

The New York Times

Art in Review

'Today I Made Nothing'

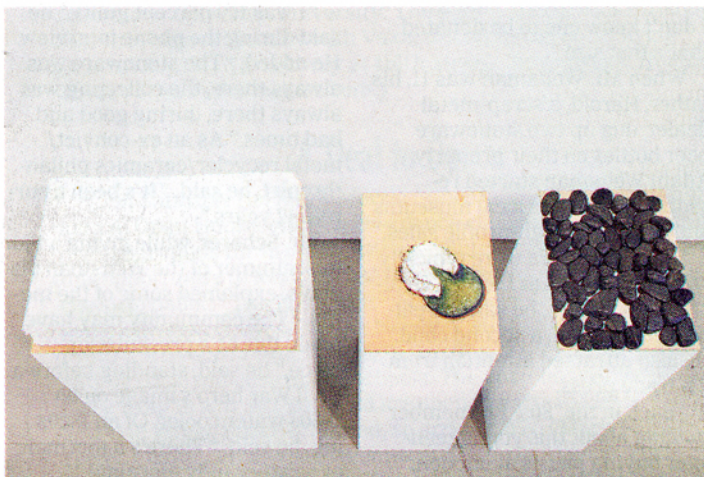
Elizabeth Dee
545 West 20th Street
Chelsea
Through Sept. 18

Working hard, or hardly working? Vacation may be over, but in "Today I Made Nothing," we're still offered a choice between labor and leisure, if such a distinction can be clearly made in contemporary art. Organized by Tim Saltarelli, the show closes out a summer of group exhibitions that were, as often as not, so visually slight and conceptually blank that, suddenly, all the aesthetic right-wingers who've been crying for Form über alles started to make a little sense.

Mr. Saltarelli's exhibition, however, has plenty of hard-earned thinking on its materially slender bones. How is work defined, it seems to ask, when, as at present, passive "facilitating" can constitute a career? In the economic and political realm, fortunes and wars materialize mysteriously and remotely; face-time and the personal accountability it might bring are all but obsolete.

Who needs an office?, artists in the show ask. Virginia Overton turns surplus office chairs into lamps. Mika Tajima uses old industrial partitioning to make a work station that can be entered. On a decorative text banner, Renée Green delivers a hostile salutation in corporate-speak punctuated by a rote command: "Enjoy!"

Art as industry takes some hits. Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda display a thick volume of interviews with artists by the global art curator and facilitator Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who churns out volumes of such interviews



ELIZABETH DEE/TOM POWEL IMAGING

Tyler Coburn's "Thumbprints & Other Takeaways," part of the "Today I Made Nothing" show at the Elizabeth Dee gallery.

every year. The labor involved in this project? Apparently, just being there and turning on a machine. And the New York artist Tyler Coburn contributes a create-your-own-Salvador Dalí piece to the show, replete with pre-signed sheets of blank paper, an etching plate and a slice of moldy Camembert, presumably for the easy production of cheesy prints.

And as for artists toiling directly in the fields of so-called constitutional critique? The message seems to be: Forget it. Alejandro Cesarco's piece "Why Work?" consists of the table of contents for a radical book about labor, one that addresses the politics of art's market-driven exploitation. But the table of contents is all we get, no book. Unless, of course, we take "Today I Made Nothing" to be, not the last group show of the summer, but the first group show of a new season in which that book will begin to be written.

HOLLAND COTTER