

frieze

Eric Wesley

FONDAZIONE MORRA GRECO, NAPLES, ITALY

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Courtesy Fondazione Morra Greco, Napoli. Photo: Gennaro Navarra

Eric Wesley's *Spa fice* (2007) is a multi-sensory experience, an interactive installation expressly designed for Naples' new project space, the Fondazione Morra Greco. A steep stairwell leads to a cellar carved from volcanic sandstone. The sweet smell of gas permeates the clammy atmosphere. Natural light creeps through small windows, but the principal sources of illumination are glowing screensavers projected onto the walls. Arguing neighbours and whizzing scooters from the streets above the cellar play background accompaniment to the sounds of the installation's protagonists: a humming gas heater and the rhythmic slapping of water in a large wading pool.

Established as emblematic of the 'Art of Idleness' by sightseers on the late-18th-century Grand Tour, Naples is the perfect location for *Spa fice*, Wesley's exploration of the age-old concepts *otium* and *negotium* (Latin for leisure and business). 'Everyone knows the story of the traveller in Naples who saw 12 beggars lying in the sun and offered a lira to the laziest,' Bertrand Russell begins his 1932 essay 'In Praise of Idleness', '11 of them jumped up to claim it, so he gave it

to the twelfth. This traveller was on the right lines.' *Spa fice* nods to Russell and winks at Tom Hodgkinson's recent *How to be Idle* (2004), rendering homage to socialist activist Paul Lafargue's belief that technology was the 'God' to liberate men from wage-labour, rewarding them with idleness and freedom.

Wesley fuses sculpture, installation and architecture to create his combination *Spa-Office*. A changing room complete with robes and cotton shorts initiates visitors who the artist hopes will disrobe and participate in his work. Nearby, a laptop with wifi sits on a table surfaced with white tiles: all of the installation's environments are created using variations on this same minimalist furniture design. In the sauna, pool, and studio, a table-auger assemblage repeatedly appears: two large holes are born through a low table directly into the cellar floor, an auger is left resting at a diagonal in one hole, while the element protruding from the second varies in each environment. In the sauna, a large cylindrical gas heater is planted in the table's second hole; in the pool, a stream of water spits from the second hole to the pool's opposite end. These assemblages suggest that *Spa fice* is self-sufficient, that its gas and water derive from sources directly below the exhibition space (which is of course not the case). A precarious walkway of furniture lined up across the pool's centre invites visitors to pass under the arch of water to an artist's studio. Punctured bags of gesso and cement are posed among funnels, cement puddles and gesso-filled plastic bottles, a composition that recalls Wesley's training as a sculptor. In the studio, the table-auger assemblage is again repeated but its second hole is empty.

The Internet is a constant presence in *Spa fice*. In Wesley's world, as in that of Lafargue's, the computer is the omnipresent, all-knowing force offering us the freedom to skip from work to play effortlessly, our salvation from the 'Right to Work'. 'Hitherto we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines; in this we have been foolish,' scolds Russell at the end of his essay, 'but there is no reason to go on being foolish for ever.'

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