

Growers-Shippers Vegetable Association
SALINAS-WATSONVILLE, CAL.



— REASONS —

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|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Lockout | 3. Blacklisting |
| 2. Vigilante Terrorism | 4. Company Unionism |

Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union — No. 18211 of California

Cummins Printing & Litho. Co.



ACCOUNTING FOR LABOR AND TIME

Daisy Nam

with notes on artworks on
view by Diego Villalobos

8 + 8 + 8

Nearly 150 years ago, labor movements across the United States rallied to fight for an 8-hour workday and a 40-hour workweek. They used the slogan “8 hours of work, 8 hours of rest, and 8 hours of what you will.” In San Francisco on June 3, 1867, over 2,000 workers marched down Market Street, fed up with the 10, 12, 14 hour workdays and the duress on their bodies. The workers included longshoremen, plasterers, bricklayers, hod carriers, stonecutters, lathers, riggers, gas fitters, and house carpenters and painters. By December, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors had passed an 8-hour workday ordinance.

For this year’s Research Season, we focus on the theme of **LABOR**, using that nineteenth-century workers’ slogan as a framework and title. The framework was immediately confronted with permutating ideas and evolving questions, some of which are laid out here and in the exhibition on view. *Why spend time thinking about LABOR today, let alone dedicate an entire year of exhibitions, public programs, and reading groups?*

Thinking about labor is like thinking about the air we breathe. In that sense, Karl Marx’s famous quote from *The Communist Manifesto* lingers today: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.” Marx distinguishes labor in the modern era, with its constant revolutionizing of production

Otto Hagel and Hansel Mieth documented workers as seen in their photograph *Portrait of a Shipyard Worker, Mare Island* (1942) and Hagel’s series *Men and Machines*. They immigrated to the United States around 1930 during the Great Depression and were itinerant farm laborers.

Pedro Reyes’s irreverent *Baby Marx*, 2008, conceived as a television show by taps into the potential of mass entertainment as a tool for radical pedagogy. Featuring Reyes’s handmade puppets of Karl Marx and Adam Smith, the episode *Baby Marx* (OW) stages an encounter between these two figures at an Occupy Wall Street protest where they debate the social and economic issues of the time, with an unexpected twist at the end.

under capitalism that causes “uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions.” (1) There is no better place to have this discussion on labor than in San Francisco and the Bay Area, especially Silicon Valley. The rapid developments in technology today mold the future of work and reshape the workforce, not just in this region but nationally and globally. Just think of the neoliberal service economy that exponentially expanded with apps and digital platforms that allow people to hail rides, run errands, build furniture, deliver food, groceries, and packages—changing how people work, earn money, and function in society.

Labor is fundamental to life. Hannah Arendt distinguishes three activities of *vita activa* (active life) in *The Human Condition*: labor, work, action. (2) According to Arendt, the modern laboring society produces the necessities for life yet degrades human beings into “animal laborans.” In the literal sense, labor is contradictory to freedom, and thus nullifies any possibility for action. For Arendt, action is the highest form of *vita activa* since it preserves political bodies in society, and ultimately leads to freedom. *What is the relationship between labor and freedom? Can we keep our humanity while working?* Marx believed in the unalienated labor of making art. Consequently, there could be artistic and skilled expression and production beyond the market. Marx writes, “free labor, the composing of music for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort.” (3)

When it comes to art, Marcel Duchamp also believed that artmaking would allow freedom and agency. He stated, “Art is the only form of activity in which man, as man, shows himself to be a true individual. The rest is just applying things, following the rules, being an employee, a robot. Art is the only way to break out of this.” (4) Duchamp also equated breathing to work. In 1964, Calvin Tomkins interviewed the artist and asked how he spent his time now that he had stopped making art; Duchamp responded,

See Adelita Husni-Bey, *Prosthesis (Agriculture)* and *Prosthesis (Meat)* (both 2017), with current statistics about the effects of technology in the Bay Area and the United States. Kenneth Tam’s *Driver Brother* (2024) humanizes the precarious conditions of immigrant taxi drivers in New York City. With the rise of Uber, Lyft, and other apps, fewer riders take taxi cabs. Many drivers described their financial struggles as if they were drowning. Waymo is now displacing the human driver entirely.

