

Matthieu Saladin

Distress & dividends | solo | 15 september - 04 november 2023

« Hello,
The gallery Salle Principale is closed from July 5 to September 14. During this period of leave, I will only check my messages occasionally, but will try to respond to urgent matters. This is because neo-liberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care" — the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her/himself, neo-liberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it relieves the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences. Best regards, Maryline Brustolin »

The third solo show by Matthieu Saladin at Salle Principale opening on 15 September 2023 actually began several weeks before that date. An excerpt from the accompanying text appeared in the inboxes of people who, like me, wrote to the gallery while it was closed for the summer. Incorporated into automated replies, it's one of the scripts of a protocol from the **Partitions de travail** series, some of whose components have already been experienced elsewhere. This process, although discreet, can be identified by anyone familiar with Matthieu Saladin's approach because of the way it both echoes and digs deeper into its central theme. For around ten years, the artist has been placing a sophisticated investigation of neo-liberalism and the ways in which economics and commodification control our life and work at the heart of his practice. Saladin adopts a conceptual approach to art and places himself in the tradition of institutional criticism, unpicking the mechanisms of capitalism and repurposing its vocabulary, data, tools and communication media, focusing on the socio-political context of the western world and specifically that of the art world.

Scripts pour un message d'absence (partition de travail n° 5) [scripts for an out-of-office message (work score script n° 5)] sets the tone with its actionable protocol, a characteristic modality of Matthieu Saladin's approach that allows him to involve partners and audiences in often implicit collaborations. These out-of-office messages inform us about existing definitions of work and point to a highly symbolic feature of it—taking time off—in a society that places value on productivism. They borrow from books read by the artist [1], whose projects feature names other than his own and form part of a history of thought, art and sound. For example, Jacques Derrida is referred to between the lines in **Regard troublé** [2] [Blurred Gaze], the second protocol activated before the exhibition began: in place of the title, Matthieu Saladin inserts a sentence in the gallery's

external communication documents dictating an attitude that must be adopted for the visit. The sentence "At the entrance to each gallery, start crying and visit the exhibition with a blurred gaze" is placed in leaflets produced by artistic

information networks, highlighting the importance of communication in the contemporary ecology of art.

Matthieu Saladin extends this way of playing with the institutional context of art to all of the parameters of the exhibition, infiltrating its tiniest nooks and crannies—including the gallery's opening times (**Flash Crash**) and the prices of the works on sale (**Les dépenses**). He even moves his work out into public space: in response to *Regard troublé*, the performance **Un-e passant-e** [A Passer-by] is carried out every day by a male or female actor who walks in front of the gallery windows in tears. Saladin also transforms the public space that forms the backdrop to the show by strategically positioning **Débat**, a screen showing the televised discussion between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen in the runup to the 2022 presidential elections, in the gallery windows – a way of reminding us that public space is a “political domain [3]”. The entire exhibition functions using these attention-grabbing games made up of echoes between and beyond the artworks on show. Most significantly, he also concentrates on the history and consequences of economic crises which he scrupulously observes, appropriating data, values and statistics. The series titled **Krachs (The Economist)** [Crashes] presents a list of the greatest stock market crashes of the 21st century cut out from covers of the magazine *The Economist*, while the long list of profits, price fluctuations and debt levels published in **Élégie Économique** [Economic Elegy] reminds us how our living conditions are subject to the market economy. Whether transformed into a motif or used to write protocols, this information borrowed from the field of economics is here transposed into the sphere of art, forming a common thread in Saladin's approach that the exhibition *Détresse & dividendes* clearly highlights. The visitor can thus move back and forth between the works, circulating between forms, sounds, words and values.

The intervention carried out on the physical space and walls of the gallery, titled **L'espace réifié est susceptible de perdurer encore** [Reified Space is Likely to Endure] embodies how the exhibition expresses what is at stake in Matthieu Saladin's work. It symbolises not only the persistence of “governance based on numbers [4]”, but also, and most importantly, the way they are used in art. While, as Alain Supiot states, recurrent crises are symptomatic of the decline of institutions, many artists have attempted to conceive alternative business models since the nineteenth century. Matthieu Saladin's aim is not to “redefine economic value in terms of artistic value [5]”; instead, he proposes an effective critical analysis of the power relationships that shape society. Economics thus becomes the gimmick of an exhibition set against a background of political, economic, ecological and social crises where the artist shows, represents, explores and comments on the separation between “distress & dividends”. Often humorously and sometimes with a hint of sarcasm, Matthieu Saladin's show reminds us that the potential effect of art, as it faces issues that escape its control, remains limited and “petrified”. **Trying to convert a sponge into a stone (you'll never break a window with it)**, which opens and concludes the exhibition, could hardly express this fact more eloquently.

Émeline Jaret – 08.2023

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[1] For example, the protocol of ***Scripts pour un message d'absence (partition de travail n° 5)*** mentions a bibliography listing essays by Wendy Brown, Patrick Cingolani, Guy Debord, Frédéric Lordon, Sylvain Piron, Alain Supiot and Edward P. Thompson.

[2] In conversation, Matthieu Saladin mentioned the exhibition "Mémoires d'aveugle" organised by Jacques Derrida at the Louvre in 1990 whose central theme might be summarised in the philosopher's own words: "The entire history and semantics of the European idea, in its Greek genealogy, as we know and see, assigns seeing to knowing". Jacques Derrida, ***Mémoires d'aveugle : l'autoportrait et autres ruines***, exhibition catalogue (Musée du Louvre, Paris, 26/10/1990-21/01/1991), Paris, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990, p. 18. Exploring the visible in terms of the invisible, this exhibition echoes Matthieu Saladin's approach as he seeks to highlight relationships of power generated by western political economics.

[3] In a text written in 2019, Véronique Goudinoux looks at this definition in the light of the one formulated by Hannah Arendt: "Public space (in the sense of the political domain) is thus above all that which is removed from the space of economic relationships and is thus exempt from relationships of domination [...]". Véronique Goudinoux, "Pratiques de co-création et mondes temporaires", in Céline Poulin and Marie Preston (eds), ***Co-Création***, Paris, Empire, 2019, p. 89.

[4] Alain Supiot, ***La Gouvernance par les nombres***, Paris, Fayard, 2015.

[5] Sophie Cras, ***Écrits d'artistes sur l'économie. Une anthologie de modestes propositions***, Paris, B42, 2022, p. 7.

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thursday to saturday | 2 - 7 p.m.
and by appointment

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