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VINCE KOGUT NATALIE NADEAU

TEXT BY  
ANTHONY YOUSSEF



WOODBIDGE FARM BOOKS  
EST. 2017, WINDSOR, ONTARIO

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Edited by Grant Munroe  
Typeset and Designed by Chris Andrechek

ACWR would like to Jaclyn Meloche, Sue Cole, Grant Munroe, Anthony Youssef, Chris Andrechek, the Art Gallery of Windsor, MayWorks Windsor, the City of Windsor, and the Ontario Arts Council.



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**THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY** was an era marked by social revolution. Industrialization altered both rural and urban conditions. In response, many artists became motivated to address these widespread changes. As James Malpas explained in his 1997 book *Realism: Movements in Modern Art*, these artists became committed to representing the “modern world and ... things as they appear.”<sup>1</sup> Naturally, as a result of elevating the fringes of society to the grandeur of high art,<sup>2</sup> labour became a recurring motif in their work. Today, more than a century later, a parallel to this exists in the contemporary social context of Windsor, Ontario and its reflection in the work of two of its local emerging artists, Vince Kogut and Natalie Nadeau.

From its early years as an agricultural settlement to its development into a Canadian industrial centre, labour has played an important role in the development of Windsor.

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1 James Malpas, *Realism* (London: Tate Gallery, 1997).

2 Malpas, *Realism*.

In recent years, due to competitive labour costs in foreign countries and changes in both government regulations and tax structures, the city has experienced a decline in industrial activity. Consequently, its labour force experienced a rise in layoffs and job instability<sup>3</sup>. In response to these changes, and through their interaction with the automotive industry, artists Kogut and Nadeau came to employ the subject of labour in their art. Though their oeuvres are similar in subject, their process and aesthetic vary. Each represents labour differently.

In Kogut's work, the labourer is the subject. In his series of figure drawings *...they remained steadfast (I)* and *(II)*, Kogut depicts labourers in a manner that is reminiscent of Mannerist portraiture. The workers are represented in an elegant and enigmatic way, standing strong and proud against the changes brought forth by deindustrialization. By contrast, Nadeau's work is void of figures. Instead she depicts the accessories, materials, and bureaucratic procedures of the automotive industry. In *Notice of Termination*, for example, Nadeau memorialize the massive job cuts of Windsor's automotive labourers, giving permanence to a paper termination notice by transforming it into a steel plaque.

In his 1884 address, "Art and Labour," William Morris defined art as "beauty produced by the labour of man both mental and bodily."<sup>4</sup> Kogut and Nadeau's work applies this definition through their pieces' conceptualization and production.

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3 Grace MACALUSO, "Canada's Auto Industry Could Disappear within 15 Years, Says Industry Analyst," Windsor Star, April 14, 2015, accessed August 30, 2018, <https://windsorstar.com/business/canadas-auto-industry-could-disappear-within-15-years-says-industry-analyst>.

4 William Morris, "Art and Labour" (address, Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Philosophical Hall, Leeds, April 1, 1884), accessed August 30, 2018, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/art-lab.htm>.





...and they remained steadfast (I) by Vince Kogut, 2014.



...and they remained steadfast (II) by Vince Kogut, 2014.



Notice of Termination by Natalie Nadeau, 2014.

The subjects of Kogut's drawings are rendered meticulously, with factory-like precision. Similarly, the process through which Nadeau created her installation *Industry Standard* involved extensive manual labour. In one work within this installation, she used embroidery tools and traditional techniques to hand stitch a mantra on workers' uniforms. In another, she explores the value in modes of production by documenting the casting process of assembly kits. For both artists, traditional modes of labour are performed during the creative process. In this manner, process itself contributes to each artists' chosen medium.

By using imagery that evokes labour and its application as a process, the two artists have created bodies of work that apply labour as an aesthetic. Both artists make use of accessories such as uniforms and tools. Parallels can be drawn through this similarity in their oeuvres: what Kogut depicts in his drawings, Nadeau depicts three-dimensionally. This connection is best exemplified in the use of uniforms in *Solidarity (I)* and *(II)* by Kogut and the workers' uniforms in the *Industry Standards* installation by Nadeau. Parallels can also be seen in the use of industrial gloves in *...and they remained steadfast I* by Kogut and in the work gloves casting by Nadeau. The use of these images and objects form a set of principles that underlie and guide both artists' work.

