

Niina Vatanen | *Gravity Experiments and Cyclic Phenomena*

Exhibition: 14 September – 12 November 2022

Opening: Friday, 16 September 2022, 6 – 9 pm



Niina Vatanen,
The World Egg, 2022

Persons Projects is proud to present Niina Vatanen's solo exhibition titled *Gravity Experiments and Cyclic Phenomena*. This exhibition follows her 2015 solo show at C/O Berlin, and her latest book *Time Atlas* (Kehrer Verlag, 2019). One's experience of time is incredibly complex. By studying the movements of the planets, and with the help of various omens and prophecies, religions and oracles, humans have investigated not only our place in the universe, but also searched for answers to existential questions. In this exhibition, Vatanen does the same – she has combined images from various archives to create a multifaceted visual essay concerning time.

Vatanen has challenged, seduced, and explored time as a mystery from the beginnings of her career. She has repeatedly attempted to decode the intricate workings of time's passage and our perception of it as the core question in her work. She explores time through means of collage, collecting and archiving, as well as conceptual and intentional storytelling. She draws upon the myth of the "world egg" for her artwork of the same title. The old myth has roots in many cultures, among them Greek, Egyptian, and Finnish mythology. The reproducing of the story of the Earth being hatched from an egg shows that same search for an answer to our convoluted experience of time.

Vatanen poses questions about our perception of time, the convolution of history, personal experiences, the temporality of existence, and her own visual recollection. Rather than imposing her own recollections onto the viewer, she merely guides them; much like a compass without degrees. Vatanen also poses questions about the nature of art, photography, and authority, using her artworks to blur these lines – Vatanen pulls from numerous sources to create one composite image, inviting the viewer to ponder upon who is the creator of the final work.

Her archive that she has utilized for her art was slowly built up over decades and is incredibly personal. Initially, Vatanen started with her own personal memorabilia and then continued to collect images from outside sources; She then began pairing them and developing new connections. Her raw material comes from old encyclopedias that touch on topics that relate to time and its measurement: math, religion, science, and philosophy. In addition to her own images, she also utilizes newspapers, manuals, and contemporary Internet imagery in order to create these new and inventive connections between different fields.

Vatanen's large-scale fabric works are also titled *Gravity Experiments and Cyclic Phenomena*. Gravity is the phenomenon that keeps the Earth on its orbit, creating tides

and causing objects to fall towards the Earth – these hanging fabric works similarly observe the cycles of nature, the passage of time, and the connections between the two. With these works, she effortlessly brings together our earthly perceptions of gravity's weight with the vastness and weightlessness of space. The installation of these fabric works also allude to the feeling of walking through a historic archive, searching for materials and the many hidden truths within them. When walking through Vatanen's exhibition, there is no one correct way to navigate the beginning or end – like the fluidity of the Japanese ensō circle, Vatanen takes the viewer on a playful journey through her own perception of time's cycle and humans' place within it.

Niina Vatanen was born in 1977 in Kuopio, Finland. She lives and works in Helsinki. Vatanen graduated from the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture in 2008. Her exhibitions include solo exhibitions like *Beyond the Visible Surface*, C/O Berlin (2015), *Glimpses of the Unattainable*, Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki (2014), as well as group exhibitions such as *When the Wind Blows* at Kunst Haus Wien, Vienna (2022), *New Perspectives – 25 Years of the Helsinki School* at Taidehalli Helsinki, Helsinki (2021), *Échos système* at Manuel Rivera-Ortiz Foundation, Arles (2021), *Festival Circulation(S)*, Paris (2020), *Eating Pineapples on the Moon* at Riga Photomonth (2019), *The future's not ours to see* at Triennial of Photography Hamburg (2015), *Secret Agent* at Sunbury House, London (2016), *Reframe Memory* at Athens Photo Festival (2015), *Touching Dreams* at The Danish National Museum of Photography, Copenhagen (2011), and *Daegu Photo Biennale*, Daegu Culture and Arts Center (2010).