

ARTFORUM

Zoe Beloff

PARTICIPANT INC

253 East Houston Street, Ground Floor
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Zoe Beloff based her latest exhibition, “The Days of the Commune,” on the eponymous, little-known play Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1947 to commemorate the rise and fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, considered by many to be the world’s first proletarian revolution. Over the course of spring 2012, the artist directed a motley crew of professional and amateur actors, activists, and artists to perform Brecht’s drama at sites across New York City that loosely correspond to settings from the play. Throughout, the last dregs of Occupy Wall Street played an omnipresent role—invisible and unacknowledged yet felt everywhere.



Zoe Beloff, *The Days of Commune*, 2013,
digital video, color, sound, 155 minutes.

The film and its attendant props, costumes, storyboards, and drawings on view here give a cumulative picture of three moments—1871, 1947, and 2012—that in their different ways represent both the last gasps of revolutionary fervor and the looming understanding of a battle already lost. The deliberately anachronistic manner of acting and stage design takes its cues from Brechtian theater, which forwent historical continuity in order to consciously overlap incongruous times and spaces. In Beloff’s case, nineteenth-century Paris is mapped over twenty-first century New York, emphasizing the artificiality of the performance while drawing attention to the present environment. The drawings of Zuccotti Park are emblematic of this tension: For Beloff, drawing is a manner of thinking in time. Her deployment of the medium in the face of the camera-ready protests demonstrates a different approach to the movement. Not beholden to the documentary tradition in photography, Beloff’s sketches are unencumbered by our need for instantaneous images, and this instead allows political imagination to take over.

— Chelsea Haines

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