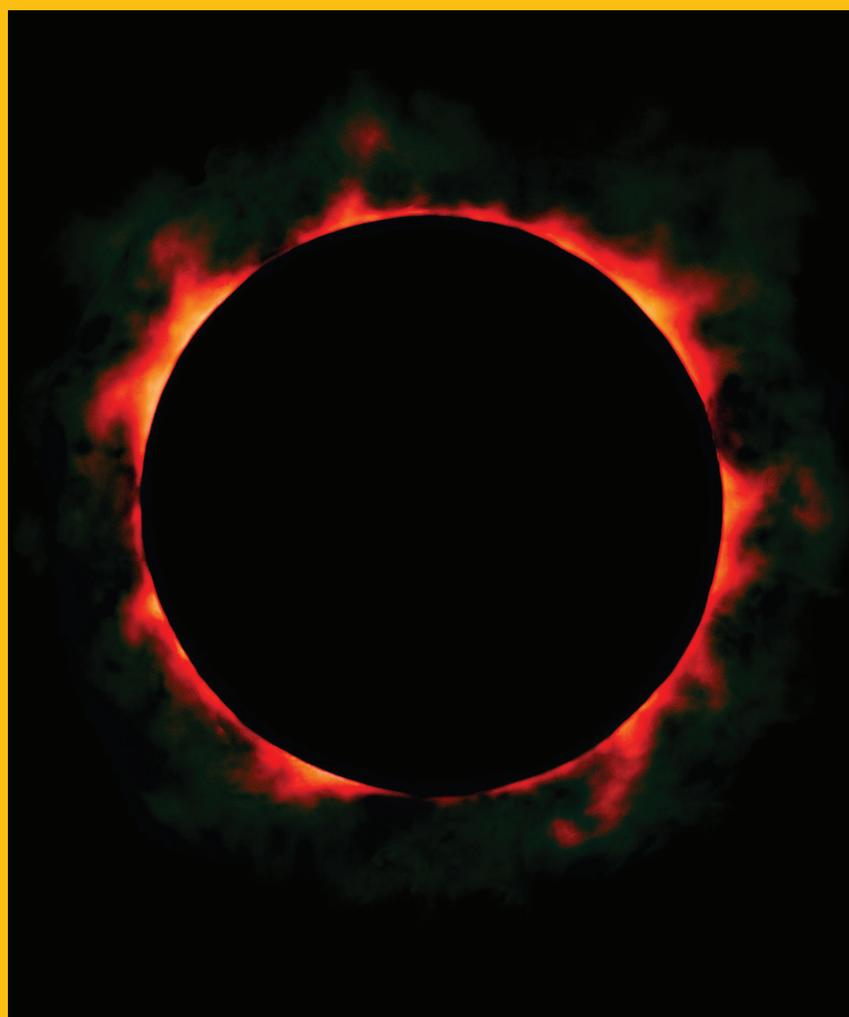


O Sole Mio

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Sonja Braas
Navid Nuur
Philippe Davet

Parasol unit

foundation for contemporary art

The Unknown Faces of Abundance

From the outset the digital exhibition *O Sole Mio* was conceptualised with the idea that the dark shadows cast on our world and its billions of inhabitants by the Covid-19 pandemic needed to be counterbalanced by some positive thoughts, because, despite the many negatives, there is still an incredible amount of positivity and goodwill on our planet. I felt blessed when the recollection of the beautiful song 'O Sole Mio' inspired me to develop the idea of a digital exhibition and guided me through its concept and realisation. Needless to say, without the support and thoughtful contributions of many artists and thinkers such a project could never have come to fruition. Therefore, I express my gratitude once more to everyone who accepted my invitation to be part of this venture.

As we all know, the news of the pandemic was initially received with

shock, followed variably by positive actions, fear of the unknown and even some expressions of denial. However, as Covid-19 took centre stage and became a reality to reckon with, there was an urgent need to find a path out of it via a whole range of precautions and advice, such as social-distancing, isolation

and extreme attention to hygiene. Later, as one country after another realised the full import of this rapidly spreading infection and the potential expanse of its ruination, the unpredicted reigned. None of us will ever forget the images of overworked and exhausted medical carers going about their duties, often lacking

proper protective attire, the rows of coffins or, in too many cases, the piles of plastic rubbish bags containing dead bodies left on the streets. The human pain and devastation also seemed to foreshadow the likelihood of a global economic recession, thereby recalling



The Great Depression of 1929–1933. All of what has happened in a matter of weeks has changed the mood of a world afloat on affluence into one of more serious reflection. It is extraordinary how swiftly an occurrence can enter the scene and generate infinite challenges. Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, we all had different opinions about the state of the world but none was as devastating as this new reality.

