

## Days of Endless Time

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Washington, DC

When the primary theme of an exhibition explores philosophical concepts of time, it would follow that time-based works should provide the catalyst for that exploration. Appropriately, the works selected for *Days of Endless Time* [October 16, 2014—April 6, 2015] consist of “moving-image” installations—videos, largely—that appear to seek to provide counterpoint to the pace of contemporary life, addressing themes such as solitude, memory, and a connection to nature. Su-Mei Tse’s *L’Echo* (2003) emphasizes human interaction with the Earth while evoking the environmental mood at the turn of the millennium: the musically trained artist plays a melancholy refrain on cello against the backdrop of the Swiss Alps, demonstrating the fundamental smallness of a human being compared to the looming mountainous terrain. Tse’s formal composition subtly underscores the cultural hybridity of her performative aesthetic, which recalls the individual’s diminutive presence in both traditional Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, as well as in 19th-century Western portrayals of the sublime.

Many works on view in *Days of Endless Time* place humans within landscapes of a certain magnitude—a Bergsonian allusion, perhaps, to the inescapable passage of time in the natural world, against which humanity futilely poses its own bureaucratic calendars. Moving from one darkened area in the Hirshhorn to the next, viewers are also confronted with the dependent, even obsessive nature of our relationship to media-saturated, technological culture. Only Siebren Versteeg’s digital work, *Neither There nor There* (2005), seems to directly

refer to that self-consciousness, though with some gimmickry. Images of the artist hunched over his cell phone dissolve into pixels that move back and forth between two small LCD monitors—an obvious nod to our absorptive “tethering” not only between, but to electronic devices. Hans-Peter Feldmann’s *Shadowplay* (2002–2009) is the only work in the exhibition that is not digitally based; in it, little toys and bric-a-brac spin on multiple round platforms resembling record players, and clamped lights cast the resulting large shadows onto the gallery wall. The cheap plastic objects and general ambiance of childhood memory betray a longing for an attenuation of time, while the dance of moving silhouettes is suggestive of the Platonic allegory of the cave: our small, private worlds, Feldmann’s work suggests, are mere shadowy recollections of reality.

Sigalit Landau and Douglas Gordon both employ performance-based video and installation to offer two distinct but necessary conceptualizations of time. Israeli artist Landau does so while engaging themes of politics and site-specificity with *DeadSee* (2005), in which the artist floats on a circular raft of watermelons that measures 20 feet across. With one hand she grasps at melons that are cut open, their raw, red cores contrasting brightly with their green surroundings. Similarly, the Dead Sea is known for its healing properties, yet its high salt content can sting the body; its location is not only one of religious and spiritual nourishment, but also of conflict and bloodshed.

Gordon has been known to emphasize cinematic media’s unique ability to address memory and time, using multiple screens and repetitive imagery. The star of his *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003) is a young elephant, which rolls onto its side and rises again as the camera circumnavigates it. Filmed within the Gagosian Gallery in New York, with its white walls and concrete floor, the elephant’s rehearsed movement of lying and standing is looped, leaving it without beginning or end. Circling

and moving between the work’s two projection screens induces a self-reflexive experience, as viewers become a proverbial “elephant in the gallery.” As Landau’s hypnotic performance leaves us floating in an indefinite sea of contradiction, Gordon’s work pits the pantomimed idea of time against “real” temporal progression—its absurdities pendulate between natural cycles and unnatural machinations.

Robert Wilson’s *Lady Gaga: Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière d’après Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres* (2013) provides a platform from which to consider the evolution of dominant media in an art historical context, and implicates the very form of portraiture in the lineage of durational work. Posing as the teenaged Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière as she was painted by Ingres in 1806, Lady Gaga indefinitely extends both the original subject’s youthful gaze, and her own. This durational effort updates Ingres’ palette using digital color, but both portraits ostensibly animate a particular human presence well into the future.

What Wilson adds is a productive tension that highlights a contemporary discomfort with the static. Many reviews of *Days of Endless Time* have praised Feldmann’s highly mechanized *Shadowplay* while largely ignoring David Claerbout’s *Travel* (1996–2013), for instance. The impressive HD animation of views of a darkened forest took 17 years to complete; it was inspired, according to the artist’s website, by a piece of “relaxation music” composed by Eric Breton in the mid-1980s, designed to reduce stress and to induce sleep. If this overlooked tendency of the selected works to ponder meditative, even inert experience in this temporal context strikes an unsettling chord, it is perhaps because we are neither at home with the natural cycles at hand, nor at ease with the technologies that serve to suspend or to prolong them.

—Erin C. Devine



ABOVE: Sigalit Landau, *DeadSee*, 2005, film still [from the collection of Lizbeth and George Krupp; courtesy of the artist] / OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: David Claerbout, *Travel*, 1996–2013, film still [courtesy of the artist; Sean Kelly Gallery, NY; Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris; and Galerie Micheline Sz wajcer, Brussels]; Robert Wilson, *Lady Gaga: Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière d’après Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres*, 2013 [courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, NY]; Su-Mei Tse, *L’Echo*, 2003 [courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, NY]