Inspired by the workers at the Cornigliano Steelworks in Genoa, Italy, composer and Communist Party member Luigi Nono wrote *La Fabbrica Illuminata (The Illuminated Factory)* in 1964. In this work, heard intermittently in the Wattis’s outdoor walkway, Nono dramatizes the plight of factory workers in a piece that is both musically and politically avant-garde. Similarly, across time and space, Detroit techno legend Carl Craig discusses his musical practice and the working-class origins of techno in Detroit during a lecture at Dia Beacon. A transcription of this talk can be found in the Wattis’s reading area. Meanwhile, Harun Farocki’s film *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995), revisits the iconic film, of the same name, by the Lumière brothers, and its impact throughout film history, while also foreshadowing the disappearance of the worker in industry.

“Oh, I’m a breather, I’m a respirateur, isn’t that enough?” He asked, “Why do people have to work? Why do people think they have to work?” (5) Duchamp’s questions only lead to more: *How do you make a living? People need to work to live, but is it life? What makes a full life?*

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“Labor” and “work” are used as synonyms, but they are not entirely interchangeable. One definition of work refers to your job, and what you do or make for your job. Aside from Arendt’s definition, labor also means the organization of workers. It is the mass of workers. *Is labor always political?* If labor encompasses bodies of workers who can organize and mobilize—i.e., through unions—what kind of power do they have? Labor power is the capacity to work. Refusal of work en masse can stop capitalism dead in its tracks. When we hear Marx’s slogan “Workers of the World Unite!” we sense that anything could happen, and everything is possible.

See the selection from the Labor Archives and Research Center at San Francisco State University. The archives were founded in 1985 by trade union leaders, historians, labor activists, and university administrators to preserve the deep labor history of the San Francisco Bay Area. The archives contain records of many of the unions and labor councils, papers of many rank and file members, photographs, newspapers, ephemera, and an extensive oral history collection.

8 + 8 + 8 = 24 / 7 ?

Does the equation “8 hours of work, 8 hours of rest, and 8 hours of what you will” still hold true today? Housework was not accounted for in the 8 hours of work, and still is not. Work within the family home—predominantly relegated to women and including reproductive labor, raising children, cooking, and cleaning—can constitute well over 8 hours a day, and certainly takes away from 8 hours of rest. The “free-time gender gap” shows women have less free time than men to socialize, relax, and pursue their interests and hobbies. Domestic work regardless of gender is still not considered work, even today, although there were efforts made in the 1970s to redefine this labor. Silvia Federici’s *Wages Against Housework* argues that women should be compensated for doing housework.

She begins by writing, “They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.” (6) She continues, writing that housework imposed on women is “the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class.” (7) More alarming is the recent cultural return of the “tradwife,” who embraces the belief that women’s work should be devoted to the home and domestic life.

Today, the division of work and nonwork is disrupted, including time for sleep, eroding our 8 hours of rest. “[Late capitalism] renders normal the idea of working without pause and without limits,” writes Jonathan Crary of this 24/7 reality. (8) Our time, and our lives, have been reorganized: 8 hours of work is no longer limited or confined to the 8 hours that the labor movement once fought for. Even at work, play and rest are integrated into work spaces with games, meditation, and yoga rooms. Meals, snacks, and drinks are provided. As a result, the boundaries of human activities disintegrate as they are co-opted. 8 hours of “what you will” is swallowed up in this 24/7 immersion, where the activities of play, leisure, sex, and friendship have been converted into commodified or financialized forms. Media consumption as leisure, an American invention and favorite pastime, has now become social media, a 24/7 activity. And the dedicated weekend has all but disappeared for many workers.

Crary warns us about the techniques of “personalization, of individuation of machinic interface, and of mandatory communication.” (9) He continues, writing that “self fashioning is the work we are all given, and we dutifully comply with the prescription continually to reinvent ourselves and manage our intricate identities.” To be on social media is endless work. The economy of attention that brings excessive stimuli, information, and impulses leads to a scattered perception. Han Byung-Chul, in *The Burnout Society*, warns us in our current times of “overproduction, overachievement, and overcommunication.” (10) Han writes, “The mounting burden of work makes it necessary to adopt particular dispositions toward

On view is Harun Farocki’s *Bedtime Stories* (1977). Made for German public television, the filmmaker enlists his young daughters to dreamily narrate the systematic circulation of industry as bedtime stories blurring the lines of play, rest, and work.