Today, sitting at my desk, the many contributions I have received for *O Sole Mio* from artists and art professionals make it clear how many and various are the thoughts we have. It has also made me, a curator, become also an editor. All this is testimony to how far reaching and extensive are our observations of the world, registration of facts, and the ensuing intellectual responses. These reactions have once more proven to me that although human nature is intrinsically optimistic and has an inherent desire to make things happen and to prosper, we must nevertheless remain alert to what else is going on around us and to be aware of where we stand. Many of us may have neglected this for some time, which is probably also part of human nature. Meanwhile, today, we are where we are and all of us must urgently contribute and strive in whatever way we can to end the pandemic. We also need to take a good look at the root of problems for, as we all must understand, a healthy house can only stand on healthy stilts.

The artists Sonja Braas and Navid Nur have generously shared their thoughts and works for this our fourth issue

of *O Sole Mio*, and in the Reflection section Philippe Davet responds to 'O Sole Mio' and what it means to him. These contributions are all deliberate and inspiring and offer a variety of thoughts on finding alternative paths out of the current crisis. Conceptual in nature, the works of Sonja Braas and Navid Nur make us tactfully attentive to what the potential for danger means. Braas's photograph *Eclipse*, 2016, and her accompanying text discuss how in some ancient cultures an eclipse was considered a bad omen or due to supernatural causes. By juxtaposing those ideas with the current situation, she ponders what possibilities there are for our learning from it. Nur's contribution, *Untitled (Exercise shelter by shifting from focus)*, 2013, is a large copperplate engraved with a cryptic message. The work reveals a clever strategy for staying out of trouble in times of danger. It remains for us to understand whether in Nur's mind this heads-up is addressed to government authorities or to citizens, or indeed to both. As usual with Nur's work the viewer experience is integral to the whole. In this work, the engraved words are filled with Vicks Vaporub, an ointment with a strong smell of eucalyptus and traditionally used to alleviate respiratory discomfort. The precautionary stands taken by both artists are intelligent and commanding. Perhaps they emphasise that before any potentially devastating occurrence, we must be alert for early signs and take preparatory action.

Ziba Ardalan
Founder, Artistic and Executive Director

Sonja Braas

Eclipse, 2016



For a while now I have been interested in the role fears play in shaping our personal life as well as that of our society. *Eclipse* is part of my series, *An Abundance of Caution*, that focuses on fears, individual and societal, justified or artificially created, their causes and consequences. As are other images in the series, it is based on a model I built to detach the image from reality and allow for abstraction and exaggeration.

A solar eclipse seems a fitting symbol for the current times. To see the Sun disappear must be frightening for anyone who is unaware of the astronomic reasons. In some cultures, solar eclipses were attributed to supernatural causes or regarded as bad omens: to signal the end of time, the apocalypse. Sixteenth-century Aztecs in Mexico killed captives and slayed people of light complexion as sacrifices, as they were convinced that if the eclipse of the Sun was total it would remain dark forever and the demons of darkness would come down and eat them. In stark contrast, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote that an eclipse that occurred during a battle between the Medes and the Lydians had led both sides to put down their weapons and declare peace.

The role of the solar eclipse in those cultures, as an agent of change but also as a reinforcer and even amplifier of a given situation, is comparable to the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in ours. It remains to be seen whether we will let our fear of disease and of financial ruin lead to sacrifices of humanity or use the chance to see beyond the crisis

and imagine a future different and better than our present. Just as the solar eclipse is temporary, this pandemic will pass, and my hope is that we do not let fear take over, but use this moment of darkness as a chance to see the rim of light, the part of the Sun that is otherwise not visible to us.

Sonja Braas

Suspended uncannily at the threshold between fiction and reality, Sonja Braas's photographic works radiate a sense of the sublime. They question what is real and what is unreal. Working entirely in analogue, Braas often places authentic landscapes alongside constructed models that she builds herself, then photographs. Braas recreates rather than represents nature and natural phenomena in her works.

