

MARIA  
EICHHORN

AT

CHISENHOLE

23 APRIL – 29 MAY 2016

# MARIA EICHHORN

5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours

23 April – 29 May 2016

Chisenhale Gallery presents the first solo exhibition in the UK and a new commission by Berlin-based artist, Maria Eichhorn. Highly responsive to context, Eichhorn's work operates within the logic of institutional structures, enacting changes through precise and visually minimal gestures. Her ambitious, large-scale projects often take on the mechanics of legal, social and financial processes, making permanent interventions that evolve over time.

Following a site visit to Chisenhale in July 2015, which included a discussion with Chisenhale staff exploring their working lives, Eichhorn has produced a two-part work examining contemporary labour conditions. The exhibition will begin with a one-day symposium on Saturday 23 April, addressing ideas raised by the project. The symposium will feature lectures by Isabell Lorey and Stewart Martin and will be chaired by Andrea Phillips. The afternoon will be devoted to a discussion with the audience, in which Eichhorn will also participate.

At Eichhorn's request, the gallery's staff will then withdraw their labour for the remaining five weeks of the exhibition. None of Chisenhale's employees will work during this period and the gallery and office will be closed, implementing leisure and 'free time' in the place of work. At the heart of the project is a belief in the importance of questioning work – of asking why, within our current political context, work is synonymous with production, and if, in fact, work can also consist of doing nothing. Eichhorn's conceptual gesture is an implicit critique of institutional production and broader neo-liberal patterns of consumption, but it is also an artwork that deals with ideas of displacement of the artist's labour and of the artwork as work.

Eichhorn has previously made a number of works that present an image of capital that calls into question systems of value, including that of the artwork itself. For example for documenta 11 in 2002, she established *Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft*, a public limited company in which the company itself is the sole shareholder. Eichhorn stipulated that, contrary to the very purpose of the structure of the company, the capital that was initially invested cannot accrue value and doesn't belong to anyone.

Historical precedents for Eichhorn's Chisenhale Gallery exhibition can be found in conceptual art and institutional critique in the 1960s and '70s. For his *Closed Gallery Piece*, first shown at Art + Project, Amsterdam in 1969, Robert Barry exhibited only a notice on the gallery's locked door, stating 'For the exhibition the gallery will be closed.' At Claire Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, in 1974, Michael

Asher's removal of the partition wall separating the gallery's office from its exhibition space literally exposed the work going on behind the scenes. Eichhorn's proposal operates a similar conceptual gesture, but here she foregrounds the work of the gallery's staff through their absence.

In order to realise Eichhorn's proposal and not compromise the ongoing operations of the organisation, Chisenhale Gallery's staff are required to carefully unravel their working structure and address important issues relating to responsibility, accountability and commitment – from the financial security of the organisation to the distinction between 'working' and 'personal' lives within the artistic sphere. Eichhorn's project is, ultimately, a consideration of how we assign value to time. She explores this by questioning how capital shapes life through labour, but also through a critique of the notion of free time and the binaries of work and leisure.

The work is constituted not in the empty gallery but in the time given to the staff and what they choose to do with it. This commission presents multiple opportunities for audience engagement, from attending the symposium to contributing to conversations that will develop around the work. Eichhorn's project directly confronts audience expectations of the artist, the artwork and the gallery. It is an artwork that exists as an idea in the public realm, operating by generating discourse, rather than through objects or images.

Maria Eichhorn (b. 1962, Bamberg, Germany) lives and works in Berlin. She has exhibited internationally since the 1990s. Recent solo exhibitions include the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver (2015) and Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2014). Recent group exhibitions include *Seth Siegellaub: Beyond Conceptual Art*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; *to expose, to show, to demonstrate, to inform, to offer*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna; *Wohnungsfrage*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; *Take me (I'm yours)*, Monnaie de Paris; and *All the World's Futures*, 56th Venice Biennial (all 2015).

Eichhorn's commission is part of the third and final year of *How to work together*, a shared programme of contemporary art commissioning and research by Chisenhale Gallery, The Showroom and Studio Voltaire. It follows exhibitions at Chisenhale Gallery by Céline Condorelli in 2014 – who explored themes of work and friendship – and Ahmet Ögüt in 2015 – who explored work and collaboration.

The other commissioned artists for 2016 are Sharon Hayes at Studio Voltaire (14 April – 12 June) and Koki Tanaka at The Showroom (28 April – 18 June).