In **8 HOURS OF REST**, Soil Thornton asks us to consider labor, productivity, liberation, and joy in their immersive installation at the Wattis starting January 2027.

In *Mine*, Liz Magic Laser collaborates with a surgeon to direct the Da Vinci Surgical System—a medical robot—to perform an autopsy on her purse. The video shows miniature robotic hands cutting through her belongings, exposing and destroying credit cards, ID, money, and makeup. Both terrifying and liberating, this invasive act transforms the purse into a disordered assemblage, speaking to how capitalism reduces identity to commodities and how destruction can paradoxically reveal a form of release and anxiety.

time and attention; this in turn affects the structure of attention and cognition. The attitude toward time and environment known as ‘multitasking’ does not represent civilizational progress.” (11) The performance of the body was under siege in earlier structures of capitalism; in our current 24/7 era, it is the limits of our cognitive abilities and psychic state that hold us back.

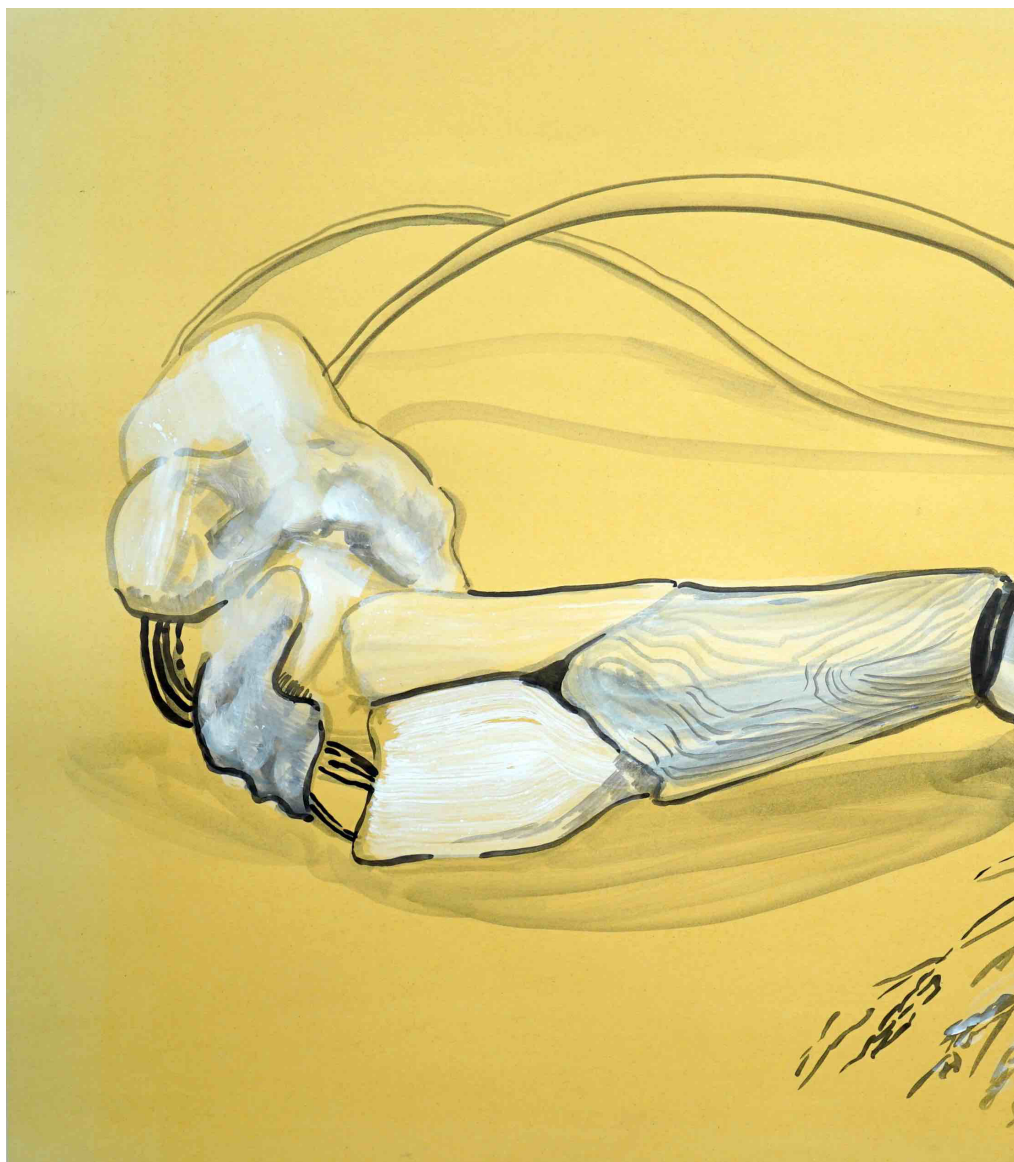
This impulse to overachieve and overproduce is replicated in art. The professionalization of artists creates the entrepreneur. See Lindsey White’s sign heeding us to “de-professionalize.”