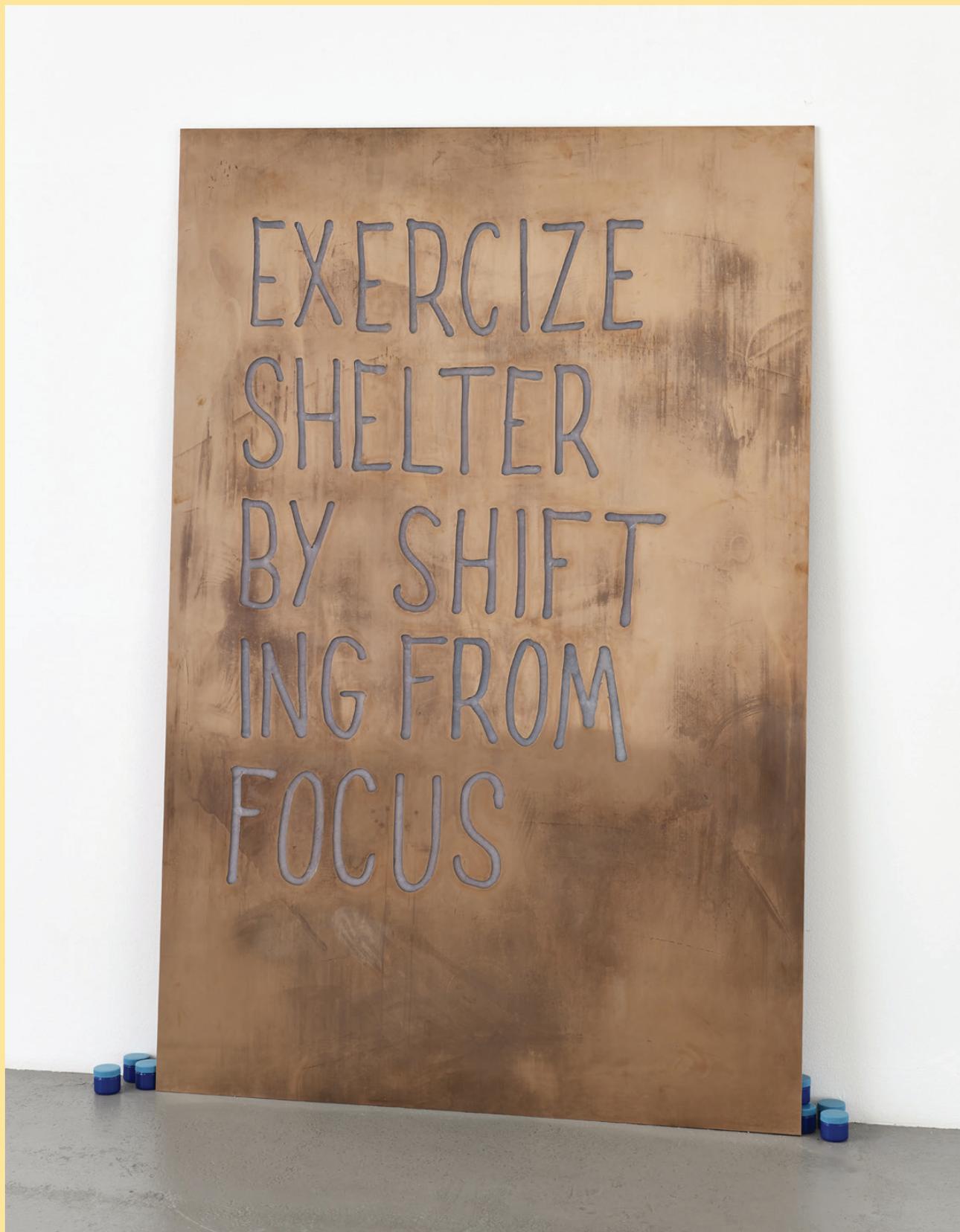
Sonja Braas, born 1968 in Germany, now lives and works in New York, USA.

In spring 2016, Sonja Braas presented works in Parasol unit's group exhibition, *Magical Surfaces: The Uncanny in Contemporary Photography*.

Sonja Braas, *Eclipse*, 2016, from the series *An Abundance of Caution*. Pigment print, framed. 176 x 144 cm (69¼ x 56¾ in). Courtesy the artist.

Navid Nuur

Untitled (Exercise shelter by shifting from focus), 2013



Navid Nuur's works are best described as modules of thought or as he calls them 'interimodules'. They articulate a way of thinking attuned to the temporary, in-between state of things, concerned with their brief existence and interconnectedness. His transitory, process-based works often both represent and evolve out of a series of subjective conditions and rules, which he intuitively establishes through careful consideration of a particular space, substance or immaterial phenomenon. To orientate himself in this inner journey, he collects matter and material, then situates it on a map that corresponds to his body as a compass in relation to the outside world.