Traditionally, visual artists have responded creatively to their present environments. Kogut and Nadeau carry on this tradition. Firsthand experience with labour informs their work. Exploring how their art employs labour as subject, aesthetic, and process reveals how the recurrent subject of labour is treated in a contemporary manner and applied to a local context.



Worker assembly kits from the installation *Industry Standards*  
by Natalie Nadeau, 2017.

Photo Credit: Francis Goodship. Special thanks to the Arts/  
Industry Program through the John Michael Kohler Arts Centre  
in Sheboygan & Kohler, Wisconsin.



Solidarity (I) by Vince Kogut, 2014.



Work uniforms from the installation *Industry Standards* by  
Natalie Nadeau, 2017.

Photo Credit: Francis Goodship. Special thanks to the Arts/  
Industry Program through the John Michael Kohler Arts Centre  
in Sheboygan & Kohler, Wisconsin.



Solidarity (II) by Vince Kogut, 2014.





Work Gloves #1 from the installation *Chip Production* by  
Natalie Nadeau, 2015.

By depicting labourers and their associated accessories, as well as applying the processes of industry in the creation of their pieces, the artists have developed an aesthetic centred on manual craft. In turn, by reframing this subject through contemporary expression, they continue to build on a tradition that began with revolutions to high art in the mid-nineteenth century. This body of work, similar in narrative yet varying in medium, contributes to our collective memory, building discourse on labour issues and its prominence in post-industrial society.

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**NATALIE NADEAU** is a Montreal- and Windsor-based multidisciplinary artist and educator. She teaches in the sculpture department at Concordia University. Her education includes a MFA specializing in sculpture from Concordia University (2017), a Mechanical Technician-CAD/CAM Diploma from St. Clair College (2014), and a BFA from the University of Windsor (2013). Her work has been exhibited in Ontario, Quebec, and the United States.

**VINCE KOGUT** is a painter and tattooer based in Windsor and Toronto, Ontario. He received a BFA at the University of Windsor (2013) and a MFA specializing in drawing and painting from the University of Calgary (2016). Kogut has been involved in numerous group and solo exhibitions in both Alberta and Ontario.

## ARTIST STATEMENT: VINCE ALLEN KOGUT

My creative practice is driven by a visualization of my social concerns and their relationship to identity. Specifically, I am interested in the effects of precarity on identity, using figurative drawing as a vehicle to address my concerns.

Precarity is a foundational element in my work. Social theorist Guy Standing defines precarity as a state of living characterized by its precarious relationship with employment and welfare. I became invested in precarity through my experiences growing up and working in the industrial region of the North American Rust Belt, specifically the Windsor/Detroit area. My hometown of Windsor is a blue-collar city that developed alongside Detroit through automotive production. The cities' complete reliance on the automotive industry led to a dramatic wave of layoffs, unemployment, and factory closures through the decline. The residual social effects of these events act as a complex scene to be interpreted or comprehended through each series of drawings.

## ARTIST STATEMENT: NATALIE NADEAU

Growing up in Windsor, Ontario, the skilled trades were a part of my lived experience for as long as I can remember. A large part of the workforce in my hometown was employed in the automotive industry. As a backdrop for my upbringing, the labour force and workers unions became an intrinsic focus within my art practice.

In a world where nearly all objects are manufactured on a mass scale, with little to no handmade elements, I seek to find the importance and value in items made by hand. Through practical research and sculptural experimentation, it became apparent that my artwork walks the line between antiquated handmade fabrication and mass manufacture. I'm interested in manipulating materials ranging from needlepoint thread to bronze casting in an effort to understand the role of the human hand in all making processes. Because of this desire, my work also explores more domestic forms of making and the roles played within the nuclear household. I see the domestic realm and the industrial world as polarizing environments, yet one does not exist without the other. This dichotomy of public versus private space is explored through the fabrication of household objects or experiences with industrial materials.

*For Hire* was typeset in Fournier MT and  
Alternate Gothic Normal 3 and printed on 70lb  
Zephyr Laid in an edition of 100 copies.  
This is number: