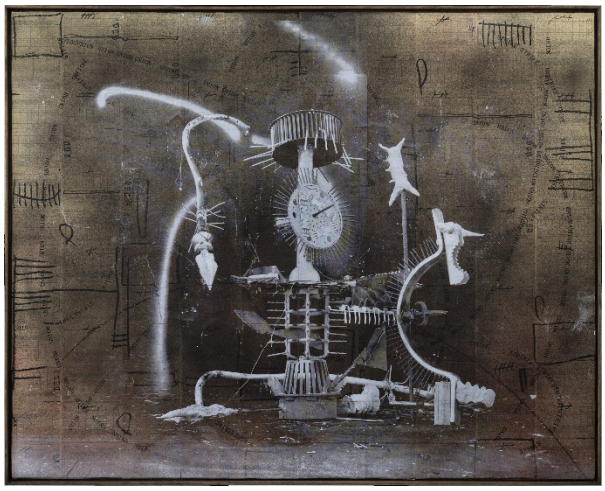
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 28, 2023
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The Print Center Announces
Rodrigo Valenzuela: Workforce

April 15 – July 15, 2023





(left to right) Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Afterwork#26*, 2021, inkjet print, 20" x 24"; *Weapon#33*, 2022, screenprint, acrylic, collaged timecards, cardboard and canvas, 48" x 60"

PHILADELPHIA, PA – The Print Center is pleased to present ***Rodrigo Valenzuela: Workforce***, a solo exhibition of recent and newly created work by the Chilean-born artist. The exhibition opens on Saturday, April 15, 2023, with a Gallery Talk and Opening Reception on Friday, April 14, at 5:30pm.

> *The Print Center is honored bring the work of the outstanding artist Rodrigo Valenzuela to Philadelphia for the first time. I know his work will resonate powerfully with our audience, and will make a meaningful contribution to our conversation about immigration, privilege, labor and unions, as well as to our understanding of current photographic practice.*
>
> – Elizabeth F. Spungen, Executive Director

Over the past decade Valenzuela has developed a body of work for which he has received exceptional accolades, from a Guggenheim Fellowship to a tenured faculty position at UCLA. *Workforce* will be Valenzuela's debut showing in Philadelphia. This major exhibition will feature photographs, video, screenprints, collages and sculpture along with an immersive, site-specific installation. Presented in all three of The Print Center's galleries, the exhibition is co-curated by Liz K. Sheehan, Independent Curator,

and Liz F. Spungen, Executive Director, The Print Center, and will be complemented by published Gallery Notes featuring an essay by Latin American Art scholar Paula Kupfer, as well as several public programs.

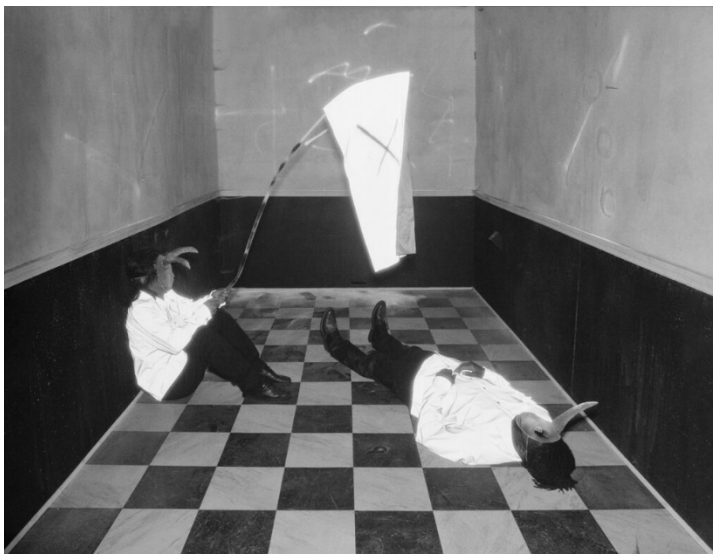


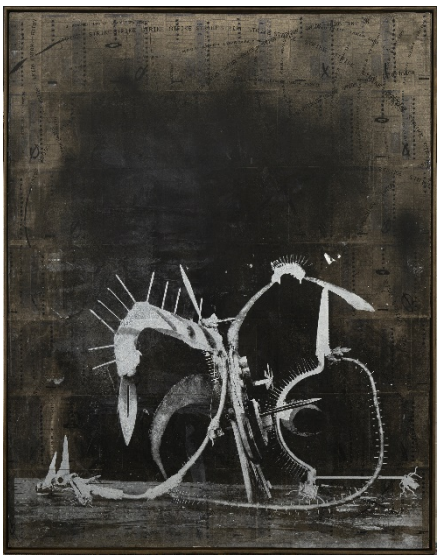
Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Afterwork#1*, 2021, inkjet print, 32” x 40”

Valenzuela has developed a distinctive and unique practice situated at the intersection of photography, the built environment and the subject of labor. Drawing on his life experience – growing up in Chile as the son of a postal worker under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and working as a day laborer during his first years in the United States – and his studies in art history, literature, philosophy and photography, he creates artworks and installations that interrogate the literal and figurative foundations of our architectural endeavors and their connection to democracy, identity, labor and immigration. Valenzuela challenges the ways that photography can create meaning. He often rephotographs his own work in stage sets that contain the same materials as the subject of the original prints. This self-reflexive strategy is a critical investigation into what photography is and is not, in its circular interplay between illusionary and real space and between 2- and 3-dimensionality.