*How to work together* is supported by a capacity building and match-funding grant from Arts Council England through Catalyst Arts, with additional support from Bloomberg and Jerwood Charitable Foundation and with additional funding for the 2016 commissions from Cockayne – Grants for the Arts and The London Community Foundation. For more information please visit [www.howtoworktogether.org](http://www.howtoworktogether.org).

## **PUBLICATION**

An online publication, including commissioned texts by Isabell Lorey and Stewart Martin; a discussion between Maria Eichhorn and Chisenhale Gallery staff; and an interview with the artist, is available to download for free from Chisenhale Gallery's website.

# SYMPOSIUM

5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours

Saturday 23 April 2016, 11am–5pm

## Symposium schedule

10:45 - Registration and coffee

11:15 - Welcome: Polly Staple and Maria Eichhorn.

Introduction: Andrea Phillips

11:30 - Lecture: Isabell Lorey

12:10 - Discussion: Isabell Lorey and Andrea Phillips

12:30 - Break

13:00 - Lecture: Stewart Martin

13:40 - Discussion: Stewart Martin and Andrea Phillips

14:00 - Lunch

15:30 - Open discussion

17:00 - Drinks reception

## Biographies

Isabell Lorey is a political theorist at the European Institute of Progressive Cultural Policies (EIPCP) in Berlin, member of the editorial collective Transversal Texts ([transversal.at](http://transversal.at)), Professor for Political Science at the University of Kassel, and author of *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (Verso Futures, 2015).

Stewart Martin is Reader in Philosophy and Fine Art at Middlesex University in London and member of the Editorial Collective of the journal, *Radical Philosophy*.

Dr Andrea Phillips is PARSE Professor of Art and Head of Research at the Valand Academy, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts. Andrea lectures internationally and writes about the economic and social construction of publics and markets within contemporary art, the manipulation of forms of participation and the potential of forms of political, architectural and social reorganization within artistic and curatorial culture. Previous to her role at Valand, Andrea was Professor of Art and Director of the Art Department Research Programmes at Goldsmiths, University of London.

## Lecture abstracts

**Isabell Lorey**

*Precarisation, Indebtedness, Giving Time*

*Interlacing Lines across Maria Eichhorn's 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*

We are experiencing a proliferation of work into life and at the same time an increasing de-waging of work. Work time transfers into life time. Subjectivation and social relations become productive and exploited. The exchange of knowledge, communication and affect are more and more economized while lifelong jobs are replaced by enforced lifelong learning. Precarization and indebtedness turn out to be the engine of productivity. If many forms of work can now be said to mean the capability to communicate and establish social relationships, what is the fate of existing (art) institutions? When production becomes social, when the precarious are always running out of time, the refusal of work is getting harder and harder. What are the effects, therefore, of Maria Eichhorn giving time off to Chisenhale's staff?

Drawing on her research on the growing gap between work and wage, and an implosion of the tension between work and subjectivation, Lorey will draw on interviews conducted by Eichhorn with Chisenhale staff in a lecture on the economical meanings of giving time and the possible breaks with these logics of exchange.

**Stewart Martin**

*A gallery closed in spring*

*On Maria Eichhorn's 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*

The work of art has been withdrawn, seemingly. And what would have been hidden has been drawn into view. So here we are, looking at what can be seen now. But the experience we have undergone has exposed more than what appears here, since what appears now has been drawn out from what is hidden. And so we might be inspired to look again. Art seems bound to appear as a work that obscures the work that produced it. But the concern that art would cease to exist without this obscuration speaks of a more urgent need than the conservation of art as such: the freedom from work that art pictures in its very durability. Is this freedom nothing more than a picture, or perhaps a pause after which we must return to work? Or is it simply a change from one form of work to another?

Martin will consider Maria Eichhorn's work within the context of contemporary capitalist culture, and approach the latter from the perspective of a transformation of the classical differentiation of forms of life, especially the differentiation of labour, work, politics and thinking; that is, a transformation in which all forms of life are oriented towards, if not collapsed into, labour. The character of this transformation is the scene of considerable controversy, both over how it should be understood and, therefore, how a critique or overcoming of capitalist culture should be

conceived. Martin will not attempt to resolve this controversy so much as orientate it towards a consideration of contemporary art, or, more specifically, certain gestures at figuring art's contemporaneity in radical 'withdrawal'. How should we understand such gestures as responses to the predicament of capitalist culture? How do these artistic withdrawals relate to a withdrawal of labour?

## CHISENHALE INTERVIEWS: MARIA EICHHORN

*Katie Guggenheim: Perhaps we could start with the title of your exhibition, 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours? What does this refer to?*

**Maria Eichhorn:** The title refers to the duration of the exhibition – to the number of weeks, days and hours, to the time, therefore, in which the full time, permanently employed Chisenhale Gallery staff members will not work for the gallery during my exhibition.

The amount of time becomes concrete in the title from unit to unit of time, moving from the general to the specific. It is not a matter of equivalents (because 5 weeks consist of 35 days and 840 hours), but of differentiations. *5 weeks* represent the total duration of the exhibition. This time representation refers to and includes both working time and free time. Weekends, evenings, night-time, etc., are accounted for. The time representation *25 days* encompasses the working days affected by my exhibition. Because the staff do not work on the weekend, the Saturdays and Sundays – 10 days in total – are excluded here. The representation *175 hours* ultimately indicates the pure working time, wage labour. This amount of time refers concretely to the working time that has been transformed with the exhibition into non-work inside of work. The title therefore contains the thematically and formally relevant time representations involved in the exhibition.

*KG: You proposed this project in September 2015 following a site visit to Chisenhale Gallery, in which you convened a meeting with the staff to discuss their working lives. Do you find the situation of the employees at Chisenhale representative of working conditions in the arts, or of society more generally?*

**ME:** Of course, the specific working conditions in each place should always be considered, and these depend on many factors: political, social, cultural, legal, geographical, sociological, economic, programmatic, individual, etc. Where is an institution? Who runs it? How is it financed?

The general working conditions in a society are also influenced by many factors, in particular by the tension between work and unemployment. In what country? In which working area? In a factory, a university, an office, a household, paid and unpaid work? etc. The situation in the case of Chisenhale is both representative and non-representative with respect to the working conditions in the field of art in the United Kingdom and beyond. It appears that Chisenhale is in a financially precarious situation. As with all organisations of its scale in London, Chisenhale is vulnerable to Arts Council cuts and is also highly dependent on fundraising from individual benefactors. If we think of society as a whole, there are overlaps that must be closely examined and investigated. Isabell Lorey depicted this very



clearly in her text. She writes that ‘[i]n contemporary capitalism, we are experiencing a diffusion of work into life and at the same time an increasing de-waging of work.’<sup>1</sup>

**KG:** *How does your impression of the working conditions in London compare with your impression of those in Berlin, where you live?*

**ME:** Working conditions in London are rougher than in Berlin. To stay on the subject of working conditions in the art field and in particular at Chisenhale: from the interview with the staff, which I held for research purposes and is included in the publication, it became clear that almost everyone works on fundraising. Art institutions in Berlin generally enjoy better financial support from the state and are financially more independent from private sponsors and the art market. A number of mutually dependent fundamental questions take shape in the discussion. To only name a few: Operations and Development Coordinator Ioanna Nitsou assists Deputy Director Laura Parker with office management but now spends most of her time on fundraising through the benefactors’ programme and editions: management of sales and production. A large part of the Director Polly Staple’s job is fundraising: she probably spends about 75% of her time fundraising. Only 27% of Chisenhale’s funding is public money.

Working time flows into fundraising, leaving less time for important things like artistic research and time to reflect, as you mentioned in our discussion. Furthermore, this kind of activity absorbs the whole person. Ioanna, for example, mentions in the discussion: ‘[Polly and I] work on [fundraising] together. It takes up a lot of my working day, as well as *personal time*. For example, when you go to an opening and you’re still representing the gallery. You can’t clock out and say, “I’m just going to chat”. You’re always conscious of the *fact that you’re working*.’<sup>2</sup> Work does not stop. Later in the discussion, Polly names a further problem: ‘There is a broader conversation here about the state of the public sector in the UK. Within a neo-liberal context entrepreneurial activity is regarded as a strength. At institutions like Chisenhale we become our own worst enemy. We show that we can raise money, through individual giving or editions for example, we show that we can be less dependent on public funding, and as less of that money is available it is seen as less necessary to us. Although it is.’ Without the fundraising work you all do, this institution wouldn’t exist.

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1 See Isabell Lorey, ‘Precarisation, Indebtedness, Giving Time -Interlacing Lines across Maria Eichhorn’s 5 Weeks, 25 Days, 175 Hours’, in *Maria Eichhorn: 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*, eds. Katie Guggenheim and Polly Staple (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 2016), p.61.

2 Ioanna Nitsou quoted in ‘Working at Chisenhale Gallery - A discussion between Maria Eichhorn and Chisenhale Gallery staff: Joel Furness, Katie Guggenheim, Tommie Introna, Emma Moore, Ioanna Nitsou, Laura Parker and Polly Staple, 8 July 2015’, *Maria Eichhorn: 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*, eds. Katie Guggenheim and Polly Staple (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 2016), p. 33 Italicisations, for emphasis, are Maria Eichhorn’s own.

**KG:** *Why did you propose this artwork for your exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery? Would you have proposed the work for an exhibition at a larger institution?*

**ME:** This work can be rendered in any institution. It is mostly diverse experiences, research endeavours, and considerations that lead to an idea. In this case it was my engagement with *time* in connection with current labour relations in society and in the cultural field.

My artistic work for Chisenhale Gallery consists in giving time to the staff. Once the staff accept the time, once work is suspended while staff members continue to receive pay, the artistic work can emerge. 'To give time, the day, or life', writes Jacques Derrida in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (1991), 'is to give nothing, nothing determinate, even if it is to give the giving of any possible giving, even if it gives the condition of giving.' Departing from Derrida's thought experiment, I am interested in the fundamental possibility of suspending the capitalist logic of exchange by giving time and making a life without wage labour imaginable.

**KG:** *Are there any rules about what staff can or cannot do while they are not working? How have you defined work and free time for the purposes of this project?*

**ME:** The only specification is that there is no specification.

**KG:** *The exhibition proposes a situation that brings to mind a labour strike, but it differs from a strike because a strike reinforces the value of work and production through its absence, and in this situation you have created an absence or lack as the artwork itself. How do you think this exhibition relates to the current conditions of austerity and contemporary labour relations in the UK and across Europe?*

**ME:** Work is suspended [*ausgesetzt*], temporarily interrupted, thus becoming the focus of attention. It becomes exposed [*ausgesetzt*] to the gaze, to attentiveness. The term *aussetzen* [to suspend, to expose, to abandon, to find fault with, or to strike] becomes active, operative and effective in its multiple meanings. Work is abandoned [*ausgesetzt*]: given away, brought to a different place and left to itself there, surrendered to the influence of somebody or something. To find fault with [*aussetzen*] work under these conditions means to question, or to critique it. *Aussetzen* can also mean 'to strike'. When a passer-by comes by the closed door of Chisenhale Gallery and reads the sign on the fence, it could occur to them that a strike is taking place here. But this strike is not chosen, rather, I have imposed it.

Strikes are mostly held for higher wages and better working conditions. Why is there a strike here? The Chisenhale staff have every reason to strike; maybe not due to low wages, but due to the lacking support of

the public authorities. This is how art is privatised and disappears into the arsenals of the sponsors and the rich.

The tax money paid by the community flows instead into areas that the majority of citizens don't want to support: armaments, wars, nuclear energy. The rich receive tax benefits, while the budget for social expenditures is cut more and more.

Armaments expenditures are increasing globally. As has been widely reported in the news recently, while almost 600 billion dollars were racked up for the arms industry in 2015 in the United States, the US Republicans have simultaneously blocked Barack Obama's proposal to increase the minimum hourly wage to over 10 dollars; a policy that would have protected the weakest on the labour market.

With respect to austerity, the UK and the countries of Europe are certainly not to be lumped together. Austerity politics and working conditions differ from country to country. What is obvious, however, is that the gulf between the poor and rich continues to grow in Europe and around the world. Why is it still not possible to distribute resources in such a manner that all people can live well? Why is it not possible to let those work who want to work - and not make those work who cannot or do not want to work - and secure a sufficient basic income that is the same for all?

**KG:** *There are some interesting parallels between 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours and the exhibition that you made in 2001 at Kunsthalle Bern, where you used the production budget to pay for much-needed renovations to the building, leaving the galleries empty for the duration of the show. For the audience, your own artistic labour was manifested through the labour of the builders and other contractors who undertook the work and these tangible and permanent improvements to the fabric of the Kunsthalle's building took the place of a formal artwork. What was the motivation behind this gesture and do you see a relationship to your exhibition at Chisenhale?*

**ME:** After conversations with the employees, managers, etc. of the Kunsthalle and the Kunsthalle association as well as archival research, I discovered revealing links between the historical development of the Kunsthalle and the association, the condition of the Kunsthalle building, the property on which the Kunsthalle stands, and a non-amortised loan, and I realised how these links mutually condition one another. These insights – in the sense of an investigative approach – were what I wanted to convey to the public with my exhibition.

