

Lazar Lyutakov and the Production of Value

Lazar Lyutakov's work embodies a fascinating intersection of elements: a contemporary post-conceptual artistic practice, the economic flows of late capital – especially as they encompass the copy and the counterfeit, the relation of the popular and fine arts, and a more modernist concern with an aesthetics of display. His work explores the global processes of production and consumption, and of the flows of money and commodities they bring, through the display of carefully chosen (i.e. appropriated) and displayed objects. Lyutakov's work therefore carries an aesthetic punch, but only in order to tell the stories his works carry folded within themselves. In this way these objects cleverly negotiate the relation between our emotional and intellectual responses, continually playing them off in order to maximise their respective effects.

“Feiyue” is a brand of Chinese sneakers produced in Shanghai since the 1920s. *Six Pairs of Shoes* looks at the “original” shoe and its various reincarnations, and paints a rather complex picture that confronts the viewer with several originals, copies, and copies of copies. A ping pong game of both designers and production facilities comes to light. The post-conceptual question posed by the work concerns the original, or more interestingly the difference between a copy and a counterfeit. But the work goes beyond this quite familiar gesture by tracing late-capitalist trans-national flows of intellectual property rights, commodities and money, revealing how these global movements are embodied in the humble (but nevertheless cool) sports shoe.

The work *Blank Daniel* (2016) adds an ironical post-internet aspect to Lyutakov's artistic diagram. Once more concerned with shoes, this work displays images collected from the Van's website of blank shoes "customized" by members of the public, a service that costs extra. The particular customization shown is actually no customization, a gesture inadvertently popularised by a teenager named Daniel in a video that went viral, and was subsequently copied by many others on the Van's website. Presented printed on vinyl laying on the floor the work humorously points out how the fine-art strategies of the readymade are already part of a popular post-modern design discourse. And further, how after the internet such expressions emerge as communities in which being different also conforms to "norms", and where a blank affirmation is the most common affect.

Finally, he has been making lamps from various cheap plastic objects since 2008. These works utilise modernist design principles, but are handmade rather than industrially produced. In this way the lamps have an ambiguous status between art and design, although their high price indicates that they are actually art. Ironically, their source was a "how to" book Lyutakov had when a child, suggesting that art's value is in fact determined by the status of the producer (artist or layman), and where the objects appear (gallery or house). Once more Lyutakov seeks to illuminate the wider processes of value production that embrace objects and determine their nature.

Lazar Lyutakov's work seeks to reveal the wider financial forces that animate the production and consumption of commodities, whether art objects or not. But he is not content with this because his work, with humour and wit, also critically observes how these forces impact art. In doing so Lyutakov deconstructs many of the myths surrounding art, as well as some of those that capitalism mesmerizes us with.

Stephen Zepke, 2018