

Laurent Grasso

Clouds Theory

March 4 – April 30, 2025

Madrid

Within the framework of anthropocentric determinism, time advances sequentially, shaping history and identity. In recent years, however, a growing awareness of temporal disjunction has emerged, particularly in discussions of ecological crisis within the political and cultural landscape of late-stage industrialism. In *Clouds Theory*, Laurent Grasso's new exhibition at Pedro Cera, time unfolds and folds back on itself: past events appear as premonitions, future catastrophes cast their shadows backward, and the present becomes an unstable zone of intersection. Conceived as an immersive installation encompassing film, paintings, neon lights, and sculpture, the presentation compels consideration on the complex interactions between the human and non-human, contemporary mythologies, and the ambiguous durations of temporal vertigo, ultimately shaping a vision of time and space at once enigmatic and expansive.

Pulsing at the heart of the exhibition, the film *ANIMA* exhales as a dynamic field of convergence, where human, animal, and geological forces coexist within a labyrinth of ontological entanglements. Resisting a coherent narrative, the work follows a lone figure adrift in a landscape haunted by elusive presences, from a fox passing in a fleeting instant to other-than-human flows. Shot in Mont Saint-Odile (Alsace, France), the film's equivocal focal point – a *Pagan Wall*, which true function is still controversial – attests to Grasso's interest in mystery-laden sites, where layers of mythology and parascientist practices accumulate. Mingling contemporary technologies and different belief systems to conjure a suspended time, *ANIMA* vibrates with an uncanny vitality, exploring what remains trapped in the realm of the invisible.

This destabilization extends beyond the film, reverberating throughout the exhibition. Stepping into *Clouds Theory* means entering a *milieu* where no element remains confined to its surface; instead, signs and meanings ripple outward, intertwining across different registers. Flames with no discernable origin migrate from the film into the exhibition space, reappearing in paintings and neon, their light converging with the two suns in an immense triptych, forming loops of luminous transfer and temporal reflection. Crashing to the ground, a large copper cloud sculpture appears dislodged from the sky, bringing celestial elements down to earth. As tokens of an unsettling vision, their cryptic nature generates a reflection ultimately bound to environmental change and meteorological manipulation. In this new geological era of human-induced transformation, geoengineering strategies aim to mitigate climate change but impose human-made technologies over natural cycles, paradoxically sustaining the very practices they seek to counteract. A post-anthropocentric perspective demands a new grammar of interpretation, one that refuses to subordinate ecological forces to human temporality, recognizing instead the self-organizing intelligence of geological formations. Eternal flames, doubled suns, drifting clouds, and celestial phenomena emerge as imaginative materials within Grasso's cosmological framework, recalling what geologist Marcia Bjornerud terms *timefulness*, the ability to relocate oneself within non-human durations, such as eras and eons¹. Earth itself becomes a living archive of temporal measurement, evoking the anachronistic philosophy of *deep time*, a concept developed by Scottish geologist James Hutton in 1788² to describe a temporality both infinite and abstract, derived from the planet's fundamental cycles, incapable of limiting the future, the progress of things, or the course of nature.

¹ Marcia Bjornerud, *Timefulness: How Thinking Like a Geologist Can Help Save the World*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

² James Hutton, *The Theory of the Earth*. Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1788.

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Visualizing the invisible emerges as the conceptual thread of the exhibition, merging distant pasts with imagined futures to construct an ambiguous *continuum* where signs of transformation bear the weight of both prophecy and memory. Grasso outlines a group of celestial occurrences, embodied through ghostly presences or manifestations of undocumented phenomena. *Studies into the Past*, a recurring conceptual project within his *oeuvre*, fuses historical painting techniques with strange apparitions, creating speculative historiography where past and future meet into a single timeline. Time travel becomes an apparatus for exploring collective memory, particularly regarding past natural events recorded only through sources such as *The Book of Miracles*, a 16th century illuminated manuscript known for cataloguing natural disasters at a period when painting did not. Seen as miraculous evidence, these representations expanded through apocalyptic foresights of an uncertain after-time.

Grasso's approach to time as a complex construct is further exemplified in another *Studies into the Past*, a large-scale triptych with two suns rising above a misty landscape bathed in ochre light, inspired by the Hudson River School of painting. The work integrates elements of his 2014 film *Soleil Double*, where the two suns cast their discordant shadows over the empty structures of Rome's EUR district, erected in the 1920s and testimony of an authoritarian vision of architecture. Grasso explores how omnipresent forces, systems of power – both natural and political, human and non-human – shape our world. Through this lens, he reinterprets objects, events, and catastrophes as what Eduardo Kohn calls “living signs”³, – active agents that influence their environments and help determine how history unfolds through the delicate web of interdependent relationships that make up existence.

In this mysterious atmosphere inhabited by repetitive signs, where flames flicker, clouds drift, other-than-human forces move unseen, and disasters loom, past and future dissolve. “*Clouds Theory* is a science fiction landscape that creates an environment of light, of meanings, temporalities, and stories, with a painting inspired by the film *Soleil Double* as a backdrop. In this Andean setting, the painting itself becomes a landscape, almost like a video projection. It seems to be emitting light—a radiant painting. This was my way of addressing climate issues, with these two suns that shine and blind us with their light.” With changes in scale, from new large painting formats to the imposing copper cloud, *Clouds Theory* becomes a scenery of its own, with the works depicting unsettling and dystopian subjects. Suspended in this enigmatic field, and all the more compelling for its complexity and ambiguity, the exhibition becomes a self-generating chain of communication. To enter this system is to relinquish the security of singular vision, to engage with a mode of attunement that is both disorienting and generative.

³ A term coined by anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, in *How Forests Think: Toward An Anthropology Beyond the Human*. University of California Press, 2013.