

AINA ALBO PUIGSERVER
INTERSTICES: WHERE THE SUN
TRACES TIME
22.05-20.09.26

Curatorial text. Sofia Moisés Pizà

Oh! Sleep, oh! Sun, my life will be
subject to your laws
and I will close my eyes
when you disappear
beautiful star of love, beautiful star of drunkenness.

Les Mystères du Château du Dé (Man Ray, 1929)

Time has been a subject of reflection ever since human beings became aware of it. From classical philosophy to contemporary physics, many thinkers have sought to define its nature and understand its relationship to space. With the theory of relativity, it was demonstrated that time and space are not absolute magnitudes, but rather interdependent dimensions. Along with this, more recent studies suggest that temporal experience is not just a physical reality but also a perceptive construction: experienced time does not necessarily coincide with measured time. Memory, attention and emotional memory are constantly altering temporal perception.

For various millennia, the sun has been the main regulator of human rhythms. A year (approximately 365 days and 6 hours long) is in reality the time the Earth takes to complete its orbit around the sun. The alternation of day and night, the movement of shadows, seasonal variations or light's angle of incidence have all historically structured daily life, rituals and forms of production. Before the appearance of mechanical clocks, time was experienced as something bound to natural cycles and observation.

The sun was venerated by great ancient civilisations as a beneficent God: in Egypt it was incarnated in Ra; in ancient Greece, in Helios and Apollo; in ancient Persia it was given the name Mitra; the Aztecs venerated Tonatiuh; in Peru, Inti was revered; and in Japan they worshiped Amaterasu. Astronomical phenomena were amongst the most observed natural events in the past: beliefs, sayings and refrains related to the sun and moon are far more common than those referring to any other star or planet: “Cada dia surt es sol, / tant surt per jo com per tu; / ell no se pon per ningú, / se pon perquè Déu ho vol.”¹

Religious connections with the sun go back to antiquity, as does scientific study of the sun, thanks to which we have the sundial, the solar calendar or the theory of a sun-centred planetary system. In the Western contemporary context, the way of measuring time derives mainly from

¹ Mas, Lluç (ed.). *Estimar l'astronomia. Manual per als amants de l'univers*. Palma: Edicions UIB, 2004, p. 437. [“Every day the sun comes up / it rises for me and for you / it does not set for anyone / but sets because God wants it to.”]

the Gregorian calendar, established in 1582 to correct the accumulated errors of the Roman Julian calendar. That was when the year was divided into conventional months, weeks and exact days, which made it possible to synchronise agriculture, labour, religion, economy and political life.

Nevertheless, not all civilisations have conceived time in the same manner. The Islamic calendar is lunar: each month begins with the appearance of the new moon, and the year lasts 354 days. The Hebrew calendar combines the solar and lunar cycles, while in China time is ordered using celestial movements, zodiac signs and seasonal energies. In Mayan cosmology, time stretches out like a system of cycles that repeat and overlap. In India, many philosophical traditions contemplate time in near infinite scales, through massive cosmic eras that last millions of years. Perhaps it is because of our awareness of our diminutive status in cosmic time that the verses of Antonina Canyelles ring strangely true for us: “Què hi fa si el sol se’ns menja el DNI, el capell i les sandàlies?”²

Human relationship with the sun is, most probably, the first great symbolic pact we made with the universe. The sun helps us define an existential geography, situating us in the world as we comprehend our place in the cosmos. This bond between human experience and astronomical observation becomes particularly patent in the way in which we measure solar time: the apparent solar day, based on the position of the sun in the sky, does not coincide precisely with the average solar day as used by clocks. This discrepancy responds to two fundamental astronomical factors: the elliptical orbit of the Earth and the tilt of its axis in relation to its orbital plane. The difference between these two solar times is given the name equation of time, and its value can be greater than sixteen minutes. As a result, the moment the sun reaches the highest point in the sky varies slightly over the course of the year.

The diagrammatic representation of this variation is the analemma, a curve in the shape of a figure eight that indicates the position of the sun at the same time over the course of each day of the year. This figure shows that time is not a stable, homogenous line, but rather an oscillation, a subtle, persistent deviation. The analemma thus becomes an image that manifests time’s variability.

Literature and art history have returned insistently to address this paradoxical experience of temporality. Philosophers, poets, scientists and mystics have all addressed sunlight effects as a fundamental feature of human experience. Marcel Proust, for example, understood light as the trigger of latent memories, positing an expanded temporality built from luminous variations, pauses, repetitions and virtually imperceptible transformations. It was not by chance that *In Search of Lost Time* was written over the course of more than a decade, then systematically revised until the author’s death. The very structure of the work thus became a form of accumulative temporal experience, fragmentary and unrushed.

This sensibility runs through a good part of contemporary culture, where music has delved into the relationship between light, memory and awareness of time. Songs like The Beatles’ *Here Comes the Sun*, *Sun It Rises* by Fleet Foxes and *Sun in My Mouth*, by Björk, along with so many others, point to this emotional and physical experience of light as a transformative force.

