

Fiona Annis
La stanza del tempo (the room of time)
IntraGallery, Napoli

In ancient Greek, the verb “to know” originates from the same root as the verb “to see” (ὄραω) in its aorist form, that is to say, in the past tense (εἶδον). Therefore, “I have seen” (οἶδα) corresponds to “I know”. The equivalence is based on a temporal sequence: “I know” is a consequence of “having seen”, thus demonstrating that knowledge requires an unavoidable empirical phase. The relationship between seeing and knowing is tightly woven. It is no coincidence that many innovations in human history are based on the means to enhance sight with the aim of increasing knowledge, especially with regard to infinitely small and infinitely big things, which would otherwise remain unknown entities.

During her recent residency in Naples, Fiona Annis creatively responded to The Museum of Astronomical Instruments (MuSA) at the Observatory of Capodimonte, founded in 1819 on the grounds of the ancient observatory built in the sixteenth century. This rich collection of instruments, dating from the mid-sixteenth to mid-twentieth century, documents astronomical research and discoveries carried out in Italy. Featuring artifacts, prints and manuscripts, the collection guides visitors through a journey of extraordinary intuitions and inventions, driven by the desire to embrace the universe via sight and to find answers to our everyday reality, precisely at the point where sight itself is lost.

Fiona Annis approached these devices both by examining their museum context, a place for the preservation of material history; and also by investigating the relationship between knowledge and the infinite. Two concepts that at first glance seem contradictory, in that “to know” means to define, observe, characterize and calculate, using the appropriate instruments. This profoundly human ambition translates into establishing conventional parameters, starting with the measurement of time. And it is precisely *La stanza del tempo* (The Room of Time) that is the title of the exhibition at Intragallery, in reference to a special room, once present in many astronomical observatories, where clocks were carefully calibrated in order to keep time and maintain a shared standard.

By means of an unexpected – and, in certain regards, improper – use of photography, Fiona Annis has transformed the objects of the museum's collection, including celestial telescopes, globes, mirrors, and pendulums, from research instruments to subjects of study. In this reversal of perspective, she directed her camera lens on the instruments themselves, but with her camera's focus set to infinity, thus completely losing the contours of the image. The focus is set on a faraway point, well beyond the objects themselves, and therefore to a place not fully visible, projecting these same objects into the galaxies, whose vision they are supposed to report to us. “I avoided an objective representation in favour of an empathic identification”, the artist says. The result is an uncertain image to which we are no longer accustomed in the era of high definition, but that same inconsistency alludes to worlds yet to be discovered, those that we do not yet see clearly, but of which we perceive. In this process, art takes liberties denied to science, to evoke an impalpable matter, not yet measured and classified, melting from image to imagination.

The exhibition at Intragallery mirrors the arrangement of these objects in the museum, as the photographs are interspersed with quotations from poets, philosophers and scientists that build a line of thought on the themes of the infinite, knowledge and the unknown, enlarging the scope to other disciplines. In the last room of the gallery, a golden line of precisely 29.9792458 centimeters long, runs across the wall. That is the distance traveled by light in a billionth of second: hence the title, *Un miliardesimo di secondo luce*. With this work, Fiona Annis returns to the necessity of giving visible consistency to something that has none – the speed of light. In the simplicity of a continuous horizon, two ideal points connect in a seemingly static way, allowing us to grasp the imperceptible and elusive movement of time.

- Exhibition text by Alessandra Troncone
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