

The miracle of the sun, or an attempt to represent the unrepresentable.

Text by Montse Badia for the exhibition at Capella del Carme, Palamós (Girona)

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The Miracle of the Sun is a proposal by the artist Albert Gironès that situates itself in the shifting terrain between faith and science. The project deals with the projection of desire and expectations, subjective perception, the collective unconscious, and the rational and scientific explanation of a perceptual phenomenon.

The Miracle of the Sun proposes a journey guided by artistic curiosity, meticulous research, fieldwork, experimentation, and the attempt to represent what is unrepresentable. As in most scientific investigations, Gironès' proposal arises from a personal observation: witnessing a strange and striking solar phenomenon on the Miramar mountain in Valls on April 14, 2022. After trying to draw and write down what he had seen, his artistic curiosity led him to conduct a detailed investigation, discovering that he had been a witness to the so-called "Miracle of the Sun," historically linked to the Marian apparitions in Fátima (Portugal) on October 13, 1917.

The artist himself recounts contemporary testimonies: "The Sun spun in the sky like a wheel of fire, emitting rays of color that tinted all the objects on Earth. Then it seemed to suddenly detach from the sky and plunge perpendicularly toward the Earth, making the crowd believe that the world was ending." The vision lasted about 12 minutes and, according to records of the time, was witnessed by approximately 70,000 people. This phenomenon is also linked to the second half of the Marian Century in modern Europe (1854–1955), coinciding with the traumatic end of the Second World War, Cold War tensions, and polarization marked by Americanization and communism.

On the other hand, the phenomenon also finds a detailed rational explanation through science, as summarized by the artist: "The 'Miracle of the Sun' could be solely the result of a neuropsychological process between the eyes and the visual cortex of the brain, occurring when looking at the Sun uninterruptedly for several minutes. A subjective experience determined by a series of hallucinatory images as a natural and unconscious response to the intense brightness received, perceptible only through the human eye and, therefore, unrecordable. For this reason, until now these observations have only been transmitted

through oral and written testimony, and consequently, there exists no moving image that is fully accurate.”

It is at this point, in May 2023, that the artist began fieldwork, determined to document the phenomenon firsthand at one of the locations where, since 1981, a considerable number of faithful still gather, eager to witness the Virgin’s apparition in the Bosnian town of Medjugorje. Again, personal experience comes to the fore: a friend of his grandmother Carme had traveled there in the late 1980s to witness the Virgin. On Mount Podbrdo, known as the hill of apparitions, Gironès observes, films, draws, takes notes, and witnesses a strong light moving and intensifying progressively before suddenly disappearing. He also observes the gathered community of believers, devotees, and curious onlookers.

The result of this process can be seen in the exhibition *The Miracle of the Sun*, a collective attempt at representation driven by the artist’s desire to show the unrepresentable, because the lenses of cameras or phones can capture the intensity of light, but not the images our brains generate when exposed to such intensity (the combination of after-images produced on the retina and the after-effects resulting from neural processes in our brains, discussed by scientist Auguste Messen in the lecture “*Apparitions and Miracles of the Sun*” at the International Forum *Science, Religion and Conscience*, held in Porto, October 23–25, 2003).

Gironès’ video installation is divided into three parts:

1. A video compiling recordings made by visitors to Medjugorje, drawn from both Internet videos and submissions in response to a public call by the artist via posters asking people to share their footage.
2. Two display cases containing various documents, including historical images, witness accounts, scientific documents, photographs taken by the artist in Medjugorje, and fragments of his field notebook with drawings and impressions from the pilgrimage.
3. In the central space of the Capilla del Carmen, the artistic experiment explores the limits of vision and representation: a projection of the Sun filmed in 16 mm black and white in Medjugorje, combined with drawings in color and black and white over the film negative. Just as the Miracle of the Sun can be seen only on specific days and hours when the phenomenon manifests, and as church ceremonies occur at precise times, the 4-minute film is projected at scheduled hours. Meanwhile, there is room for desire, sound, documents, and a setting that emphasizes expectations that

something magical will occur.

Albert Gironès' project is highly relevant today. We live in a present where science can explain many phenomena, with abundant accessible information, but also widespread misinformation based on unfounded beliefs that manipulate people's emotions and expectations. Where science cannot reach, the door opens to esotericism and other forms of knowledge that are more intuitive and not solely reason-based. Our present is full of uncertainties and emergencies (environmental, social, economic). We live in a moment of change, where one way of understanding the world is giving way to another still in formation, and in between, as Gramsci wrote, in this *chiaroscuro* emerge monsters, tensions, contradictions, as well as fundamentalisms and extremisms.

Between faith and science, the artistic approach — sharing the fervor and enthusiasm of faith and the curiosity and analytical spirit of science — allows us to view things from unprecedented perspectives and grants us the autonomy to think and experiment for ourselves.

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