

O Sole Mio

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Parasol unit
foundation for contemporary art

The Sun as Emissary to Discover Analogies

As we saw in Sonny Sanjay Vadgama's work, *Our Blood That Flows*, featured in issue 09 of the *O Sole Mio* digital exhibition, the sun and the path it appears to take across the sky from sunrise to sunset can give some of the most vibrant performances. Having also seen other artworks destined for this project, in which the sun could easily have been the leading player, I have learned something interesting. Yet again, it has confirmed why photographers usually prefer to work on cloudy days.

myriad possibilities. I find the concept of facing such a wealth of possibility utterly exhilarating, particularly during this period of Covid-19 isolation. In the same breadth of thinking, this paradox might explain why technology has become such an important tool for communication during the pandemic.

All the artists we have brought together in this tenth issue of *O Sole Mio* seem to be interested in finding analogies within the realities they present in



However, here and for the sake of this introductory essay, we are considering the sun as an emissary or a vehicle that allows us to discover reality and explore its analogies – those other attributes that any object could possess. They could be physical, but equally associative meanings or even something like metaphor, which in turn offer us a

their work, even for example in the apparently simple photograph, entitled *Eli*, by American artist Kate Gilmore. The photograph shows a small child seated on the shore of a lake, peacefully looking at the gorgeous and serene scenery on a totally calm, sunny day. It is a lovely and captivating photograph, but is it really all that simple?

Thinking further, it is easy to realise that in these uncertain times with the threat of Covid-19 still hanging over us and now, too, the escalating race protests, this delightful image may have greater significance than at first appears. By now, many of our readers will have associated it with a nineteenth-century style of painting known as Romanticism. The German artist Caspar David Friedrich and American painters such as Fitz Hugh Lane and Martin Johnson Heade come to mind. In such paintings, a majestic view of nature occupies almost the entire canvas in contrast to a minuscule back view of a lone person positioned somewhere in the foreground. These paintings remind us of nature's awe-inspiring importance and power, just as the current pandemic makes it clear that despite all of humanity's advances, nature remains very much in control.

Oren Pinhassi, in his sculpture *Standing Figure*, focuses on the dichotomy between our human ability to be inspired by the real sun/natural light, and our capacity to sink ever deeper into the underworld of technology. Not unlike the artist David Claerbout, yet totally differently, both artists question such life concepts, alerting us and making us aware of the danger of allowing ourselves to become completely absorbed by our computers, smartphones and other such technological devices. Understandably, during the current pandemic they have all become vehicles of our hope to communicate with the outside world.

But the concerns of these artists go much further. In Pinhassi's *Standing*

Figure sculpture, a pane of glass represents the void which seemingly forms the head of the figure. Generally, a sculptured head has a certain volume, but here it is a void with a flat outline and the glass pane simply reflects images it receives from the outside world, without any ability to think, interpret or make decisions.

Standing Figure is Pinhassi's response to the human condition of contemporary beings in this era of technology and his own isolation. Thinking back some sixty years, we could revisit Alberto Giacometti's impressive and emaciated walking figures. Made of course in a totally different time and environment, they were his reflections on the human condition of modern man. Although the 1960s are often referred to as a time of extraordinary possibilities and human aspirations for communication that included even travelling to the moon, the anticipation of a great artist, such as Giacometti, warned of a disturbing future.

Like Pinhassi, Katrín Sigurðardóttir lives and works in New York City. At the height of the pandemic, when going outside was limited, Sigurðardóttir took a daily walk from her studio to an area near the Statue of Liberty. Her beautiful and touching aquarelle, painted by the artist as her contribution to the *O Sole Mio* digital exhibition, expresses in multiple ways Sigurðardóttir's concerns about this symbol of friendship, originally between two nations, and the freedom for all it has embodied for well over a century. Perhaps the artist has been reflecting on the meaning of freedom during the current lockdown.

And now, considering the recent political events, we too may ask ourselves what freedom means in a time of escalating racial and political tensions. The monumental copper statue was a gift from a foreign country, from France to the people of the United States. Today, we might ask ourselves why the friendship between the USA and its allies has gone sour. Noteworthy in Sigurðardóttir's delicate and sensitive watercolour is a feeling of sombre melancholy. Painted uniformly in grey as if the statue – that has welcomed countless immigrants and heralded their freedom in the land of opportunity – has suddenly become a shadow, no longer willing to reveal itself. Where has its exuberance and promises of a better future gone?

