

Subprice

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At the supermarket *Subprice* an extremely limited range of everyday goods will be retailed at very low prices. As a work of art *Subprice* has broken free of the institution in order to be able to act directly in the social and aesthetic fields of everyday reality. That way the piece inscribes itself into an avant-garde tradition of breaking down the barrier between art and life.

Throughout the 20th century different avant-gardes have walked a thin line between being the hardest critics and the greatest innovators of modernity and progression. When politically engaged art of the 1970s broke down all barriers and restrictions of an antiquated system of control, it actually assisted in making flexibility a new measure of control, vis-à-vis the contemporary proletariat, the so-called “flexible personality”. What seemed like a great emancipation, turned out to be a new form of subordination and control.

“Tea is the new coffee”, they used to say in the US, and in that, they might just have coined a phrase for this kind of development.

Sverre Strandberg’s *Subprice* makes me think of changes in American sculpture in the 1960s: the *Brillo Boxes* of Andy Warhol and the *L-Beams* of Robert Morris. History has had a way of limiting the critical potential of these seminal works to their formal development and their critique of the institution. It has been regarded a rather trivial fact, that these works also responded to the aesthetics of a new time and a new economy. But maybe there is a potential, even a strategic potential, in this way of subjecting modern economy’s modifications of the social and aesthetic frameworks of our lives, to an aesthetic examination.

Subprice engages a specific development in the business of retailing everyday goods in Norway. This business seems to be caught in a downward spin, driven by a desire for lower prices at the cost of almost every other value in vogue: quality, diversity, sustainability and so forth. In what is probably the richest country in the world, this is a rather inexplicable development.

Subprice resembles the reality of a new supermarket chain, so much so that passers-by will think that is, and enter. Once inside the shop, though, surroundings will appear exactly strange enough for the shoppers to realise, that it is not; that the shop is actually an image. Or maybe even a monument, over the changes we are going through. *Subprice* is both an image of the times, as well as a timely consideration of how art can vocalise the obscure ways in which our world is changing, thereby making it possible to discuss them and maybe even influence them.

‘There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments,’ Robert Musil said. The walls of our lives are usually invisible, and it is in the borderlands of this invisibility that *Subprice* is working.