Art history has likewise witnessed great efforts to represent the tension between permanence and transformation. Whether the Baroque vanitas recalling the fleeting nature of life, the medieval astronomical clock or modern manifestations like the series of light by Claude Monet, Salvador Dalí and his soft clocks or Olafur Eliasson’s installations, the relationship between light, time and representation is present throughout much of Western artistic practices.

In the early 20th century, artists and scientists began to conceive photography as something more than a mere tool for representation, understanding it as a device able to reveal visible structures of time and movement. Étienne-Jules Marey, through his chronophotographic

2 Canyelles, Antonina. *Putes i consentits. Antologia poètica*. Barcelona: Lapslàtzuli Editorial, 2020, p. 131. [“What does it matter if the sun ends up devouring your ID, your hat and your sandals?”]

studies, registered various phases of a movement on a single photographic plate, turning the image into a temporal condensation. This will to capture what is fleeting and intermediate, what habitually escapes the gaze, would deeply transform the relationship between art, science and perception.

In this context, Man Ray discovered that it was possible to “draw with light” using rayographs: compositions done directly onto photosensitive paper using opaque and transparent objects, with no need for a camera. Using this technique, he revived an early photographic procedure to explore the direct relationship with light and the materiality of the image: “I have finally freed myself of the sticky material of paint, and I am working directly with light itself,”³ the artist claimed. Light was no longer an instrument for the representation of objects, turning instead into the active material of creation.

This urge to reveal the imperceptible, to situate luminous traces and invisible temporalities, has a direct echo in the artistic practice of Aina Albo Puigserver (Palma, 1982). Making use of a gesture as basic as looking at the sun, Albo develops a process of visual exploration where light becomes measure, matter and writing in time.

Conceived specifically for Exhibition Hall D at Es Baluard Museu d’Art Contemporani de Palma, the project proposes a shift able to move beyond the walls, the city and the very visible realm, where each piece might work as a point of orientation, a newfound “you are here” inscribed into an internal, abstract map of the universe, rather than in a physical map.

The exhibition begins with an experience situated in the museum’s immediate environs. Over the course of a full year, a camera installed on an upper terrace captured daily variations of the landscape and the position of the sun—coinciding always with the same solar time, despite the variation between winter and summer clocks—thus constructing a sustained image in time. Continuous recording turns the analemma into a method of observation based on constancy and repetition. The systematic recording of these variations leads to an accumulation of luminous fragments that transcends mere documentation, working as a kind of visual thinking.

The analemma becomes in this way the guiding principle of the exhibition. The artist recalls that this astronomical figure can only exist over the course of time; it is a projection of movement, a form of luminous writing, condensing multiple moments. It is precisely here where the notion of the interstice emerges: those minimal gaps between one instant and the next, between a point of light and its shift, fragile and often imperceptible in nature, are transformed into the veritable domain of the artist’s study.

Albo understands these intervals as sites of appearance, cracks revealing a form of knowledge that is not immediate, but rather paused and accumulative. So the exhibition introduces another way of inhabiting time: as a constellation of instants, rather than a continuous line.

This approach is expressed formally in visual language founded in geometries, drawn from rigorous observation of natural phenomena. Circles, projected lines, trajectories and light variations do not respond to a closed order, but to a structure in permanent evolution. The geometry acts here as a tool, making it possible to approach variability, while at the same time as a symbolic form of the forces running through the universe. The circle most particularly—a primordial shape associated with the sun—appears as an image of eternity, time with no beginning nor end.

The materials used—glass, wood, varnishes, glazing—help sustain a delicate balance between measure and intuition. It is not a matter of depicting a landscape, but of converting it into a space for meditation. The sun, understood as a physical and symbolic agent, along with the landscape’s essential shapes, enter into dialogue with the subtle geometry of luminous and atmospheric phenomena. Scenarios are born from this intersection that fluctuate between reality and the imaginary. These images do not solely refer to observable landscapes, but also to possible visions: emotional instants, non-existent memories, imagined futures.

The diversity of formats present in the exhibition likewise responds to this will to construct a fragmentary, expanded experience. The large-format works provide a global, near

3 Mundy, Jennifer (ed.). *Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia*. Barcelona: Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, 2008, p. 38–39.

atmospheric vision, while at the same time demanding close, paused observation. The smaller works, in turn, function in more intimate fashion; they are fragments, visual annotations, loose sheets making it possible to access concrete details.

The exhibition proposal is conceived as an installed landscape where painting, sculpture, light and moving image converge. The overall body of works establishes a flowing path through the exhibition, making it possible to experience time from diverse perspectives: projection, light variation, shadow, overlaying, and the observational document. The exhibition is organised around a pictorial nucleus and sculptural mechanisms that set out the spatial path.

Taken together, all of the works have a relationship of continuity and complementarity. Visual features reappear from one piece to another, as if travelling across surfaces. Certain forms that are just hinted at in one piece are manifest in full in another. This system of correspondences creates a crossover reading, where each piece modifies the perception of all others.