An innovative contemporary painter of still life, Lisa Milroy has an extraordinary ability to feel and sense the physicality of each object she paints. Milroy's interest in objects is photographic and moreover her attention to and focus on objects often prevails over the significance of light, which in turn allows the objects to acquire their independence and take centre stage. This is totally opposite to the way the moving-image artist Sonny Sanjay Vadgama uses light in his piece *Our Blood That Flows*, shown in *O Sole Mio* issue 09. So, in some ways it came as a surprise to me to see the group of photographs that Milroy created during the lockdown at her home and in which the prominence of light is indisputable. Here, her images of familiar and everyday objects find renewal by being

fully bathed in rays of sunlight. Patterns and transformations of the objects happen when, for example, shadows of the glazing window bars interact with furniture or a person. This interaction between natural light and man-made objects constitutes a new direction for Milroy, which allows for new potentials not only in her practice but also in the manner the artist guides us towards discovering analogies.

Every day, like most people, I am learning and discovering the pleasure of doing tasks in new ways. I have come to think that knowledge and the sun function similarly, and the more one learns, the more possibilities open up, and therefore the more one gains access to analogies, just as the more rays of sunlight project on reality, the more nuances become evident.

Ziba Ardalan

Founder, Artistic and Executive Director

Photograph by Ziba Ardalan.

Kate Gilmore

Eli



Working across video, sculpture, photography and performance, Kate Gilmore explores notions of female identity, displacement and gender in her darkly humorous and physically demanding videos and works. She often plays the sole protagonist in her performance-based videos in which the artist subjects herself to uncomfortable and difficult tasks.

Kate Gilmore (1975–) was born in Washington, DC, USA, and is now based in New York. In 2011, Parasol unit presented a public art project in collaboration with Kate Gilmore. *Walk the Line* was a site-specific performance

artwork set up in Exchange Square, City of London. During the live performance, teams of eight women in two shifts walked continuously around the top of a red structure for nine hours a day, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Members of the public could walk around the structure and through a passageway beneath it in order to get a sensory experience of the women walking above them. By creating such a powerful work in a public place, Gilmore highlighted and gave prominence to the daily life of professional women working in the City of London.

Oren Pinhassi

Second Nature



Oren Pinhassi, *Standing Figure (Brescia 1)*, 2019. Steel, glass, plaster, burlap, sand, pigment, 200 x 40.5 x 37.5 cm (78¾ x 16 x 14¾ in). Courtesy the artist.

What is most exciting to me in the lyrics of 'O Sole Mio' is the physicality of the image of the lover's face as a second sun, collapsing the boundaries of human/nature. When the real sun goes down, the singer is comforted by a proximity to his second sun, his lover who also went to sleep. If the lover's face is a second sun, and the window (architecture) shines like the lover's face, can our relationship to the actual sun become erotic? If the face of the other can be a source of light, maybe under that same logic we can think about nature in terms of friendship and gentleness.

Both suns in 'O Sole Mio' promise warmth and friendship. Recently, I was on a flight to Chicago from New York City. It was a beautiful sunny day! But as the doors of the plane closed, all the passengers, one by one, closed their window shades to create the necessary condition of darkness for their phones to shine. In the darkened aeroplane cabin, these devices became private second suns. Do they give comfort to their owners? Warmth? Hope maybe? The feeling I had was one of despair and disappointment. The inability to orient myself in this dark flying chamber made me nauseous and I felt sad, because that darkness was a choice that felt metaphorical and at the same time very real.

I came up with the idea for my work, *Standing Figure*, walking down a street in NYC, where I passed a person standing still like a traffic island in the middle of the busy street, head bowed to

look at their phone. I was struck by the fragility of the situation: the ability to exist in such a closed circuit with that device, to give it all, while being completely exposed and unaware of the bodies that moved around them. *Standing Figure* is trapped in the melancholic contemporary condition of being alone together, fully connected but isolated. The head is a pane of glass, an empty window, transparent and reflective.

