

Time After Time

“The incidence of light creates an interaction between reality and illusion, the material and immaterial, the disappearance and appearance, a slipping of exterior to interior.”

-Kaat Van Doren, 2018

The Restless Sitter

Although Kaat Van Doren considers sunlight the primary focus of her ongoing research and artistic oeuvre, *Waiting for 9:58 A.M. (#18092018)* casts sunlight as her “sitter,” just as people sit for the portrait painter, only the sun refuses to sit still for anyone. Not only does the available sunlight change with each passing moment, but its reach shifts daily as the sun’s position changes, which this immersive light-painting captures with ease. Breaking in (and out) through a nearby window, sunlight forges a path around the room atop lines marking the edges of earlier shadows repeatedly cast on the wall and floor by the sunlight of 18 September 2018.

Van Doren’s installation depicts time more vividly than any clock. Unlike a sundial, whose focus is the time of day, and thus repeats its course daily; this work’s constantly roving rose aperture marks out a different territory daily, spreading its joy to different points around the room. Only time will tell whether light reflected from the window realigns the “same time, next year” with the angles of yesteryear’s shadows. I even wonder whether tape placed on the floor each day at the same time could mark out an analemma, the figure eight indicative of the sun’s changing position in the sky. I’ll keep circling back to *Waiting for 9:58 A.M. (#18092018)*.

Time’s Elusiveness

Time is either explicit, as in the case of live actions or growing species; or implicit, as when we look backwards to recall past events or glance forward to imagine the future. And indeed, the past impacts our present, while the present influences our view of the past. The present thus begins as an invisible seed whose DNA is rooted in the past, while its legacy rests squarely on its future. Unlike the notion of time as an arrow that constantly marches forward, events occurring in and over time tend to transcend any notion of time as a discrete entity, granting time its fluidity. As a result, eras mix, blur, and spread, lending time its sense as a borderless frontier. With its discrete lines demarcating the edges of yesteryear’s shadows, *Waiting for 9:58 A.M. (#18092018)* registers concrete time limits, thus restoring boundaries to now and then.

In 2010, theorist Timothy Morton coined the term “hyperobject” in *The Ecological Thought* to convey objects occupying space-time fields that are so vast that they overwhelm ordinary perception, thus defying the imagination. Exemplary hyperobjects include the omnipresence of non-decaying styrofoam and plastic bags, Ecuador’s Lagro Agrio oil fields, the Florida Everglades, a biosphere, climate change, the solar system, a black hole, and so on; all examples that are more processes than static, unchanging objects, which is why time is relevant. Less remarked upon is the way the infinity of endless time risks to overwhelm the imagination far more than space’s vastness, which is comparatively finite. To overcome time’s inaccessibility, people schedule activities, anticipate event durations, and plan despite time itself being beyond their grasp, let alone control. *Waiting for 9:58 A.M. (#18092018)* has been programmed to anticipate the return of the rose aperture, just as almanacs predict full moons.

Time in Art

For the most part, artists keen to explore *time* as a topic all its own, devoid of the context that subjects like history or science afford it, have turned to video and/or photography to capture transformation; presented performance art/live action; or created living sculptures with animals and/or plants. Notably, pictures depict the already past, actions occur in the present, while living sculptures engender a near or distant future, depending on species’ life spans and careful maintenance. None of these artistic approaches visualizes time so well as *Waiting for*

9:58 A.M. (#18092018). Given people's incapacity to grasp time, this immersive light-painting proves especially helpful since it marks where time has been, and predicts where time will go, next time. But we don't know whether time is so accurate as to retrace the shadow's path one year to the next. We expect this, but don't yet have good reason to bet on it.

Waiting for 9:58 A.M. (#18092018) is Van Doren's fourth work focused on time's elusive features. In 2017, she produced several works that froze the present in the past. As the sun traveled across a book's pages for four minutes, it cast shadows on pages made from light-sensitive paper punctured with holes, such that several shadows extended through the holes to reach other pages. Her video *Waiting (F)or* records shadows cast on a sketch book, as the wind flips through its pages to reveal its title flitting across its pages. And before that, she drew and painted layered shadows cast on paper and canvas, respectively; as tree branches were tossed about by the wind and the sun criss-crossed her backyard, shifting the shadows.

Van Doren's architecture-specific installation is poised to address one last question. What will happen as time passes? While going forward over time, will the sun's myriad shadows recycle, repass, revisit, and retrace their original paths? Or will they all be cast anew, forcing the work to generate new lines of resistance? Either way, I suspect this shadow will be 6 hours late (15:58).

Sue Spaid, Ph. D.