

ABBAS ZAHEDI: 11&1

“When life gives you lemons, fuck lemonade.”¹ Abbas Zahedi's practice does not merely renounce common-sense logics, for his is a praxis of disobedient curiosity in the face of mythologies made political. Citing the specificities of a place and fragments from times, Zahedi re-routes, or (p)re-makes, architectures of understanding in order to explore that which lies bleached by binary divisions. Drawing upon his own auto-bio-graphic roots Zahedi's exhibition *11&1* pulls at the edges of a space, making the ‘commercial gallery’² uncanny and affective through his installation. Presented here, alongside an anti-portfolio of sorts — the artist's first publication, *Semi Rational Records of Artchievement* — Zahedi's history is not laid out as some kind of sanctified historiography; instead it is used to suture different labour processes associated with being and existing, forming, in turn, some sort of conspiratorial platform or arena for shared inspiration.

The threshold has always been an active site for Zahedi: recent solo exhibitions, including *How To Make A How From A Why?* (South London Gallery 2020) and *Ouranophobia SW3* (Chelsea Sorting Office, 2020 – 21) literally made the crossing from an outside to an inside, and vice versa, into an aesthetic encounter. Indeed, each of these exhibitions presented a viewer with phenomena which to be exceeded. Whether that be sitting in the dark basement bar of *Ouranophobia SW3*, listening to the wallows of a lament, or cranking a handle to make architectures cry rose scented tears, as is the case with *How To Make A How From A Why?*. In *11&1*, the threshold of the gallery — a large display window looking out upon the streets of Mayfair — is utilised as a chalkboard-like surface, where, in his daily lecture performance, Zahedi sets out a formula connecting emotional moments from his past with social-political events, establishing a pattern from that which seems dissociated and devoid.

For Zahedi a formula is an apparatus, a “*conceptual probe, looking for something that wants to exist*”; a structure through which you can add anything into and have returned a tangible ‘thing.’ A formula, in other words, provides proof of a thing's validity as a thing.

Applied to human-beings, when placed within a formula, or a formulaic existence, our being becomes validated via a framework of value, with questions like ‘who am I’ or ‘who are you’ becoming bound to questions ‘how much am I’ and ‘how much are you.’ Such questions, and their streamlined answers, are catalysts for Zahedi's Deleuzian thinking around the shift from the individual to the dividual,³ and how beings become manufactured through increasingly neoliberal automations of life. That is, how the familial is made productive for an economy; how the emotional and the affective are reaped for something Political; and how the body is overlooked in order to ascertain a shiny output in a system of individual measurement. As a manifestation of theory, throughout *11&1*, the humble lemon acts as a cipher for beings held in a lattice-like grip; in a systemic hold that compacts and discards in its *projuicive* squeezing.

Here, stripped back to a state of uncanny vacancy, the gallery — a stereotypically rarefied space — becomes a squared environment, one that riffs off of the mechanical logics behind spectacular individuality and which presents neoliberalism's *logos* in debased form, as an empty platform pertaining to movement. Zahedi revels with this seeming emptiness, situating handmade object-artworks within this platform-space to script a poetics from the immaterial connections now (p)re-made.

Like a flickering light of a candle or the wafting of incense smoke, *11&1* has a particular atmospheric tactility. In its most overt reference, this aesthetic of feel is given form in the pistachio-coloured macramé hangings that linger in the bare space of the gallery. Acting as quasi sequential chains, these weavings suspend the differing domestic objects that

constitute the exhibition: a handmade bluetooth speaker, seven lemons from a local grocer, a copy of the artist's *Semi Rational Records of Artchivement*, as well as acting as an anchor line for Zahedi's spatial intervention.⁴ Presented raw, these macramé hangings not only add to the sense of *hapticality* permeating the exhibition, but raise our awareness of the conceptual limens key to Zahedi's unbounding: connecting DNA and labour, the artist's history and governmentality.

Zahedi's non-linear approach to the non-essentialist conjunctions between the personal and the collective is given sonic form through his 11:01 minute installation mix-tape. Corralled from bodily traces — vocal memos recorded in part whilst the artist was working for the East London drinks company *Square Root*, using his hands to bottle and cap thousands of beverages a day — the mix acts as the pulsing heart of the exhibition. Played through a pair of handcrafted speakers,⁵ the sublime echoes of notation-like speech, rhythms, and lyrics compiled here further the poetic links between Zahedi's past and apparatus of formulaic enclosure. By treating space as something freely available, a formula in itself, Zahedi reconfigures the 'order of things,'⁶ using these frequencies to accentuate the labour of a being, rather than the output of an existence; alluding to the pre-comunal moments and domestic rituals now sold as commodities without a bodily history.

11:01 is not a reactionary occupation; it is a citizen's invitation, an epistemic installation, where the artist's vulnerability points to the sinews of a structure more cerebral than quasi-scientific. Zahedi's ability to hold a space in tension is more than just a simple stretching of architectonics, it is a gesture of expansive hosting. *11:01* takes up this mode of hospitality by creating a platform through which some shared dialogue can be initiated. Here, the intermittent presence of the artist, and his open invitation for all to join him in the gallery, alongside his crafted selection of object-artworks, provides a sort of grammatical guide framing a coming together of different beings, making room for collective respiration.

- 1 Abbas Zahedi, 2021. Lecture performance given on the occasion of the Royal College of Art's (London) 'The Urgency of The Arts Assembly: I Need To Talk To You Urgently' online lecture (March 2, 2021).
- 2 The false-dichotomy between the commercial and the public is binary the artist also looks to depart from.
- 3 Gilles Deleuze, 1992. 'Postscript on the Societies of Control,' in *October*, Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3–7.
- 4 Always look up in exhibitions.
- 5 A loop programmed to play eleven minutes of sound followed by twelve minutes of silence.
- 6 Michel Foucault, c.1966. *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. Routledge: London.

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