Navid Nuur, born 1976 in Iran, lives and works in The Hague, Netherlands.

In 2013, Parasol unit presented Navid Nuur: *Phantom Fuel*, the artist's first ever solo exhibition in a UK institution. And in 2019, Navid Nuur participated in two related group exhibitions: *The Spark Is You: Parasol unit in Venice* at the Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello, Venice, and *Nine Iranian Artists in London: The Spark Is You* at Parasol unit, London.

Navid Nuur, *Untitled (Exercise shelter by shifting from focus)*, 2013. Engraved copperplate and Vicks Vaporub. 190 x 125 cm (74¾ x 49¾ in). Copyright the artist. Courtesy of Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin | Paris | London

Reflection by Philippe Davet

Il Ciela in Una Stanza (The Sky in a Room) by Gino Paoli

When you are here with me
Quando sei qui con me

Nothing, nothing more in the world
Niente, più niente al mondo

This room no longer has walls
Questa stanza non ha più pareti

Play a harmonica
Suona un'armonica

But trees
Ma alberi

It seems to me an organ
Mi sembra un organo

Endless trees
Alberi infiniti

That vibrates for you and me
Che vibra per te e per me

When you are here near me
Quando sei qui vicino a me

Up into the immensity of the sky
Su nell'immensità del cielo

This purple ceiling
Questo soffitto viola

Play a harmonica
Suona un'armonica

No, it no longer exists
No, non esiste più

It seems to me an organ
Mi sembra un organo

I see the sky above us
Io vedo il cielo sopra noi

That vibrates for you and me
Che vibra per te e per me

That we stay here
Che restiamo qui

Up into the immensity of the sky
Su nell'immensità del cielo

Abandoned
Abbandonati

For you and me
Per te e per me

As if it were gone
Come se non ci fosse più

In the sky
Nel cielo

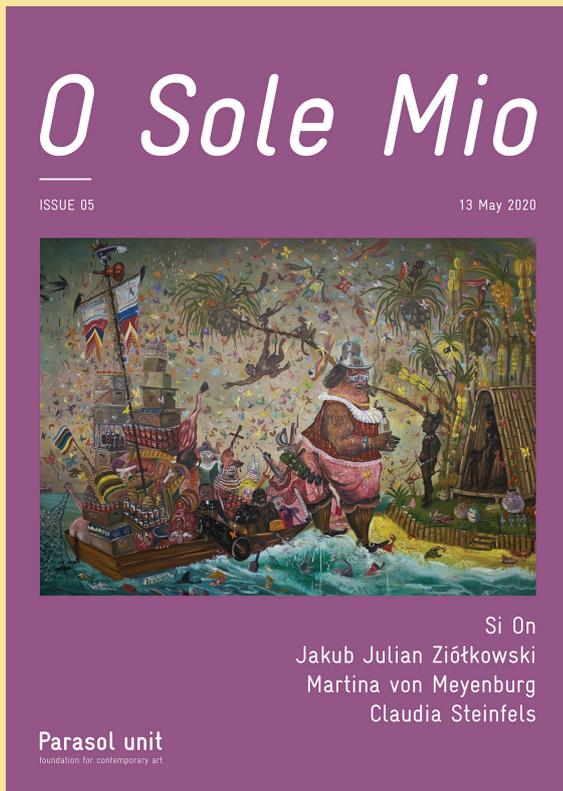
Source: Lyric Fund
Gino Paoli, 'Il Cielo in Una Stanza' lyrics © Universal Music
Publishing Group

Philippe Davet responded to 'O Sole Mio' with another iconic Italian song, 'Il Ciela in Una Stanza', which is sometimes translated as 'The Sky's the Limit'. Written in 1960 by the well-known Italian songwriter, Gino Paoli, it has been understood literally as well as metaphorically, the latter meaning to imagine the big picture from a minute detail. Which also brings to mind William Blake's poem, 'Auguries of Innocence' that starts with the lines:

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand /
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold
Infinity in the palm of your hand / And
Eternity in an hour...' It has been said
that in writing this poem, Blake was
commenting on the rampant excesses he
observed during his lifetime.

Philippe Davet lives and works in
Geneva, Switzerland, where he is a co-
founder of Blondeau & Cie.

Upcoming Issue



ISSUE 05 featuring works by

Si On
Jakub Julian Ziótkowski
Martina von Meyenburg
Reflection by Claudia Steinfels

Words by Ziba Ardalán, Sonja Braas and Navid Nuur. Copy edited by Helen Wire.
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