

## Allan Sekula

### Shipwreck and Workers

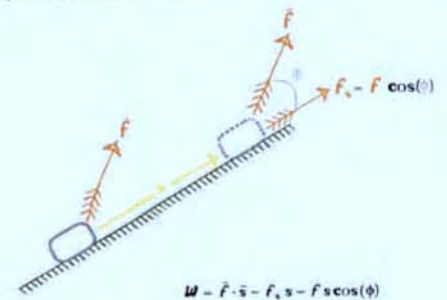
In the late spring of 2005 I was invited by the Museum in Progress in Vienna ([www.mip.at](http://www.mip.at)) to come up with a work to be displayed as a series of billboards outside the Chamber of Labor, the headquarters of the Austrian trade union movement. The ideas occurred to me that this would be a temporary monument of sorts, and that it could consist very simply of portraits of working people combined with pictures of work processes. The entire series was bracketed by two triptychs, one spatial and another temporal, both made in Istanbul, of a shipwreck and of goldsmiths at work. The photographs presented here make up only about a third of the original series.

Later, in the summer of the same year, I expanded the project in Leuven, the oldest university town in Belgium. Here the context was different: a commemoration of the life of the Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier (1831-1905), an under-recognized contemporary of, and influence upon, Auguste Rodin. Meunier's lifework was devoted to an acutely sensitive representation of labor at a time when workers' movements, in Belgium and elsewhere, were just coming into their own as democratic political forces challenging aristocratic and bourgeois monopolies on power. The project in Belgium included large vertical panels of graphics and text, moving more explicitly into the terrain of photomontage and thus exploring a dialogue between Meunier's radical democratic end-game

with monumental sculpture and the emergence of modern political graphics.

I put it this way in the notes for these installations: "Many work, but few govern."

A second thought, which comes to us from the supposedly discredited brain of Karl Marx, is that capitalism becomes universal only when the commodification of human labor power is everywhere the norm.



Captions:

Page 30

"Definition of work in physics," (detail from text panel) adapted from <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~vawter/PhysicsNet/Topics/Work/DefinitionWork.html>

Page 31

Machinist, Tours

Page 32-33

Seafarers, Limassol (diptych)

Page 34-35

Ship inspector, Seattle (diptych)





