

TIMESCAPES

Paul Barlow | Tom Hardwick-Allan | Rebecca Halliwell Sutton | Shahpour Pouvan |  
Yelena Popova | Hiraki Sawa | Solveig Settemsdal | Min Woo Nam

Curated by Maria Hinel

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Frequently thought of as a line irrevocably directed from the past to the future, time intuitively appears as an *a priori* container of lived experience. Underpinning our conception of change, memory, and sense of self, the reckoning of time passage seems natural and absolute, a singular common measure of human existence. Yet the present system of time keeping in hours and minutes is a relatively recent invention, and contemporary research shows an extensive variance in attitudes towards time across cultures and geographies.

The notion of universal clock time, for instance, only solidified in the middle of the nineteenth century coinciding with rapid industrialisation. Transforming the economics of labour, clock time engendered hourly wages, and subsequently the idea of ‘time is money’ prevalent in contemporary culture. Inherently dissociated from the patterns of the natural world which previously directed our temporal orientation, standard clock time thus emerges as *contingent*, rather than absolute, a product and tool of specific social and political conditions.

Bringing together works by eight contemporary artists spanning painting, drawing, sculpture, video, and photography, *Timescapes* considers the ways in which one can bridge and become aware of distinct timescales, notably individual and planetary, ancestral and futuristic. Conceiving of alternative ‘timescapes’ beyond a single accepted temporal system, the artists in the exhibition make visible the moments of change and stillness, time stretched and condensed, anchored by the clock or a cycle of light and motion in the external

landscape, indirectly suggesting other ways of thinking about the environment and human future on the planet.

In *Wall* (2018), a video work by **Hiraki Sawa**, a quiet loop of imaginary scenes and constructed landscapes presents a meditation on our perception of time. Re-imagined by means of digital animation, mundane domestic objects pace and hesitate in an invariably motionless frame, staging a dissonance of movement and stillness, change and repetition. In one scene, birds follow each other in a perpetual close loop in the twilight sky; in another, a clock walks on human legs, perhaps as a metaphor of constrained vision, obstructed by established routines and ideas. Complicating the conventional notion of time as a straight line underpinning our memory and experience, the artist poignantly alludes to its gaps and loops, a theme also palpable in his works on paper portraying a metronome entangled in delicate lines tracing its movement.

Executed in subtle hues of maroon, white and grey, the shimmering outlines in *Horizon* (2023) by **Min Woo Nam** draw us into the composition demanding a slow gaze. Gradually emerging from the dark ground to create a sense of movement and depth, the elements of the seascape here register a painterly process rooted in an uninterrupted temporal experience. Repeatedly beginning anew on the canvas, Nam creates the entire composition in one continuous and often very long sitting. Painstakingly executed from memory, the painting thus acts as kind of personal timescape, simultaneously encapsulating and inviting a period of deliberation.

Tracing the life cycle of a liquid form emerging and dissolving in a viscous space, *Still Lyes* by **Solveig Settemsdal** reflects on mutability of objects and ideas over time. Diluting lye and Verdigris (an ancient painterly pigment) in jelly, the artist films ever evolving biomorphic shapes, presenting a moving image categorically devoid of stillness and questioning the prerequisites of an object's identity over time. Composed of hydrophone recordings from the Tingvoll fjord in Norway, the sound in the work alludes to underwater movement in a seascape.

Depicting symmetrical shapes curving against monochrome ground, paintings by **Paul Barlow** likewise seem to unfold in front of the viewer, delicately capturing moments between stillness and becoming. Applying thinned paint on to the canvas in layers, the artist manipulates, reshapes and scrapes away the liquid pigment as it flows and permeates the material of the support. Effortlessly branching away from the central shape, the traces of paint configure into images of remarkable detail, evoking meandering river estuaries or bifurcating tree trunks, as if following imperceptible patterns of movement in nature.

Applying the pigment made of powdered earth and rocks on to the canvas in energetic arcing lines, **Yelena Popova** investigates the soil as an archive of natural and human activity over the millennia. Using the soil from distinct parts of the UK landscape, the artist builds each composition in layers of translucent pigment, as if mimicking tectonic movement of the earth in free hand. Here, as in part in Barlow's compositions, complex interweaving lines

suggest a new mode of abstraction, inherently rooted in, rather than distanced from the external environment.

**Rebecca Halliwell-Sutton's** tender two-dimensional works, coalesce the contemplation of the past and the future with the immanent sense of the now. Titled *Blue Ritual (Ecologies of Desire)*, the works reference an ancient pre-Vedic prayer to gods, whereby a small rock was tied to a tree with scraps of fabric and returned back to the ground once a request was fulfilled. Re-enacting the ritual, the artist tied stones on to a tree with pieces of silk soaked in cyanotype, which acquires dark blue pigmentation when exposed to sunlight. Emerging as a record of duration and light, the intensity of the colour of the cloth alludes to the mounting sense longing. As the artist writes, "To take a piece of earth and elevate it into the trees and imbue it with hope and belief, felt like a leap of faith for a future life."

In *Chunk of Water*, **Shahpour Pouyan** considers foundations of a distinct ancient cosmology, rooted in the Zoroastrian religion. Simultaneously capturing the sense of stillness and rippling motion, the sculpture portrays a sample of the primordial ocean, an image of purity and source of all life in time.

Composed of three circular forms, the triptych by **Tom Hardwick-Allan** reflects on the idea of a 'light cone', a path that a flash of light emanating from a single event would take through spacetime towards the past and the future. Permeated by rhythmic curves mimicking invisible patterns of movement, the works portray disparate objects and associations in flux, rendered in striking detail. Painstakingly carving into the plywood, the artist locates natural concentric patterns, thereby re-imagining the industrially processed material as a slice of timber, a paradigmatic image of time lived and compressed.

Text by Maria Hinel

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Image: Tom Hardwick-Allan, Y, 2023, Acrylic, ink, marker, fine-liner, biro and pencil on carved birch plywood.