At the heart of *Workforce* is Valenzuela’s imagining of new futures for the working class, which has spurred an interest in science fiction. He says, “In the real world there doesn’t seem to be a lot of room for metaphor, whereas in science fiction it’s easier to imagine a world where you can point out the problems of our neoliberalism…Maybe a kinder, more ethical capitalism can become the product of science fiction.” Valenzuela has often drawn titles for his works from *1984*, George Orwell’s classic novel of life under totalitarianism. The book is a touchstone for the dystopian aura of Valenzuela’s photographs and the unseen but ever-present structures of power upon which he comments.

Workforce presents works drawn largely from the recent series “New Works for a Post-Worker’s World,” supplemented by earlier works and a new series titled “Devils’ Union.” In a group of black and white images from the “Afterwork” series, Valenzuela photographed sculptural materials which take on the appearance of trapped machinery, paused mid-production in a factory of unknown industry. A narrative emerges, playing out in a space that the artist describes as “a post-worker world…a place where production happened but there are no longer bodies.” Whether the workers have been made obsolete due to the advent of automation, or are missing for some other nefarious reason, is unclear.





(left to right) Rodrigo Valenzuela, from the series “Devils’ Union;” *Weapon#42*, 2022, screenprint, acrylic, collaged timecards, cardboard and canvas, 60” x 48”

On the second floor, Valenzuela will construct an immersive, site-specific, raw-hewn structure that echoes the framework of a building project, using 2” x 4”s – the humble and ubiquitous basic building material – upon which large-scale images from the series “Weapons” will be displayed. These works have a menacing tone, with spiky and threatening forms composed of knives and metal components. To create them, Valenzuela screenprints his photographic images onto a backdrop of timecards, which stand in for the absent workers and symbolize bureaucratic control over employee time. Collectively, these images create imaginary spaces that exist in the “aftermath of the workers leaving the factory and creating weapons out of precarious materials.”

People rarely appear in Valenzuela’s photographs, and when they do they are masked, as in the series “Devils’ Union.” These cinematic images feature two uniformed, horned figures interacting in a confined, stage-like room, and reference the prevalent symbol of the devil in South American culture.



Rodrigo Valenzuela, video still from *Prole*, 2015

The artist’s films *Prole* (2015) and *The Unwaged* (2017), which address issues and questions of labor in both scripted and unscripted narratives, will be screened in the Zemel Family Gallery (2nd floor south). For Valenzuela, video offers a democratic way to share an intimate conversation and to give workers a platform. The films are another facet of Valenzuela’s commentary on the value of labor and the contemporary reality experienced by working-class people of color.

The Harpo Foundation has made this project possible, including the creation of a new edition of prints with the Common Press at the University of Pennsylvania.



Rodrigo Valenzuela (b. 1982, Santiago, Chile; l. Los Angeles, CA) has a BFA in photography from the University of Chile, Santiago; a BA in philosophy from Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA and an MFA in PhotoMedia from the University of Washington, Seattle. His work has been exhibited extensively across the US and internationally and recent solo exhibitions include BRIC, Brooklyn, NY; Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, CA; Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, OR; New Museum, New York, NY; Portland Art Museum, OR; and Lisa Kandlhofer Galerie, Vienna, Austria. Additional venues that have exhibited his work include the Kala Art Institute, Berkeley, CA; Tufts University Art Galleries, Boston, MA; Triumph Chicago, IL; Site131, Dallas, TX; Getty Museum, Los Angeles; New Hampshire Institute of Art, Manchester, NH; Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; The Drawing Center, New York, NY; Bemis Center, Omaha, NE; The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS; artspace, San Antonio, TX; Center for Architecture and Design, Frye Art Museum, Henry Art Gallery and Jacob Lawrence Gallery, all Seattle; Tacoma Art Museum, WA; Hillyer Art Space, Washington, DC; as well as internationally in Austria; Brazil; Chile; Mexico; and Spain. Valenzuela has received many awards and accolades, including an Art Matters Foundation Grant; Artist Trust Innovators Award; John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Photography; Joan Mitchell Award; and a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. He has been awarded artist residencies in the Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME; MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, NH; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; Lightwork, Syracuse, NY and the Center for Photography at Woodstock, Kingston, NY. He is Assistant Professor in the School of Art and Architecture at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Programs

Gallery Talk & Opening Reception

Friday, April 14, 2023
5:30pm Gallery Talk with the Artist and Exhibition Curators
6 – 7:30pm Reception

Artist Talk

Tuesday, April 11, 2023, 6pm
Held at the University of Pennsylvania, Meyerson Hall, Room B-3, both in-person and on Zoom.
Valenzuela will discuss his work, artistic practice and career.

Additional programs will be announced. For more information and to register for Zoom, visit **printcenter.org**. All of The Print Center's exhibitions and programs are free and open to the public.

All images are courtesy of the Artist.

About The Print Center

Mission

For more than a century, The Print Center has encouraged the growth and understanding of photography and printmaking as vital contemporary arts through exhibitions, publications and educational programs. The Print Center has an international voice and a strong sense of local purpose. Free and open to the public, it presents changing exhibitions, which highlight established and emerging, local, national and international contemporary artists. It mounts one of the oldest annual art competitions in the country, now in its 98th year, provides the Artists-in-Schools Program to Philadelphia public high school students and its Gallery Store offers a carefully selected array of contemporary prints and photographs onsite and online.

Funders

Support for this exhibition has been generously provided by the **Harpo Foundation** and the **University of Pennsylvania's Department of Fine Arts.**

Support for The Print Center is offered by: Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation; Forman Family Fund; Sheila Fortune Foundation; Fund for Children; Allen Hilles Fund; Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation; Christopher Ludwick Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; William Penn Foundation; Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage; Philadelphia Cultural Fund; The Philadelphia Foundation; Rosenlund Family Foundation; University of the Arts; Henrietta Tower Wurts Memorial; and our Board of Governors, Luminaries, members and friends.