

BERLIN

Fred Lonidier

SILBERKUPPE

THE QUESTION IS WHO EXERCISES HOW MUCH POWER TO WHOSE ENDS? reads a line printed below statistics concerning US car production in the year 1978 and a photograph depicting cars in a parking lot. The collage, enclosed in a license-plate frame, at the top of which stands the word OLIGOPOLY, is one in a row of similar constructions—the others address FETISH, WASTE, POLLUTION, EXPENSE, and DANGER as characteristics of the automobile industry. Together, these elements comprise *Photo License*, 1978, the first piece visitors encountered in Fred Lonidier's exhibition "Artworks from Protest, Social Criticism to Class Struggle." With a work such as this one, whose typewritten textual elements and dated photography reveal its creation following the inception of Conceptual art, Lonidier spoke through the new artistic language being developed in that time and ventured a valuable investigation into critical sociopolitical issues.

For nearly forty years, Lonidier has taught at the University of California, San Diego—the same school where he studied in the 1960s and early '70s and met the artists alongside whom he worked to critically revise photography from a documentary into a socially engaged practice: Phel (then Phil) Steinmetz, Martha Rosler, and Allan Sekula. Lonidier's *29 Arrests*, 1972, consists of twenty-nine photos taken over the shoulders of police officers that portray a procession of young men and women under arrest. A text panel pinpoints the context: HEADQUARTERS OF THE 11TH NAVAL DISTRICT, MAY 4, 1972, SAN DIEGO; those pictured are protesters against bombing in Cambodia.

As indicated by *Create-A-Clock*, 1978, Lonidier's praxis exists "for, by and about" class struggle, although his work often concerns race, gender, and the environment as well. In this work, two clocks hang side by side. On the right-hand one, the words RATIONALIZED TIME appear along with reproductions of the spine and two pages from the 1937 book *Motion and Time Study* by Ralph M. Barnes. On one page, a group of onlookers is shown evaluating the efficiency—following the logic that led from Taylorism to Fordism—of a worker operating factory machinery, which represents the process by which, according to Marxists, the worker becomes alienated from his or her work. An advertisement for the "create your own" set from which both clocks originate has been repurposed as the face of the one on the left, over which stands the legend AESTHETICIZED TIME; the contrast between the two clocks speaks to the leisure available primarily to the upper classes. Lonidier, who has been a union activist for more than thirty years, often exhibits in union halls and educational and cultural centers in an attempt to engage the public that the work actively concerns.

As shown by this summary but cogent selection of pieces from a significant period in Lonidier's career, humor offers a recurrent point of access to the work. The final piece in the exhibition, *Certified Loser*, 1976, consists of framed reproductions of two "Prize Eligibility Certificates" that Lonidier received from *Reader's Digest*. The work coolly mocks the "get rich quick" fantasy that drives so many people in modern capitalist society. Portrayed in a photograph set in the corner of one of the frames, Lonidier sits placidly before his desk, his bookshelf, and his camera. A telling poster on the wall beside him reads, AVANT-GARDE? IN 1871 "RADICAL ART" WASN'T A QUESTION OF STYLE.

—John Beeson



Fred Lonidier
Create-A-Clock, 1978
diptych, mixed media
each panel 15 x 12"