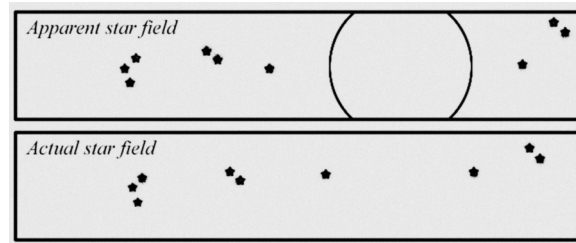


25 January – 23 April 2012

thousands of kilometers away in Portugal. Polo's photographs restore what did not exist, and her film relocates something improperly located. Reality has not been altered by either of these interventions: their futility is telling. Príncipe remains a remote corner of the globe commemorated largely on account of an astronomical occurrence and so continues to "not exist."



In the logic of imperialism, Edward Said declared, knowledge is power, and the accumulation of knowledge automatically signifies an accumulation of power. The world maps drawn by colonial empires are associated with a control

that is both symbolic (the act of representation) and real (determining the movement of populations and the heavens). *Apparent Position* images the principal ideal which underpinned colonial fever: an empire on which "the sun never set."

"Fisuras" is a program that reveals interstitial spaces in the Museum (landings, stairwells, underground passages, connections between buildings), and allows visitors to discover the narrative possibilities of those intermediate zones. In *Apparent Position*, this "fissure" touches on levels of discourse beyond the spatial: by addressing such issues as the general theory of relativity and an undocumented historical event, it reveals the caesura between reality and our perception of it, and so offers new ways of "positioning ourselves."

Paloma Polo.
Apparent Position.
Digitally manipulated
scientific diagram,
2011

**Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía**

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Santa Isabel, 52

Nouvel building

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Museum hours

Monday to Saturday

from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Sundays

from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Closed Tuesdays

Galleries close 15 minutes

prior to Museum closing

Paloma Polo

Apparent Position

25 January – 23 April 2012

Espacio Uno (E1)

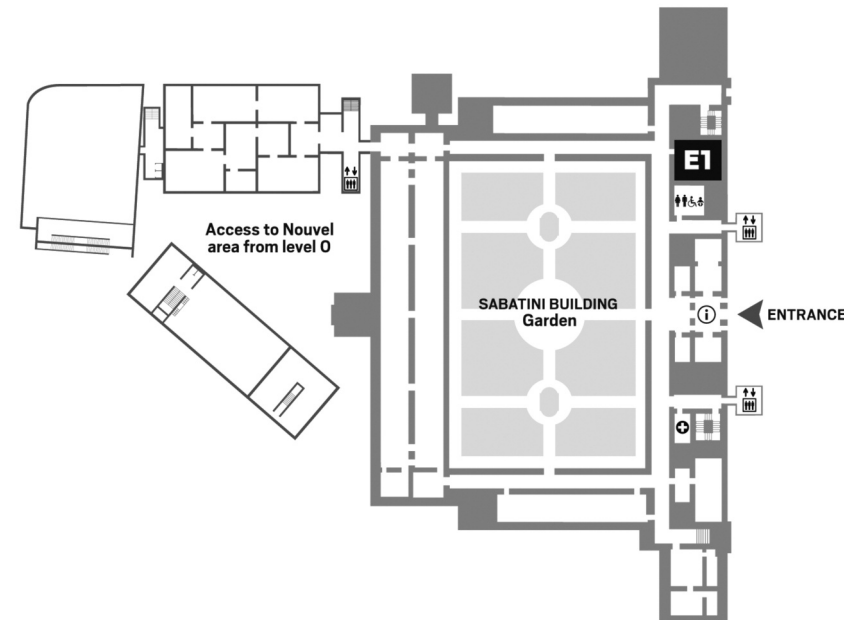
Images

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Paloma Polo

Apparent Position

Paloma Polo's project for the "Fisuras" (Fissures) program at the Museo Reina Sofía emerged from research into expeditions, undertaken in various parts of the world during the colonial era, that sought to observe and document astronomical phenomena. At first glance, her work addresses issues related to the connection between scientific knowledge and the imperialist projects of the European powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but *Apparent Position* also gives rise to less immediate reflections on the relations between events that seem to intersect at a given time and place, as in the manner of an eclipse.

The starting point is a historically and geographically verifiable event: Sir Arthur Eddington's 1919 expedition to the island of Príncipe, a Portuguese colony in the Gulf of Guinea, to observe the effects of a total solar eclipse. This voyage is not, however, engraved in history with the epic dimensions of other expeditions of the colonial era. Although there are precise reports on the calculations and conclusions of the expedition, there are no photographic records of the experience. Only a stone stele, which is mounted upon a white-washed plinth at the approximate spot where the eclipse was observed, reminds us that Eddington's achievement signified the verification of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity.



