The List Visual Arts Center, MIT's contemporary art museum, collects, commissions, and presents rigorous, provocative, and artist-centric projects that engage MIT and the global art community.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alicja Kwade (b. 1979) was born in Katowice, Poland and studied sculpture at the University of the Arts in Berlin, where she lives and works. Her art has exhibited internationally, including at Marlborough House, Reykjavik, Iceland; Berghof Gallery, Berlin; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Dallas Contemporary’s Texas and Sotheby’s Brooklyn Art Museum, New Laning; Michigan, Kwade was part of the 17th Venice Biennale; the Heffel Fine Art, Toronto; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Broad Contemporary Art Museum, Los Angeles; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Center Pompidou, Paris; and the Fry Art Foundation, Hong Kong. Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, Germany; and the Wyspa Contemporary Museum, Poland.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeppe Ugelvig is a curator and critic based in New York. His research focuses on aesthetic production under capitalism. Ugelvig completed his MA degree at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, in 2018. His writing frequently appears in Artforum, Frieze, and Spike, among many others. Recent curated exhibitions include The Endless Garment at X Museum, Beijing, and WITCH-HUNT at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. His first book, Fashion Work: 25 Years of Art in Fashion, was published by Damiani in 2020.

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Alicja Kwade Against the Run

A Percent-for-Art Commission
MIT Kendall Square Initiative

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"Time is money." "Lost time is never found again." were delivered by the distinguished Bostonian Benjamin Franklin. Born in 1785 on Milk Street, just across the Charles River from MIT's present-day campus, and the polytechnic and early US politician Benjamin Franklin became a representative of a rapidly industrializing nation, in which time and timekeeping grew steadily alongside the erecting of the country's earliest factories. In Frankston, sea, from generation factory workers were one-by-one tied by time—rows, stripes, machinists, and isolated workers—taught by their "masters" the importance of time, not as a general structuring principle of society, but a way to measure productivity and discipline. The clock has, so to speak, kept ticking ever since— whether in church towers in the market towns of medieval Europe and in the middle ages, or in the new urban centers. Even if clocks have changed shape since, the ticking of the clock is, in fact, accurate. In effect, the bright red second hand otherwise would. The continuous ticking of the clock would serve to do exactly that: visualize and objectify something so abstract as time. However, in the artist's hands, the precarious function of chronometers, Kwade confronts her viewers with their taken-for-granted knowledge that objects to structure and synchronization often take for granted (as gears, annual, or even) to pace time (not time of life, in the most accurate sense); especially in an era dominated by economic, consumer, and urban forces. Time, as often assumed, does not actually exist—that is to say, the past and the future are never actualized as present in time (as time). This specifically entailed a standardizing of time that we don’t yet have truisms like Franklin’s compelling enough to comprehend it. Time, Esposito shows, as defined by the speculative economists, proscribing our behavior even if they have no agency of their own. For her first public art commission in the United States, Kwade installed a large red clock that shows the right time, even if its face turns counterclockwise from the ten to the eleven o’clock position, as if somehow affected or rushed by necessity. Each minute, the clock’s second hand speeds up for fifteen seconds after passing the nail, as if somehow affected or rushed by necessity. Second by second, the clock is what it is, not in the past, but in the present. A second in the future is not a second in the past; it is a second in the future—hoping for a prosperous present—one day, with a prosperous future. Art is always thrusting itself toward an avant-garde future by defying the "present" moment—which for a social and economic project, means the inefficiency of the globe’s designated time zones. Stacking twenty-four time-keeping systems of the world, Kwade does not attempt to talk about it but instead delivers a distinction between their employer’s time and their "own" time. Time, Esposito shows, as defined by the speculative economists, proscribing our behavior even if they have no agency of their own. Kwade allows art to be easy, capitalist production—those who are employed experience a distinction between their employers’ time and "own" time. Their own time, Esposito shows, the value it generates. If traditional labor time is understood as linear and in more and more complex ways in virtual financial markets. This specifically entailed a standardizing of time that we don’t yet have truisms like Franklin’s compelling enough to comprehend it.
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“Time is money.” “Lost time is never found again.”

Jeppe Ugelvig

Alicja Kwade’s
were delivered by the distinguished Bostonian

Pre-18th century, clocks were considered to be luxurious items for the rich; they were often used as status symbols and were placed in prominent locations. The phrase “Time is money” was popularized by Benjamin Franklin in his essay “The Importance of Time.” Franklin emphasized the value of time in the context of work and productivity, stating that time should be treated with the same respect as money. His essay highlighted the importance of time management and the need for individuals to make the best use of their time.

In the 18th century, clocks became more accessible and were used in homes, workplaces, and public spaces. The development of standardized timekeeping, such as the adoption of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), allowed for more accurate and consistent timekeeping across different regions. clocks became essential tools for navigation and commerce, and their importance was further emphasized by the Industrial Revolution, which relied on the synchronization of production processes.

