



SHARING SUNS

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&
Carlotta Wald

A conversation between
Haley Darya Parsa & Carlotta Wald
on the occasion of the exhibition
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Wald:

First of all, can you describe what is behind the title "Sharing Suns" for the introduction to the subject matter and your exhibition? Who shares those suns? Why suns in plural form?

Parsa:

I was thinking about what connects us all. We all share the same sun. The sun is plural in possession—my sun is different from yours, as my world is.

Originally I was thinking of my family, who are so far away from me, and the ways in which I still feel connected to them, one of which being through the sun. The sun leaves me to find them, halfway across the world, and returns back to me. It is with either of us at all times. That's a beautiful and comforting thought to me. Especially now, as we can't be together in a physical sense but are being warmed by the same star, as our planet rotates, making its way around it.

Going off of these ideas, I've been making cyanotypes. This involves an old-school photographic printing process that can only be activated through exposure to light. You place an object or a photographic negative onto photosensitive fabric or paper, expose it to the light, and a silhouette image is formed. So I'm using sunlight as a direct material in my work.

Being back in Texas, I've been looking at the Southern landscapes around me, both natural and artificial. I've been collecting materials from them—the flowers and fence around my porch, sticks from a manmade lake I used to drive around, and leaves from a golf course while I was on a walk. I've also been using black tea teabags my dad gave to me to use during quarantine. I laid all of these objects out on coated fabric and left them in the sunlight to be exposed. The shadows would then be captured and memorialize that passing moment and memory.

What kind of symbol is the sun in this context?

I grew up in the heat of Texas, and my family is from Iran—both places characterized by nearly year-long summers and dry heat. For my whole life, I haven't been able to ignore the reality of rising temperatures and the knowledge of global warming and its urgency. At the same time, I'm so used to the heat that it's comforting to me.

The sun or light is among other things also a symbol of The Enlightenment. Louis XIV, the French King of The Enlightenment, called himself the "Sun King." The Enlightenment is a genuinely Western concept of the construction of reality and is currently criticized in many places as outdated and one-dimensional. Does this discourse play a role in "Sharing Suns"?

I didn't have that context specifically in mind but it's an interesting observation and addition to the conversation. My personal views on politics and culture are definitely reflected in my work, sometimes more explicitly than others, but I don't think of it as being overly informational or didactic.

In this series, "enlightenment" is relevant when meaning "to shed light on" or bring to the surface, but not in terms of one absolute truth and singular view, which is rightfully criticized. I'm thinking more in terms of things coming forward and receding backward in oscillation. I think of myself bringing questions to light rather than presenting absolute answers.



Even in making cyanotypes, in which you're making lifesize depictions of real objects, they are still just images, and so much information gets lost in the silhouette. You end up with a ghostly blueprint.

So much of my work deals with the specifics of my own personal identity and culture, which is already moving in between two places or finding myself in the middle, so it would be really limiting to want people to identify every single reference. In some ways, I'm making a case for the in-between. I love hearing the different associations and connections people make, and I hope everyone can connect to some part of it regardless—images, objects, patterns, family, tradition, sentimentality, history, culture, so on. Sometimes I draw or paint something because it's beautiful and funny to me and I can't figure it out, so I don't think of myself as doing that to get a specific message across, but I guess I am making a case for its importance by memorializing it.

How important is the idea of sharing here? And to what extent can "sharing" also be understood here as a geopolitical strategy?

I've been thinking about how the word "sharing" implies active or even thoughtful participation. We are living on the same planet and relying on the same natural resources, which comes with responsibility, whether we accept that or not. We have to care for our world, the only one that we are given, with this knowledge—not just environmentally and geopolitically but also socially, culturally, and in terms of borders and immigration. We need to be united together in our pursuits, rather than prioritizing economic gain over the environment and the well-being of our planet, or waging useless, destructive wars derived from capitalism and racism. This is extremely true in our current situation. If we aren't unified in our efforts, we will cause irreversible harm to our society and planet.

Does this experience come from the circumstance of your split identity, which always oscillates between belonging to Iranian and US American culture?

Absolutely. The two sides of my identity are at war. I'm constantly negotiating my place on either side and end up somewhere in-between. Conversations around race and ethnicity are often oversimplified. There is multiplicity on both sides and hybridity in the middle and privilege too, in my case. I'm thinking about all of this critically and sensitively.

A war would deepen the distance between me and my family. We are already unable to see each other or make any plans to do so, especially under this administration. That makes the consequences of division very real.

How is this conflict reflected in your artistic practice?

I've been working on a project that documents the escalated tensions between Iran and the U.S. from December 31, 2019–January 14, 2020, and the media's portrayal of the impending war. I scanned the front page of The New York Times daily during these two weeks and isolated the related text and imagery. On a fifty-foot-long silk scroll, I printed out the resulting front-page images in two side-by-side vertical formats: one shows the images stacked on top of one another progressing forward in time, and the other runs backward in time. While that work recorded a specific window, it is situated in a longer ongoing history.

And finally, isn't it the sun we are all waiting for now because it apparently will release us or at least lower the risk of the coronavirus?

The sun has taken on new meaning even in the past few months. We are all inside fantasizing about the world outside and being in the sun together. It symbolizes hope and what is on the other side. In some ways, it could even help us right now, medically, and of course emotionally and mentally. Another layer to this is that while we are all inside, the earth is trying to heal itself. The sun means so many things to me right now. It is extremely personal and universal.

As the sun completes its cycle, it signifies a new beginning and a new chance every day. What would happen if we shared it?