Paloma Polo Apparent Position

Paloma Polo.
Action at a Distance.
16-mm film
transferred to HD
digital video, 2012



It is here that the “apparent” referred to in the title of this project makes its entrance. The purpose of Eddington’s expedition was to confirm that light altered its linear course when in contact with a powerful gravitational field (like the sun), an aspect of the general theory of relativity demonstrable only during a solar eclipse. The position of the light of the stars is presumed to be “apparent,” and only a parenthesis in the astronomical process—a black eclipsed sun—would allow that deceptive position to be photographed and the degree of deviation of the light to be calculated. This was an event of extraordinary scientific importance. And yet, in spite of the claims of the commemorative stele, Eddington’s expedition does not appear to have been the touchstone in the verification of Einstein’s theory. Later research indicates that its scientific results were rather poor. That is, although Eddington’s expedition “officially” legitimized the validity of the general theory of relativity, such confirmation actually came only two years later.

Paloma Polo’s project is presented in three formats: a 16-mm film transferred to digital video; photographs on glass; and a printed book. The three formats are traditionally associated with the documentary impulse, and the rush to chronicle potentially historic events. Yet *Apparent Position* makes no attempt to document or inform. It starts instead from a threefold position: the acknowledgement of a known fact; the awareness of the absence of precise historical documentation; and an intervention on site, which reveals not an alteration of reality but a way of framing new relationships with the surroundings and with history itself.

25 January – 23 April 2012

The first images depict a silent scene that might well have taken place at the time of the expedition—photographs on glass illustrating the appearance of the expedition’s surroundings during the eclipse. Numerous variables enter into play: the peculiar light of an eclipse; the procedure for making a printed record of it with a photographic camera; and the constructed nature of such images. The images in question are virtual reconstructions of a space from the standpoint of the present. They seek to recreate as exactly as possible the look of the instruments, the furnishings, the decoration, and the architectural features of the epoch under the momentary penumbra of the eclipse, with the greatest possible precision and on the basis of research and consultation with various experts. The scenes represented in Polo’s photographs are not documentation: if it ever existed, no record remains. Nothing is left today but the architectural memorial. With their apparent veracity, these images do not attempt to replace what may never have existed but to become substitutes. Unlike other artists who work with fake “found” documents, Polo does not attempt a sleight of hand, nor does she reveal a process of manipulation. Rather, her photographs are the depiction of a possible history frozen in time.



Paloma Polo.
Action at a Distance.
16-mm film
transferred to HD
digital video, 2012

regional government of Príncipe, to the exact spot where, according to new research, the astronomical observation “apparently” took place. This was but a few yards away from the original position on the same farm. If Polo’s intention is to draw a historical parallel, it is a deliberately sterile one that is set up as a testimony to a loss. The film does not restrict itself to merely documenting the relocation of the stele and fixing it in time. Above all, it concerns itself with the status of the audience and its position with regard to the experience it is witnessing. Viewers never get a clear

We can imagine the tremendous mobilization of resources in any scientific undertaking rooted in imperialism. Its present-day parallel represented in her film is both evocative and eloquent. The projection shows the moment in the summer of 2011 when the stele commemorating Eddington’s achievement was moved at the artist’s suggestion, and with the support of the

Paloma Polo Apparent Position

sense of the space (the camera seems to situate the viewpoint in a position that the next shot reveals to have been merely apparent, while tracking shots tend to distance viewers from the object or to dwell on details). In addition, the introduction of sounds foreign to the scene distances viewers from the events depicted; and jump-cuts prevent them from quantifying the passage of time. It is not clear where the stele has gone, how much time it took, or whether it was moved a few meters or

several kilometers away. Time and space are alternatively suggested and disappear. Since viewers must re-construct them from their own vantage points, these points of view necessarily become relativized.



Paloma Polo.
*Simultaneity
is Not an Invariable
Concept.*
Wet-plate collodion
photograph, 2012

“Position” emerges as the basis of this project: the position of the objects involved; that of the sun and the moon; that of the viewer; and, ultimately, and of more complex articulation, that of the ideological “positioning” that might emerge from the whole. Position can thus relativize all the information obtained. Polo’s relocation of the commemorative stele proves futile—just as the 1919 expedition proved controversial from a scientific point of view. Eddington did not manage to convince the scientific establishment that he had confirmed the general theory of relativity, but he did contribute to colonialism’s final years. Polo’s project does not try to restore a memorial or resignify a site. The results of her act of relocation will be judged by what the island’s inhabitants wish to do with it from now on, as an ongoing issue or as a commemoration.

This project bears witness to an absence: that of the colonial powers who supported expeditions like Eddington’s. Although their presence was rarely made visible, they established a dominant world-view. Never completely transparent, their power was rigorously exercised. Used to relocate the monument, the chains seen in the film not only may evoke the dark memory of slavery, they suggest new modes of appropriating space and history. Those participants in the film who manipulate the chains are the generation born after their country became independent in 1975: by contrast, their grandparents’ center of political gravity was