

Spectral Machines

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What happens when the idea of the worker disappears?

Tiana Reid • Winter 2023



Rodrigo Valenzuela, *Afterwork #10*, 2021. Archival inkjet print. 40 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Asya Geisberg Gallery.

Rodrigo Valenzuela's *Afterwork #10* is the tenth in a series of abstract still lifes that resemble factories or their products. The machines smoke or steam, suggesting productivity, but there are no workers in Valenzuela's photographs.

Today, the masses still labor but the concept of the worker is at risk of being lost and, along with it, a key agent of political antagonism. As Valenzuela put it recently, “we are not people considered ‘a worker’ anymore but there are still producers. . . . What will happen after the idea of the worker disappears?”

In his artwork, Valenzuela draws from his past experiences in manual labor before he got his green card—mopping the floors of construction sites, landscaping, moving boxes—and physical labor remains central to his artistic practice. For a recent exhibition in Brooklyn, he made his own frames and packed and drove the truck from Los Angeles. Through this activity, he recalls the ferocious urgency of production—and reminds us of the worker.

Tiana Reid is an assistant professor of English at York University. Her writing has been published in *Artforum*, the *Nation*, the *New Inquiry*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Paris Review*, and elsewhere.

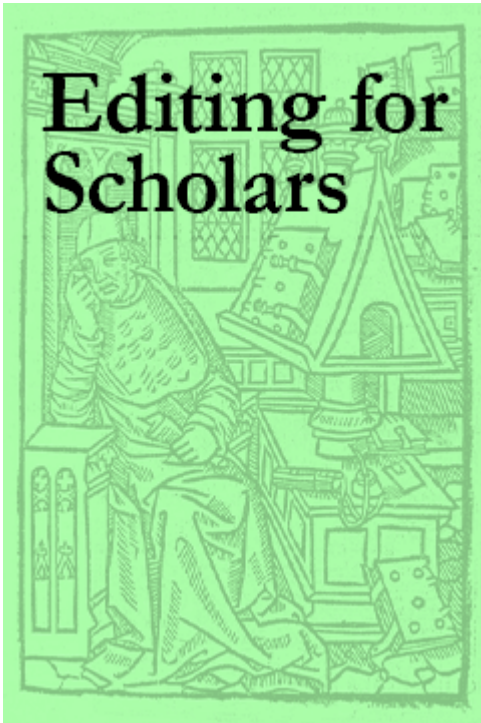


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