The exhibition, *Das Geld der Kunsthalle Bern / Money at Kunsthalle Bern*, consisted of three parts: an historical analysis of the economic context of Kunsthalle Bern, and two applications deriving from this which referred to the Kunsthalle's property relations. Materially,

it consisted of a series of renovation projects, a talk followed by a discussion, and the production of various printed works that I designed: invitation card, poster, catalogue, and share certificates.

The Kunsthalle was mostly empty, because the renovations were to take place, insofar as possible, outside of opening hours (it was not a display or 'performance' of workers). Nevertheless, it did happen that certain zones were closed off when dangerous tasks needed to be carried out during opening hours: when equipment or materials remained standing around; or when noises from the areas not open to the public (attic, storage rooms, etc.) indicated that activities were taking place there.

The third part of the exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern, the new issue of share certificates, tended towards a fundraising action. The yield from this action goes completely to the Kunsthalle association. It serves to increase the equity capital.

**KG:** *Where do you think the work is located in your exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery? Is it in the empty gallery and the sign on the gate outside explaining the reason for the closure, the symposium and the conversations that develop around the work, or in the free time that you have given to the Chisenhale staff?*

**ME:** In all these places. The exhibition consists of the staff members not working; that I give the employees time, and that they accept the time. That is, they suspend [*aussetzen*] their work while continuing to be paid.

That the exhibition space and the office are closed is a spatial consequence of the fact that these are the places where the staff primarily attend to their work. The institution itself and the actual exhibition are not closed, but spread into the public sphere and into society. So, a sign will be fixed to the gate in front of the gallery with information about the exhibition. In addition, further messages are available, on the website, in social media, etc. The automatic email response, written especially for my exhibition, includes information about the exhibition as well as a notification that incoming emails will be automatically deleted and it will not be possible to reach recipients again until 29 May 2016. When the staff return, they will not have an excessive amount of emails to attend.

**KG:** *We could have employed temporary staff to keep the gallery open for your exhibition while the regular staff are not working. Why did you decide not to do this and for the gallery to be closed during your exhibition?*

**ME:** Nobody should be in the gallery spaces or working there during my exhibition. In a certain way the building should also calm down and have time off, not work. These spaces should also not be used or made available in other ways. Not rented for profit or otherwise capitalised. My exhibition is also taking place in the Chisenhale Gallery spaces.

**KG:** *For documenta 11 in 2002 you established Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft, a public limited company in which the company itself is the sole shareholder, and you stipulated that, contrary to the very purpose of the structure of the company, the capital that was initially invested could not accrue value and did not belong to anyone. What interests you about this model, which inverts many of the most basic facts about our contemporary neoliberal situation? Do you see a relationship between this work and your exhibition at Chisenhale?*

**ME:** The *Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft* owns its own shares and belongs to no one – or, that is to say, to everyone. *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* is similarly conceived so that the time itself does not belong to anybody. That is, time cannot be economised, it does not allow itself to be exchanged and it breaks with the law of equivalence.

**KG:** *This work has a very real impact on the lives of the employees of Chisenhale and some of its implications are very personal. Will you ask the staff about what they did with their free time and the impact that this had when they return to work?*

**ME:** The employees are not assigned any tasks by me. They should do nothing other than not work for Chisenhale Gallery. That is my only specification.

In conclusion, a personal note: this has been an extraordinarily involved project to work on together. We met each other multiple times, talked on the phone, and spoke intensively about the project. You, Katie, and Polly, you two formulated many questions that I answered, added new points on my end, which in turn raised new questions that we discussed back and forth for so long until we had thought through all aspects for the realisation of the work. I am very thankful to you two for making this project possible. I also would like to wholeheartedly thank the entire team.

**KG:** *We have really enjoyed working with you, Maria. Thank you very much.*

*Maria Eichhorn interviewed via email by Katie Guggenheim, Exhibitions and Events, Curator, Chisenhale Gallery. Chisenhale Interviews, series editor, Polly Staple, Director, Chisenhale Gallery. Eichhorn's answers are translated from the German by Kelly Mulvaney.*

## CHISENHALE GALLERY

64 Chisenhale Road, London, E3 5QZ

+44 (0)20 8981 4518

[www.chisenhale.org.uk](http://www.chisenhale.org.uk)

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