

Artist contribution — Tom Holert

The Labours of Shine

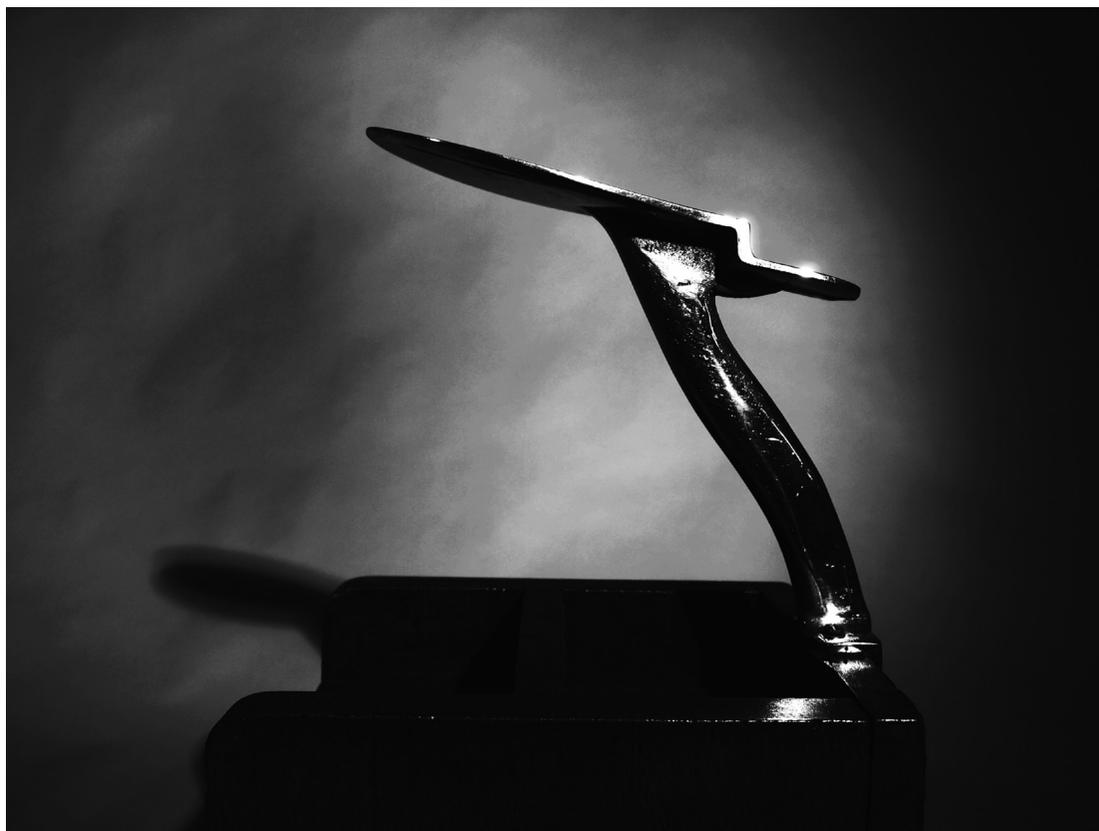
To most people, the picture of a shoeshine pedestal will likely evoke a black-and-white image of a child worker, 'bendin' low at the peoples' feet / On the windy corner of the dirty street', as Johnny Cash sings in *Get Rhythm*.

Yet the device of the shoeshine pedestal pictured here, taken from Tom Holert's video *The Labours of Shine* (2012), belongs to a different regime of representation. The shiny metal wing and the wooden podium are depicted in such a way as to make us think of High Modern Sculpture rather than lopsided power relationships, submission, and child

labour. Is this simply the umpteenth example of the Duchampian magic trick, whereby a common object goes into the hat and something quite different — an Artwork — comes out?

In this associative, speculative film-essay, Holert investigates the power of shine, and the labour it involves. The shoeshine box, an object from Holert's own collection, is juxtaposed with Constantin Brancusi's highly polished sculptures. Moreover, the film explores representations of the shoeshine boy in Hollywood films and how this figure exemplifies the film

Stills from *The Labours of Shine*, video, 2012. Courtesy Tom Holert.



industry's representation and repression of political and racial turmoil.

Walter Benjamin has famously complained that 'creative' photography will 'endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists'. *The Labours of Shine* certainly inflates the image of the shoeshine pedestal to cosmic proportions, but without turning a blind eye to the social and political contexts in which it performs. In our culture, saturated with images, the importance of Benjamin's attentiveness to the power and potentiality of

visual rhetoric and aestheticization remains undiminished. But can it be that the best way to explore the connections in which a thing exists is in fact by scrutinizing its mediations?

Tom Holert is a Berlin-based art historian, critic, curator and artist. He is currently honorary professor of art theory and cultural studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He (co-)authored books on art history, visual culture, politics, war, mobility, and glamour.

