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Thérèse Mastroiacovo, Galerie Clark, Montréal. March 10, 2011
– To be determined

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THÉRÈSE MASTROIACOVO, *SITUATION: AUTO DURATION*

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The sun has yet to set on *Situation: Auto Duration*; a work Thérèse Mastroiacovo presented this past year at Galerie Clark in Montréal. Unveiled last March, the project consisted of a shipping pallet, placed in the middle of the gallery floor and stacked with 3000 copies of a publication, which became an informal cube in the central space. The publication, printed on newsprint, is composed of 32 black and white images of a sunset taken in Kamouraska, Québec, by the artist in 'auto duration' by way of the automatic function on a still camera. The front and back cover pages are reproductions of a hand-written text describing each of the two durational components of the exhibition. The front cover describes the

process involved in capturing the images reproduced in the publication and the back cover gives instructions for disseminating the publication once introduced into the gallery context. Around this isolated volume of publications, upon the periphery of the gallery wall, was a hand-drawn graphite line demarcating the initial height of the stack of publications. Acting as a preconditioned type of documentation, the line showed the height of the stacked volumes before the process of their removal began, a waterline as a marker of the content's projected evaporation over the course of an indeterminate length of time, which is the exhibition itself. The graphite line is also conspicuous as the only physical trace of the artist's hand within an exhibition,

which goes to great lengths to infer the hand's removal: from the automatic timer function of the camera and the mechanical printing of the publication to the actual dissemination of the publication as well as the conclusion of the work, which is entirely dependent on the public's gradual removal of it, piece by piece. The contract for presenting this work was conditional: Galerie Clark agreed to house the work until every last publication was taken out of the gallery by visitors, even if this meant making the publications available to the public well past the exhibition's conventional duration. Eight months later, although the work has been moved out of the main gallery space and into a new location (after the Audio Station and before Gallery I), there



Thérèse Mastroiacovo, *Situation: Auto Duration*. New Location (After the Audio Station and before Gallery I), 2011. Photo: Kim Waldron.



Thérèse Mastroiacovo, *Situation : Auto Duration*.
The pile of publications at the beginning of the exhibition in Gallery 1 at CLARK. Situation : Day 01.
Photo: Kim Waldron.



Thérèse Mastroiacovo, *Situation : Auto Duration*.
The pile of publications at the end of the exhibition in Gallery 1, before it was re-stacked in New Location (after the Audio Station and before Gallery 1).
Situation: Day 31. Photo: Kim Waldron.



Thérèse Mastroiacovo, *Situation : Auto Duration*.
A detail view of the publication.
Situation : Sunset (detail). Photo: Kim Waldron.

still remains a stack of publications available for visitors to take. The work is not yet complete and as such calls attention to itself as a site of slow depletion, critically unveiling the relation to its own duration.

The tradition of artist publications emerged out of a desire to break away from the confines of the gallery structure, which conventionally was more conducive to housing objects rather than ideas. This was especially the case at the beginning stages of conceptualism, wherein the artist publication became a distinct site of opposition and as such was rooted during this time in the evolving idea of the alternative space. Ed Ruscha's famous 1963 artist book, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, can be sited as an example of this particular type of program. Ruscha's book is a photographic record of all the gas stations he would pass in his frequent travel between two cities. *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* presents a collection of systematically captured black and white photographs of the same quotidian subject in gradual flux. To utilize the printed page as an alternative exhibition space and to then disseminate it as an object was a subversive gesture. Mastroiacovo's publication is similar; however, she takes this gesture one step further by bringing the space of the publication back into the space that it may

have initially opposed: this being the physical, three-dimensional space of the gallery. The artist leaves this gesture open-ended by handing over the responsibility of the works completion. It is up to the public to decide on the works end-point and in effect, the gallery becomes a site of dissemination rather than a hermetically sealed container.

The successive images that comprise the publication, when scrutinized, reveal elements of the haphazard. In a number of images, the presence of a passerby is visible. In another image, the scene is completely out of focus due to a mechanical error: perhaps a leaf was blown through the scene at close range and caused the automatic focus to shift. In every photograph, tiny black specs can be observed in an unsystematic placement: birds flying home at the end of the day. All of these unforeseen factors represent chance elements that puncture the visibility of a systematic approach further still.

The dominant subject of *Auto Duration* is that of the sun set, which is arguably the most commonly documented subject in vernacular photography on account of its notoriously awe-inspiring colour. In this instance, the artist has chosen to deprive the subject of its most associative attribute by printing the image of a gradually setting sun in black

and white. The subject as such becomes less defined by its aesthetic qualities and instead becomes subsumed by its role in the publication as a subject demarcating the passing of time, as well as its own inevitable erasure. Just as the passing of time is mechanically documented from one image to the next, the page of the publication becomes more and more saturated with black ink. The residual black ink deposited onto one's fingers after flipping through the publication has an unexpected poetic agency in this regard, enacting another form of dissemination into the physical world. Zooming out from all this, we are left with the physical remainder of a scene reflecting its own conditional time: the slowly dwindling stack of publications that now remains of *Situation: Auto Duration* is collecting dust and their paper is becoming discoloured by the sun, the exhibition has not ended and a date has yet to be determined.

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