

Project Portal : Artist Information

Paul Malone

march 25th to 28th

About the artwork

The Sun rises, the Sun sets. And shines down upon our ignorance. Theories about what the Sun actually *is* and how it operates have been legion over the centuries; and, despite the best efforts of our scientists, we are no wiser.

Today, the biggest mystery in astrophysics is the paradox of why the Sun is a perfect sphere. It should be oblate due to the centrifugal force of its rotation. During a total eclipse, the Sun ought to extend out both sides of the Moon's equator which itself does not rotate. The Earth is 1000 miles longer around its equator than around a line of longitude traversing the poles. Jupiter, with its 10 hour day, even more so.

This perfection of the Sun had been noted since prehistoric times and forms the basis of many mythologies. It was not so much the proposal that the Earth orbited the Sun that pitched Galileo into trouble with the authorities as his observation of sunspots - a despoliation of 'God's perfection'.

It is easy to dismiss these early theories as failures of observation and superstition but they were consistent with the data of their times. If the Earth orbited the Sun then the winter stars would get brighter during Autumn and the summer stars in the Spring. This was fatal to the heliocentric theory of the Solar System for over 1000 years. Only when the true distances to the stars were measured was this resolved. However, belief was so entrenched that even 30 years later, at the time of Pierre Borel (1620 - 1671), there were severe punishments for the adoption of the Copernican system.

At the time, the famous astronomer William Herschel (1738 - 1822) thought that the photosphere of the Sun was a layer of glowing clouds beneath which was a landscape not too dissimilar to that of the Earth, with mountains and valleys and cows grazing in the fields. This view of the Sun persisted for many decades. As recently as 1901 this idea was iterated by George Woodward Warder in his volume 'The Cities of the Sun'.

And this is the subject of my artwork in Project Portal. We are faced with the implacability of the Sun's photosphere, the mystery of what it is and what lies beyond. In this, the role of sunspots is critical. Sunspots are the portals through which we traverse down to the actual surface of the Sun. Looking down into this umbra we are blinded by the surrounding brilliance and can see but blackness; that is except for the little studied 'umbral flashes'.

Warder contended that it is through these portals that we travel once we are free of Earthly constraints - that 'old, old fashion'. In this artwork I am inviting you to preview that journey and imagine its ultimate conclusion.

About the artist

Paul Malone is interested in lost and forgotten theories of natural philosophy especially relating to astronomy. He studied Fine Art for B.A. at Reading University and Sculpture at the Royal College of Art; graduating his MFA in 1980. Since then he has exhibited extensively around the world and engaged in numerous curatorial events.

Website: www.paulmalone.co.uk

Social media: ello.co/hybrasilian

Availability

Paul sells unique artworks from his studio and online and is available for commissions. He can be hired for videography and presents Talks about some of the theories he researches. Although not engaged in academic life he is available to students for paid education sessions by Zoom or studio visits.

Please contact the artist through his website.

Artwork in the display

'Solar Portal' 2021. Installation, with gold foil, movie

Credit movie source: Swedish 1 metre telescope