Here glass takes on a critical role, working as a transparent surface, filter, membrane and optical device. Looking through glass means accepting that all perception is mediated by light, and therefore by time. Nothing is shown as an absolute; all of vision is appearance conditioned by angles, the incidence of light and transparency. The shadows projected in the installation work to record the presence of light, setting the ephemeral in its place.

The triptych *Invisible i visible: anelemes*, dedicated to the analemma, plays a particularly meaningful role in the project. The piece expresses three temporal dimensions, as related to the past, the present and the future. The central panel depicts the analemma of our time, the result of ongoing observation of the sun over the course of a year. On the left we have a historical, imaginary variation of the analemma, based on the idea that the figure traced by the sun thousands of years ago was not the same as nowadays. On the right side, in turn, we see an analemma that is yet to come into existence, the hypothetical figure that the sun might trace thousands of years from now. These three versions of the analemma work as temporal projections recalling the mutability of everything surrounding us.

In earlier works, the artist had previously explored this tension between time, memory and an imagined future. A future that does not yet exist, because it has yet to happen, despite living fully in our imagination. The future analemma is thus turned into a form of projection towards a time that the artist will never experience, although she might be perfectly able to imagine various versions of it.

The sculptural aspect of the exhibition is focused on the glass and light projection featured in the installation that gives this show its title, *Donde el sol dibuja el tiempo*, delving more intensely into this reflection. On the one hand, it articulates the material reconstruction of an astronomical and luminous phenomena; on the other, it makes manifest what is intangible and emotion. Light emerges here both as physical matter and a transitory phenomenon. The technical precision the piece is created with demonstrates the importance of planning in Albo's creative process. Her knowledge of engraving and sculpture are patent in how she treats glass, patterning using a sandblaster. This technique demands careful preparation, allowing for various layers of depth and transparency in the composition. Some fine line details were in turn done with acid etching, creating subtle variations of light density. In this way, the pieces' formal language shifts into three-dimensional space.

Light—whether coming from the sun, the moon, from lightning or the stars—acts as the project's veritable material. Everything is transformed by its incidence: spaces, objects, surfaces, as well as the emotional perception of the landscape.

The series "Dins el paisatge" brings together various scenes taken from images recorded by the camera placed on the museum terrace: thunderstorms, lightning flashing through the clouds, cases of parhelions,⁴ lunar movements, disappearances and reappearances of stars.

⁴ Also known as "sun dog", a parhelion is an atmospheric optical phenomenon produced by the refraction of solar light when passing through hexagonal ice crystals suspended in the clouds. It appears as one or two luminous points on either side of the sun, along the line of the horizon.

These extraordinary moments are caught as part of an ongoing observational exercise, to be later condensed in the work *Paisatges dins el paisatge*, the exhibition's large mural.

This large-format piece sets up a temporal overlaying based on the series of events recorded over the course of a solar year, as if time had folded in upon itself. Moments that have been experienced and others that have not, live alongside each other within a shared visual space, rupturing the temporal linearity we habitually structure reality with. The process allows us to observe transformations that are often hard to perceive: the unhurried shifting of the sun on the horizon, a series of lightning flashes during a storm, or minimal variations of light.

In making this large-format piece, the artist built a homemade compass with a radius of almost three metres, turning the geometric gesture into a physical and corporeal experience. This relationship between the body, scale and time runs through a good part of Albo's artistic practice. In fact, time is a recurring concern in her work, such as with the shape it takes for us, our awareness of our finitude or how it conditions our experience of the world.

An essential aspect of this approach is the relationship with materials. Albo sustains a highly physical bond with wood, a material that she considers to be alive, charged with memory. She has gradually reduced opaque covers to allow for the materiality of the support to remain visible. Varnishes and glazing create subtle depths so that the surface might keep its roughness, wood grain and intrinsic expressivity.

Geometry plays an essential role: circles, lines and vectors are created using precise technical drawings, done with ruler and compass. Colour, in contrast, is defined gradually during the work process. Paint is built up slowly as well, in ongoing dialogue with the support and with the transformations suggested by the work itself over the course of the process. When it comes to paint, the artist works solely with brushes, understanding pause as a fundamental component. Slowness is included as part of the method, so as to avoid hastiness; pause is consented as a form of attention, meaning she accepts that images need time to emerge.

The project is rounded out with a register box, a physical container holding fragments of the material produced throughout the process: notes, drawings, photographs, small samples of materials, documentation. A unique archive, synthesising various levels of the research, visualising its accumulative aspect.

The forms present in «Interstices: Where the Sun Traces Time» go beyond the exhibition cube, expanding beyond the architecture and unfolding as an experience in time. The works compose a temporal lapse, out of which it is possible to reconnect with the surroundings and ourselves, even though only for a few moments. It places us in a hiatus, a realm of bound attention, from where we might imagine what it would be like to travel with light through time: a realm where everything might be observed, including the most hidden, delicate variations of the world.