Now, with the pandemic, it has been two months of little sun and little public life. 'O Sole Mio' reminds me to hope that through darkness we may find new ways of seeing and relating to one another and to the physicality of our environment.

Blurring the boundaries between human and object, Oren Pinhassi uses plaster, glass and ready-made objects to make the anthropomorphic sculptures through which he investigates the intersections between the private and public. Often constructing sculptural installations that examine the potential of the erotic and intimate, his work invites the viewer to explore his sensual, corporeal landscapes where figures are both exposed and obscured.

Oren Pinhassi (1985–) was born in Tel-Aviv and is now based in New York.

Oren Pinhassi, *Standing Figure (Brescia 1)* [detail], 2019. Steel, glass, plaster, burlap, sand, pigment, 200 x 40.5 x 37.5 cm (78¾ x 16 x 14¾ in). Courtesy the artist.



Katrín Sigurðardóttir

The Shadow, 2020



Often inspired by both her native Iceland and New York, where she currently resides, Katrín Sigurðardóttir merges the natural environment, architecture and design in her work, while exploring how physical structures and boundaries inform our perception. With a shift in scale, either creating complex miniature versions of real or imaginary places and forms, or room-sized installations, she examines distance and memory within these environments. Her works frequently encourage direct participation by

allowing viewers to confront and interact with the constructed space while evoking references to childhood and fantastical places of the imagination.

Katrín Sigurðardóttir (1967–) was born in Reykjavík, Iceland, and is now based in New York. In 2015, Parasol unit presented *Supra Terram*, the artist's first major solo exhibition in a London institution.

Katrín Sigurðardóttir, *The Shadow*, 2020. Aquarelle on paper, 23 x 31 cm (9 x 12¼ in). Courtesy the artist.

Lisa Milroy

sunlight around the home, 2020



During the first few weeks of lockdown in our home in east London, a different sense of time and pace to the day began to unfold. I discovered I no longer felt in a rush. This didn't mean 'slowing down' but simply not having to hurry, some kind of pressure or urgency was dissolving. Gently steered by this new rhythm, I began to take stock of our home with a greater awareness and appreciation of all the objects that had come to populate it over the years: shoes, clothing, bags, baskets, carpets, kitchen utensils, lamps, vases, fabrics and textiles. The plethora of things began to sing out to me, chiming with my love of still life painting.



My appreciation of the objects made me want to work with them directly in the spirit of still life. I began to photograph objects according to themes, such as colour or function, and then grouped the photographs into portfolios. The engagement allowed me to cherish the fabulous sense of simply 'being alive' that can suddenly well up through glimpsing a familiar object in a particular light, catching a scent that stirs a memory, or feeling the satisfying texture of a fabric against the skin. It was also a way to celebrate the enjoyment to be found in 'looking'. I began to post the portfolios over a three-week period on Instagram under the heading 'around the home'.

Still life is at the heart of Lisa Milroy's practice: in the 1980s her paintings featured ordinary objects depicted against an off-white background. Subsequently her imagery expanded to include depictions of objects within settings, as well as landscape, architecture, people and the body. As her approaches to still life diversified, so did her manner of painting, giving rise to a range of stylistic innovations.

Lisa Milroy was born in Vancouver, Canada, and is now based in London, UK. In 2018, Parasol unit presented *Here & There: Paintings by Lisa Milroy*. This solo exhibition brought together a selection of work from the previous fifteen years to explore Milroy's approach to still life through the lens of stillness and movement, presence and absence, making, looking, touch and transformation – recurrent critical perspectives in her practice.



In response to the 'O Sole Mio' project, I created one final portfolio, sunlight around the home. The same 'alive' feeling is triggered in me by listening to this wonderful song! Feel welcome to take a look at the sunlight around the home portfolio on my Instagram.

[lisa_milroy](#)

Lisa Milroy, *sunlight around the home: Toes | Sunburst | Peacocks | Tulips | Yellow*, 2020. Photographs courtesy the artist.

Upcoming Issue



ISSUE 11 featuring works by

Marco Castillo
Adrian Esparza
Nathaniel Rackowe
Canan Tolon

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