

# Time Spaces (Zeit-Räume)

Text by Siegfried A. Fruhauf (filmmaker and visual artist)

For light itself, there is no time. This may sound like a purely poetic statement, but it is a scientific fact. Perhaps this is why there is something inherently fleeting about light. At the flip of a switch, it vanishes and with the speed of light, it bolts away: light. But light also has a durational quality. When a star explodes at the edge of our universe, we only see its light millions of years later. The star no longer exists, its light reaches us as a trace from a bygone era. Then there is the astounding experience of light making everything visible – even though it is not visible itself. It fills space, it is present. It does not make itself appear, but instead the material upon which it falls, the surfaces that reflect or absorb it. We believe we see objects, but science has not yet fully explained what exactly it is that reaches our eyes. Maybe it is spooky action at a distance, as Albert Einstein put it. In its mysteriousness, light is and remains a wonderful philosophical subject.

These briefly sketched, light-related phenomena can be found everywhere and are always around us without ever drawing our attention. It is presumably this everyday quality that leads us to overlook the obvious. We no longer notice what is extraordinary in daily life. The artist Viktoria Schmid, however, takes this as her material. Schmid manages to draw out the fascinating potential in the interweaving of light and time.

She makes traces of light visible and turns them into the central focus of how she deals with time and space. While we generally only pay secondary attention to the play of shadow and light, she manages to draw attention back to these phenomena and she does so with impressive reduction.



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Photos: Violetta Walkobinger



Curtain for Rainy Days (270 West 17th Street, New York City)

In her work, a simple curtain becomes bigger than life. A studio stipend from the Federal Ministry of Austria led Schmid to New York, where she made *Curtain for Rainy Days* in her live-in studio at 270 West 17th Street. The artist froze the light and shadow phenomena on the curtain, how they appeared on it at a particular time of day. If one takes into consideration that the light coming in from outside and the resulting shadow, viewed at the same time one day later or perhaps at the same time of day one year later, are identical to the captured trace of light on the curtain, then the piece is not only about a moment frozen in time. It reflects elements of filmmaking that are very significant to the artist's work. Repetition and difference, which are important in this context, are also among the artist's recurring interests. Through its title, the *Curtain for Rainy Days* also acts as a repository of memories of better weather and sunny days, maybe in a figurative sense as well. The drape, which also keeps out light when it is too bright, becomes the screen of an imaginary outside where the sun is always shining.

The imaginary outside and the curtain's nature as an object show how the artist deals with space. They convey a sense of the way Schmid always observes her immediate surroundings very precisely, interweaving and translating them into abstract cyanotypes and films. In her studies of the temporal dimensions of spaces, Schmid is not after something flashy and spectacular. In her photographic work, she is interested in the space in which she lives and works. This can be her own, familiar apartment in Vienna or the initially unknown studio at one of her artist residencies. The resulting images of time (Zeitbilder) sharpen our perception of the everyday and alter how we see our own familiar space in that it can acquire something excitingly foreign and new. On the other hand, photographic research of unfamiliar spaces can serve to make one's surroundings more familiar.

Schmid's work makes us inescapably aware of the fact that a space is always different at different times, that space is "time-space." This is especially striking in the series time flies. We see the identical part of a room, a detail, captured in a series of frames at specific temporal intervals. The differences in the individual images reveal how time constantly redefines spaces through light. Consequently, the piece also fulfills fundamental premises of cinema that are hallmarks of the artist's entire oeuvre.

In her photographic works, the cyanotype is her preferred technique and one that she has perfected. A cyanotype is an early form of photochemical reproduction whose advantage is that its light-sensitive paper can be used under normal tungsten light and without a darkroom. A reaction only occurs after exposure to ultraviolet daylight. Depending on its intensity, the traces of light turn a lighter or darker blue while the shadows remain white. This reversal process into a negative image does not only show a phantom picture of the surroundings fragmented into cutouts and segments of time, ultraviolet light has its own wavelength that human eyes cannot see. In this way too, these frames produced without a camera become phantom images of a space.