996

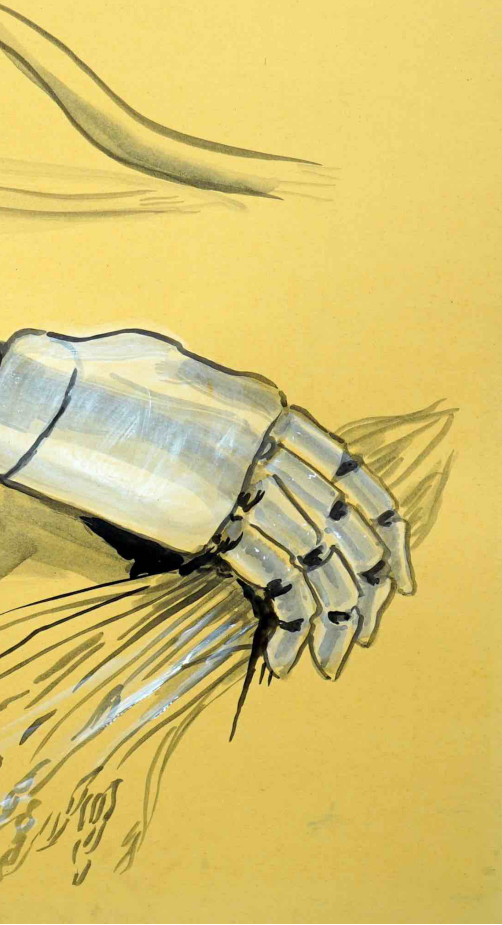
And yet, there is the recent trend of “996,” the new work-life combo in Silicon Valley. This refers to the new arrangement of labor that transpires from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week. It was first seen in China’s workforce. The billionaire founder of Alibaba, Jack Ma, has been a staunch proponent. Workers have pushed back on this new regimen, and the Chinese government has intervened, yet 996 has gained popularity in U.S. firms, especially start-ups.

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In the United Kingdom, contract workers are also known as “zero-hour” workers. In this case, employers do not need to guarantee a minimum number of working hours in a week. For instance, a mass text will be sent saying their work is not needed today; but when needed, they must be available for work. Zero-hour workers, much like independent, freelance, and gig workers in the United States, have experienced the erosion of their rights. They have lower wages, fewer protections, and greater instability and risk. While there is a sense of freedom as an independent worker to work untraditional hours or extra work on top of their other jobs, there is a cost for this freedom. While they make up 36 percent of the U.S. workforce, and are disproportionately Black and Latinx, the National Institute for Workers’ Rights reports that over half of gig workers do not have access to employer-based benefits, including healthcare or paid leave—and their rights as workers, including an 8-hour work day, are diminished.



Adelita Husni-Bey
Prosthesis - Agriculture, 2017
Indian ink and acrylic on paper



Government-funded labor projects such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the 1930s is something truly of the past. Fast forward to today: a recent news headline in *Forbes* reads, “2025 Job Cuts Have Already Surpassed All of 2024—DOGE, AI and Tariffs Are Biggest Causes.” (12) The year 2025 began with DOGE (the Department of Government Efficiency) eliminating over 280,000 federal employees in order to cut “waste, fraud, and abuse,” claims it failed to identify or achieve. The effects have been disastrous in gutting federal agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Education (DOE), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), to name just a few. The trickle-down effects have led to further cuts in non-federal organizational jobs, set back research and entire fields of study, and restricted services to those in need. The aftermath could last a generation or more.

