

The miracle of the sun

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Between the camera's movement and the slits of the human retina emerges an image that overflows: a sun that is also an apparition, a light that manifests in places that demand faith and questions. The supernatural calls to us.

In the video installation *The Miracle of the Sun* (2025), the artist Albert Gironès takes us to symbolically charged locations such as Fehrbach (Germany), Fátima (Portugal), and Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina). In all three, the phenomenon of the Miracle of the Sun has occurred within the context of Marian apparitions. The first to be recorded was the event on October 13, 1917, in Fátima. According to witnesses, up to 70,000 people gathered that day because young shepherd girls had announced that the Virgin Mary would perform a visible sign. Many people reported witnessing the sun seemingly dance across the sky, spin on itself, emit bursts of color, and zigzag down toward the crowd before returning to its normal position.

Some historical context can help open questions about how light, through cinema, shaped collective imaginaries at the end of the 19th century:

- On December 28, 1895, the Lumière brothers gave their first public film screening in Paris at the Salon Indien of the Grand Café.
- On June 18, 1896, the first public film screening took place in Lisbon, at the Real Colyseu da Rua da Palma, and between that year and the next, the first screenings were held in other cities across Portugal.
- The first film in the history of Portuguese cinema was recorded in 1896 in Porto by Aurélio da Paz dos Reis, *Saída do Pessoal Operário da Fábrica Confiança*.

Could we read the collective fascination with luminous phenomena like the Miracle of the Sun in parallel with the growing attraction to cinema in Portugal and across Europe? From the 18th and 19th centuries, we can identify a collective fascination with luminous

phenomena fueled by pre-cinema projection technologies such as the magic lantern, the phenakistoscope, or the zoetrope. These early optical machines transformed light into apparition and, in a way, when cinema emerged at the end of the 19th century as both art and spectacle, it confirmed the capacity of a technology to collectively generate visions that blend the marvelous with the real. It may not be coincidental that witnesses of the Miracle of the Sun describe light phenomena in terms that could also describe a projection: the sun dancing, projecting toward the crowd, flooding the air with color. Perhaps cinema and miracles share the condition of being devices of visual faith, capable of gathering communities before a luminous event that surpasses ordinary perception.

Similarly, in Fehrbach, a small German village, several Marian apparitions were reported during the 1950s that drew local worshippers. Witnesses described light phenomena in the sky with colors and apparently inexplicable movements. Local accounts of the Fehrbach phenomena reflect both the religious and psychological dimensions of mass experiences in the face of extraordinary events.

In Medjugorje, Marian apparitions began in 1981, when a group of young people claimed to see the Virgin Mary on Podbrdo hill. Witnesses reported unusual lights, glows, and visions that seemed to spring from the sky.

Albert Gironès visited each of these three sites to record the luminous phenomena and reported apparitions on Super 8 and 16 mm film, but encountered the intrinsic limitations of the technique: cameras cannot fully reproduce the intensity, movement, or brilliance perceived by a witness. Investigating these phenomena as perceptual anomalies — resulting from both the limitations of photographic equipment and the vulnerability of the human visual system — Gironès positions the experiences on the edge between empirical evidence and faith, combining scientific research, artistic practice, and fieldwork to explore the tension between perceived reality and visual capture.

Through sound manipulations, direct marks on the celluloid, and deliberate camera movements during filming, Albert Gironès seeks to generate an image perceivable only by the human eye. Using these techniques, the artist transfers to the cinematic image a perception that technical media alone could not capture, exploring the limits between immediate visual experience and the material reproduction of light and movement.

Like a sun that dances only for those who watch it, Albert Gironès' *The Miracle of the Sun* reminds us that some experiences exist always between the desire to see and the

impossibility of holding them. And it is precisely in this liminal space — between perception and the inexplicable, between faith and technique — that the true brilliance of what surrounds us may manifest.