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LambdaLambdaLambda,

(The
Pristina

Kosovo

Hours)
31

August

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Katja
28

October

Mater
2023

I've always found Plato's allegory of the cave annoying. Prisoners chained up in an underground chamber are looking at shadows on the wall and mistaking them for reality. One of the prisoners breaks free, and goes up to the illuminated real world. At first, his bleary eyes can only discern the shadows of things. Then he can begin to see the reflections of things on the water. Gradually, he is able to see "the things themselves," unmediated – and finally, he can "look upon the sun itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place."

For Plato, the realm of the cave stands for the realm of "petty miseries." The people who are stuck down there are stuck in a degraded reality of distraction and delusion. They don't even know that they are missing out on the truth; only the individual who has unchained himself and looked straight up at the sun is enlightened enough to understand the real source from which all those pesky shadows are cast. Shadows are "mere" appearances; they're immaterial, they're elusive, and, worst of all, they're existentially dependent. It's a line of thinking that feeds easily into the Christian European episteme with its insistence on equating knowledge with light and ignorance with darkness ("dim understanding," "shadow of doubt," "bring to light," "beginning to see the light," "The Enlightenment," etc.).

Like I said, I'm not a fan. I'll choose *phantasms in an alien setting* over staring directly at the sun any day. I like shadows and reflections. I like mimesis and incomplete visions. I'm not turned on by the quest for an unadulterated original that is static, isolated, and detached from all relationality. I like the play spaces of mediation, and I like the non-totalizing knowledges of the night. I have respect for caves as places of shelter, secrets, and story-telling – and for

their historical importance as sites of ancestral worship and other ritualised practices of knowledge that have turned away from the glare of the sun. I don't want the truth of absolute visibility. I don't want to see things without their shadows, and I don't want knowledge that has no doubt in it.

For her first solo exhibition at LambdaLambdaLambda, Katja Mater presents *They (The Hours)*, which turns the gallery space into an experimental timekeeping device that works with the fleeting appearances of shadows, reflections, and re-directed sunlight. A series of mirrors are strategically arranged below certain windows, to catch the light of the sun as it passes overhead. They are angled so that the light can then be sent into the gallery space, towards one of the cast aluminium and bronze sculptures that have been positioned to catch the light that is thrown in their direction – each one marking a different time of day. The different colours of the aluminium and bronze build a writing system that holds layers of multiple meanings. The installation also features subtle markers on the wall, located so that they align with the shadows that are cast through the windows at certain times.

It all depends on the sun's position in the sky, and the angles of its light, at this particular time of late-summer-becoming-early-autumn. The mediated arrival of light and shadows in the space is also determined by the weather conditions of any given day. There are a lot of contingencies at play, and part of the premise of this model of timekeeping is that it is imprecise and prone to failure.

Also on display is a body of work called *WAtch them all | Regardez les tUous*. While researching the history of sundials as non-mechanical time-keeping devices, Mater became interested in the mottos that were often inscribed on them; usually brief memento mori or

phrases that reflect on the passing of time. The title of the sundial installation comes from one of these inscriptions: “THEY (THE HOURS) PERISH AND ARE NOT THOUGHT OF.” For *WATCH them all | Regardez les tUous*, Mater has produced a series of double-sided photo prints with a selection of old sundial mottos that have been reworked through their mirror-image reversals on the flip sides. It’s a technique that continues from the body of work presented in Mater’s book *Time is an Arrow, Error*: marks are added to – or subtracted from – the inscriptions of letters and numbers, in a dynamic process of mediation that begins to invite multiple meanings and ways of reading.

Plato, the original philosophy bro, presents the pursuit of the highest form of knowledge as a practice of staring directly at the primary source of light, rather than attending to its changes and its effects in the world. In contrast with this ideal of knowledge as something detached from embodied relations, Mater’s emphatically situated and responsive timekeeping device does not forget the body.

For the duration of the exhibition, the people working in the gallery space are invited to wear one of a series of custom wrist “watches” made by the artist as moving components of the temporary sundial apparatus. While regular watches tell us the indifferent time of the modern 24-hour system – a system that artificially divides the day up into regulated units that are the same everywhere, for all bodies, in all conditions, and across all seasons – Mater’s watches have no numerical divisions. Instead, they are made with blank discs of polished copper or brass; small, circular

reflectors that shine with the shifting conditions of illumination throughout the day (and throughout the seasonal shift), while telling a time that is also partly determined by the orientations and movements of the body. On brighter days, the time on these watches will shine brighter. If the people wearing them stand by the window at certain times of the day, their watches might tell a time of brilliant bursts and fleeting flashes. And if those people were to leave the gallery space, they would take a part of this timekeeping device with them, out into the world, dispersing the time that is told by the system.

In a comedy attributed to the ancient Roman playwright Plautus, there is a “Hungry Parasite” who decries the invention of the sundial. According to this character, the sundial had introduced an abstract and disembodied temporal structure, whereby mealtimes were determined by the arbitrary divisions of the hours on the timepiece’s dial, rather than by the hunger of the belly: “*May heaven blast the man who first invented hours; who in this place set up a sundial, to cut and hack my days so wretchedly into small portions! When I was a boy, my belly was my sundial, and it was easily the most exact and reliable timepiece ...*” Imagine if this poor parasite had lived to see the invention of the dominant temporal order that we now live under, with the mechanically regulated Greenwich Mean Time system and all its extractive efficiency. He might have found some refuge in Mater’s installation, where space is converted into a vessel for a plurality of times. Rather than hacking the day up into standardized units, *They (The Hours)* invites a practice of time-telling that begins with the multi-layered and open-ended interplay of shadow and shine.