Who is not accounted for in the workforce? During that 1867 rally in San Francisco, among the speeches for workers’ rights were also anti-Chinese diatribes. There was a fear of Chinese laborers working for less pay and taking all the available jobs. By 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed into law, which was the first significant move to restrict immigration in the United States based on race. The right to work was not for all. And today, we may still ask: *Who has the right to work?*

With fears about a jobless future with the rise of AI, we should remember that it was not the technological advances that restricted the labor force or dismantled social protections. There have always been drastic changes in labor based on technology, with machines, tools, and automation. Meanwhile, greed, corruption, imperialism, and the xenophobia of citizens and lawmakers lead to the decisions to withhold labor for some

We also should not forget the government’s history of enforced labor. Tania Candiani’s *Camouflage* (2020–25) is a textile-based installation seen at the front entrance of CCA. The artist was influenced by Dorothea Lange’s documentation of Japanese American women weaving camouflage nets for the U.S. War Department in 1942. These women, incarcerated in concentration camps such as Manzanar and the Santa Anita Assembly Center in California during World War II, were forced into military labor producing large-scale hemp nets intended to conceal tanks and equipment.

Chantal Peñalosa Fong’s film *Fong* (2023), showing in the screening room, explores her Chinese ancestry in relation to broader sociopolitical narratives of Chinese immigration to Mexico and the U.S. Also on view are her *untitled* videos made while she worked as a server in a restaurant in Tecate, Mexico. These works reflect on the passage of time through the act of waiting. Filmed during a period of economic decline and narco violence along the U.S.–Mexico border, the empty restaurant became both her workplace and studio, where daily routines turned into quiet acts of observation.

and exploit the labor of others. With the current shift of AI rapidly replacing jobs, lawmakers may create opportunities for all citizens, or create government programs like Universal Basic Income. But will they? There is a history of repetition that restricts, enforces, and enslaves labor to economically propel national economies. The formation of mass labor, and the accumulation of wealth and property based on robbery and exploitation, have been fundamental and recurring dynamics. *Can working citizens ever build a mass of resistance that breaks the perpetual cycles of debt and loss? How do we demand a form of government that ensures equality, security, health, and a peaceful and prosperous living for all?*



There is always a promise with new technology that human life will be improved—and as a result, there will be more time for “what you will.” What will people do with their new “free” time? And why all this counting when we talk about **LABOR**? Perhaps it is through accounting for our time that we come to understand who truly owns it. As we live, we labor, and time is our main resource.

See Josh Kline’s *Universal Early Retirement* (spots) (2016), videos showing what a post-work future could look like, especially with Universal Basic Income that acts as a safety net for people displaced by automation.

In Aria Dean’s *The Labor of Appearance*, on view, she writes: “Labor: work, especially physical work, bondage: the state of being a slave, theoretically, economically. These are two different kinds of alienation. The alienation of the worker from their product and the act of production, the slave. On the other hand, slavery is natal and alienation by way of social death, which is to say that a slave has no symbolic currency or material labor power to exchange. A slave, unlike a worker, does not enter into a transaction of value.”

- (1) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 58.
- (2) See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958)
- (3) Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1857 (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 701.
- (4) Marcel Duchamp, interviewed by James Johnson Sweeney, in *Wisdom: Conversations with the Elder Wise Men of Our Day* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958).
- (5) Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (New York: Badlands, 2013), 3.
- (6) Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press with the Power of Women Collective, 1975), 1.
- (7) *Ibid.*, 2.
- (8) Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), 9.
- (9) *Ibid.*, 72.
- (10) Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), 5.
- (11) *Ibid.*, 12.
- (12) Mary Whitfill Roeloffs, “2025 Job Cuts Have Already Surpassed All of 2024—DOGE, AI and Tariffs Are Biggest Causes, *Forbes*, July 31, 2025.

