ALMINE RECH

Supermarket of Images

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Art and economics have entertained a complex and decisive relationship since ancient times. But for over a century, what is at stake goes far beyond the mere art market: what we face now is the commodification of all that is visible.

The photographs, drawings, paintings, videos, films, digital works and multimedia installations selected for this exhibition explore the raw materials that go into creating these images, the enormous reserves and databases they accumulate in, the human (or non-human) toil involved in their creation, and the fluctuations in their value as they circulate around the world.

The exhibition offers a critical take and unexpected perspectives on the making of the great image market that structures our gaze.

We live in a world that is increasingly saturated with images. Their number is growing so exponentially — on social networks and on screens of all kinds — that the space in which we live is literally overflowing with images, as if it were no longer possible to contain them, as if there were no more gaps between them. (We could be said to be approaching the limit which, as long ago as 1929, Walter Benjamin described as “a one hundred percent image space”). Faced with this overabundance and overproduction of images, the question of storing them, managing them, circulating them and transporting them (even electronically), their weight, the fluidity or viscosity of their exchange, fluctuations in their values – in short, the whole business of the image economy – is more pertinent now than ever before. In the book that provided the starting point for this exhibition project (Le Supermarché du visible, published by Editions de Minuit in 2017), I suggested the word iconomie (“iconomics”) to refer to the economic dimension in the life of images.

The works and artists chosen for the exhibition cast a keen and watchful eye over these issues. On the one hand, they reflect the upheavals that currently affect economics in general, whether in terms of unprecedentedly large storage spaces, scarce raw materials, labour and its mutations towards immaterial forms of work, or in terms of value and its new manifestations, such as cryptocurrencies. At the same time, however, these artists’ works repeatedly interrogate the future of images and things visible in the age of their globalised iconomics.

In the supermarket on display here, images of the economy always involve the economics of the image. And vice versa, as if there were a recto and a verso to all of them.

Curators: Peter Szendy, Emmanuel Alloa and Marta Ponsa