

## An Attempt to Measure the Fragility of Time

*Lorenzo Benedetti*

With a new series of works Lennart Lahuis is emphasising several topics he has been focusing on in the past year: from the instability between language and material to the amplification of the spectrum of time. In his new body of works time plays an important role: from a collective iconography to a surreal dimension of mixing past and future, with a special reference to Fellini's masterpiece *8½*.

The big structure that was built on the set of Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini's famous film *8 ½* is reproduced by Lennart Lahuis in a large burned serigraph, which he placed on the floor of the exhibition space. An icon of cinematic surrealism has been transformed and translated into a fragile work of art. The dreamlike presence of the subject of Fellini's movie is reenacted by the fragility of being, the condition of instability of a precarious statement on the object and context of the work. Time seems to be suspended in the fragility of the used material. The icon of time is further represented by a series of watches from magazine advertisements, which have been silkscreened and burned creating a turbulent condition of disparity between the longevity of watch technology and the unbalanced form of time. The form of appropriation from a language of advertisement that is very stable in time representing the same topology of imagery that seems to be immortal. The concept behind the advertised eternity seems completely negated by the burned paper. Nonetheless the process of precisosity in Lahuis' work is evidenced by the transliteration on a more precious material through the process of silk-screening the advertisement.

The craquelure on the paper is evidence of an accelerated aging process. In this way it is not a mere critique of image consumption that Lahuis is realizing. It is not simply a moment of giving attention to the irresistible flow of image material that is streaming in our society. But there is a more complex analysis of time that the artist is realizing, trying to delve deeper into the concept of time and its difficult relationship with imagery. In the series of watches there is not only the images of the watches but also the mechanisms that are hidden inside these small machines. Their

miniature mechanisms, made by subtle engravings on the gears, show that time is not an abstraction, but a product of technology. And if the advertisement's message is leading us to believe that there is a perfect time for everybody who owns one of these precision machines, for the artist there is the memento mori of the impossibility to hold on to this perfection forever. The cruelty of time is showing in the wrinkles, the cracks and fractures in the materials the artist deploys.

Lahuis' series of works are extremely fragile due to this acceleration of the material's lifespan. One of the magic tools that an artist can use is the possibility of playing with time. By speeding up the image's lifespan and by tearing it apart, Lahuis seems to show the way that time and its acceleration is an artistic product. Time is imbedded in the work as an exhortation form. The presentation in plexiglass boxes already incorporates the museum status in the piece itself. The sophisticated perfection of time is translated into the fragile preservation of material. The translation of a desire of consumption into a preoccupation of preservation relates to the myth of the perfect object to the inevitable decay of everything. Translating the perfection of the image in the advertising world of watches into a dramatic document of the past.

In this process of working with time Lahuis is creating a broader way to deal with this subject. In the images that he appropriates there is a clear structure of measuring time. In Lahuis' works there is the consideration of time as a deteriorating process. The awareness of the images as a material, as an element that has to deal with the process of time and the consequences of it. The image that has to deal with its deterioration, its storage in a collective memory that will inexorably fade. The image as part of a surface on a support showing the dilemma of materiality versus immateriality, mortality or immortality, visibility or invisibility. There is an existential dimension in the images that is depending on a support that has to deal with the 'real' world, to something that will fade away with the passing of time.

In his 'Towards a Philosophy of the Image' Vilém Flusser underlines the concept of time inside the image: 'While wandering over the surface of the image, one's gaze takes in one element after another and produces

temporal relationships between them. It can return to an element of the image it has already seen, and 'before' became 'after'.

The critical act of Lahuis towards images is the art work on the floor showing a still from Federico Fellini's film *8 ½*: the big scaffolding structure that has this alarming meaning. The monumental structure that resembles a launching pad for a hypothetical starship is a symbol of the void, the uncanny and the missing. The movie that has a tautological and autobiographical connotation shows a critique of the film industry on one hand and the recurring tragedy of the blank page on the other: the void of inspiration. It is a film about the need to make a film, but for whom, for which industry of consumption or which political propaganda? Fellini wanted to be the author without a goal except that of reclaiming his own identity, which was imprisoned in his own past.

The fragility of Lahuis' work is reminiscent of the unbearable condition of the filmmaker in Fellini's movie, who is played by Marcello Mastroianni, one of Fellini's closest collaborators. This geometry of the unknown represented by the scaffolding is related to questions of life, religion, the mysterious source of creation that is the nightmare of the author who cannot escape the scene. This whole complex situation has been reassembled in an image that Lahuis has silkscreened and, after burning it, has left on the floor. The piece entitled 'Some...Cleanliness' cannot escape its condition of being. As in a cage the work, longer than two metres, cannot be moved or displayed in another way or place. It is there and it will be there until its end. The end of the image imprisoned in this material as an extreme condition of being shown. The big useless structure is now presented in a dramatic condition and a precarious state. On the back wall is the portrait of the film critic, who is questioning the why of the movie throughout the film. 'No ... Chaos [Carini Daumier]' shows the portrait of the cinematographic critic Carini, while he is smoking a cigarette. This overlapping of the image of the critic smoking and the burnt paper creates an emphasis on duration and consumption. The critic who is put in the complicated position of judging is almost hidden by a cloud of smoke that is slowly polluting the image.

Next to the series of watches and the stills from Fellini's masterpiece, Lahuis creates breaks between the corrupted images by showing several

sentences made from glass micro beads, which are affixed to the wall. Observation and measuring are the topics that these sentences refer to, for example; 'Astronomers evaluate sky-transparency with the faintest star visible to the unaided eye'. The semitransparent text is making a combination between the content of the sentence and its technical reproduction that requires special attention when reading it. Like the previous work about text where the artist used Listerine and window foil in order to create a script made of water that was in a precarious balance. This condition of instability often occurs in Lahuis' practice, when it deals with the subject of text and its reproduction. The relation between a complex technique that often demands a lot of preparation and the way to perceive these texts, often based on a 'fragility' of the gaze, are symptomatic of the special balance that the artist wants to create between the production of the work and its consumption, between the medium and the message, between being and meaning. Lennart Lahuis' works form a subtle critique on easy consumption and build awareness that fragility is the lifeline connecting artwork and viewer.

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Lorenzo Benedetti is a curator based in Paris. From 2014 to 2016 he was director and curator of de Appel arts center. From 2008 until 2014 he was director at the Art Center De Vleeshal, Middelburg, in the Netherlands, and curator of the Dutch Pavilion for the 55th Venice Biennial in 2013. He studied Art history at La Sapienza in Rome and attended the Curatorial Programme at de Appel arts centre in Amsterdam. In 2005 he founded the Sound Art Museum in Rome, a space dedicated to sound in visual art. He has been the director of the art centre Volume! in Rome and a curator at the Museum Marta Herford, in Herford, Germany. He was guest curator at La Kunsthalle in Mulhouse, France. Recent exhibitions include 'During the Exhibition, the Studio Will Be Close', Wiels, Brussels and 'Sculptures Also Die', Palazzo Strozzi, Florence. He writes regularly for art magazines and exhibition catalogues.