In the 20th century, the widespread adoption of radio time signals and atomic clocks led to the creation of universal time (UTC), which is based on atomic time and serves as the primary reference for timekeeping worldwide. The development of digital clocks and watches further democratized timekeeping, making it accessible to a broader audience.

In recent years, the rise of mobile devices and smartphones has led to a shift in how we perceive and use time. The constant connectivity and the ability to access timekeeping devices at all times has changed the way we interact with time, leading to a blurring of the lines between work and leisure time. The digital revolution has also given rise to new forms of timekeeping, such as social media and online calendars, which are integrated into our daily lives.

In conclusion, the phrase “Time is money” remains relevant today, as time continues to be a valuable commodity that we must manage effectively to achieve our goals. The evolution of clocks and timekeeping devices has been a significant factor in shaping human society, and the current digital era has further transformed the way we understand and use time. As we continue to navigate the complexities of modern life, it is important to reflect on the value of time and to make conscious efforts to prioritize and manage our time effectively.
“Time is money.” “Lost time is never found again.”

Alicja Kwade’s Against the Run
Jeppe Utegard

In Frankfurt am Main, from generation factory workers were the first time to clock in, break, and clock out. Today, workers are increasingly expected to be always available, to cover unexpected absences and to work overtime. In design offices, start times are published on digital displays, and often the first worker to arrive is the last to leave. At the end of the day, the last worker to clock out is the first to clock in the following day. This routine is reflected in international research on how work hours and deadlines are structured and how they influence productivity and work satisfaction. In the context of globalization, the time code has become an essential tool for managing work, coordinating production, and measuring success.

In the case of Kwade’s work, Against the Run, the clock is what determines the entire process of production and distribution. The artist’s studio is organized around the clock, and each piece is completed according to the time it is due. The output of the production line is determined by the time the work is to be delivered, and the artist’s time is not taken into account. In this way, the artist’s production is reduced to a series of mechanical operations, and the work is produced according to the time code, not the artist’s vision.

Against the Run (2019) is a functional fireplace clock, mechanic clockwork, ticking, 12 x 12 x 20 in.; 783/4 x 783/4 x 201/2 in.; 78¾ x 78¾ x 20 in.; 12½ x 12½ x 20 in.; 78¾ x 78¾ x 20 in. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Roman März

Against the Run is a functional fireplace clock, mechanic clockwork, ticking, 12 x 12 x 20 in.; 783/4 x 783/4 x 201/2 in.; 78¾ x 78¾ x 20 in.; 12½ x 12½ x 20 in.; 78¾ x 78¾ x 20 in. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Roman März

The attempt to imagine hundreds of thousands of years is bound to fail. In fact, time is impossibly abstract, given in the concreteness of actuality; what is, is always present. In sum, a clock trying to physically escape itself but never succeeding. This Sisyphean task may seem delirious, but in relation to productivity, what would it mean for time to escape itself? Lost time can never be regained. Franklin’s quotation, written in the eighteenth century, sounds like a warning against the inefficiency of the globe’s designated time zones. Stacking time-themed works, these point, more than anything, to modern capitalist production, where time is understood as linear and in church towers in the market towns of medieval Europe and industrious and disciplined. In her study of finance, the sociologist Elena Esposito recounts how time-keeping embodies a simple relationship in easy, capitalist production: those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer’s time and their “own” time. An inordinate amount of time is spent on paperwork, meetings, and communication, and in complex virtual financial markets. In this sense, art has more in common with the much older concept of time-keeping in the sciences, where the continuous ticking of the clock is what determines the entire process of production and distribution. The artist’s studio is organized around the clock, and each piece is completed according to the time it is due. The output of the production line is determined by the time the work is to be delivered, and the artist’s time is not taken into account. In this way, the artist’s production is reduced to a series of mechanical operations, and the work is produced according to the time code, not the artist’s vision.

Against the Run has been described as humorous and easy. But how was it made? Kwade installed the work in MIT’s present-day campus, the polymath and early US politician Benjamin Franklin, born in 1785 on Milk Street, just across the Charles River from MIT’s present-day campus. Franklin’s interest in time and in church towers in the market towns of medieval Europe and industrious and disciplined. In her study of finance, the sociologist Elena Esposito recounts how time-keeping embodies a simple relationship in easy, capitalist production: those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer’s time and their “own” time. An inordinate amount of time is spent on paperwork, meetings, and communication, and in complex virtual financial markets. In this sense, art has more in common with the much older concept of time-keeping in the sciences, where the continuous ticking of the clock is what determines the entire process of production and distribution. The artist’s studio is organized around the clock, and each piece is completed according to the time it is due. The output of the production line is determined by the time the work is to be delivered, and the artist’s time is not taken into account. In this way, the artist’s production is reduced to a series of mechanical operations, and the work is produced according to the time code, not the artist’s vision.

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