Savu, *Giants*, 2025. Oil on panel, 60 x 48 cm.
11. Șerban Savu, *Giants*, 2025. Oil on panel, 60 x 48 cm.
12. *The Gearwheel, Hardworking Hands, and the Tired Exhibition Visitor*, 2025. Exhibition view at Editorial, Vilnius.
13. Morta Jonynaitė, *Dimpa*, 2025. Dyed hand-woven linen, 61 x 63 x 20 cm
14. Morta Jonynaitė, *Dimpa*, 2025. Dyed hand-woven linen, 61 x 63 x 20 cm (detail)

15. Ieva Rižė, *Swallow 1 and Swallow 2*, 2024. Wood, metal, synthetic hair, adaptable height, 35 x 14 cm, 33 x 12,5 cm
16. Ieva Rižė, *Swallow 1*, 2024. Wood, metal, synthetic hair, adaptable height, 33 x 12,5 cm (detail)
17. Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė & Petras Kalpokas, *Glass, metal*, 2025. Engraved glass, metal, text on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm
18. Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė & Petras Kalpokas, *Glass, metal*, 2025. Engraved glass, metal, text on paper, 42 x 42 x 53 cm (detail)
19. Agnė Bagdžiūnaitė & Petras Kalpokas, *Glass, metal*, 2025. Engraved glass, metal, text, 42 x 42 x 53 cm
20. *The Gearwheel, Hardworking Hands, and the Tired Exhibition Visitor*, 2025. Exhibition view at Editorial, Vilnius.
21. Irena Haiduk, *Memory Implant*, 2019-ongoing. Desktop image, text.
22. Irena Haiduk, *Memory Implant*, 2019-ongoing. Desktop image, text.
23. *The Gearwheel, Hardworking Hands, and the Tired Exhibition Visitor*, 2025. Exhibition view at Editorial, Vilnius.