

Artist contribution – Diego Tonus

Processing Authorities

Processing Authorities (2013 - ongoing) is a work in progress and revolves around an anonymous and singular group of hammers owned by the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. These gavels belonged to chairs and heads of commissions of revolutionary and emancipatory movements mainly related to Dutch Trade Unions: labour movements, agricultural organizations, religious groups, anti-alcoholism commissions, Esperanto movements, sports associations, feminist movements, and so forth. Over the years, the International Institute of Social History collected them almost by chance, and without full knowledge of their histories and derivations. In an attempt to display them for the first time as a collection — or as a fragment of a collection that does not exist yet as such, but that could be particularly rich because of the variety and the number of the objects involved — Diego Tonus is researching their micro- and macro-histories, and their shifting symbolic meanings. In doing so he comments on Western cultural decision-making processes, as well as on the visual representation of authorities.

The artist creates replicas of the original gavels — dating back from the nineteenth century up until today — so that they can once more be used outside of the IISH archive. This reproduction allows for a reconsideration of the gavels' meaning, and their repositioning within today's cultural landscape. It enables them to become objects of observation and discussion within their anthropological, psychoanalytical, social, and political perspectives. The reconstruction of these artefacts is a process of appropriation, and will lead to a series of performances and actions in which these tools of power will be used for new decision-making processes.

Diego Tonus (1984, Pordenone, Italy) lives and works in Amsterdam. He graduated from the Fine Arts department of the Sandberg Institute in June 2013. *Processing Authorities* is the result of an ongoing collaboration with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (IISH).



Measuring and categorizing the gavels at the artist's studio. (Photo: Diego Tonus)



Processing Authorities, exhibition view at Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA), 2013
(Photo: Sander Van Wettum). Collection of International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.