

**Felix Kiessling***I shall willingly pause*

curated by Lucia Longhi

April 4th – June 1st 2019 Düsseldorf



*“SAGREDO: Wait a while, Salviati, for in this argument I find so many doubts assailing me on all sides that I shall either have to tell them to you, if I want to pay attention to what you are going to say, or withhold my attention, in order to remember my doubts.*

*SALVIATI: I shall willingly pause, for I run the same risk too, and am on the verge of getting shipwrecked. At present, I sail between rocks and boisterous waves that are making me lose my bearings, as they say. Therefore, before I multiply your difficulties, propound them.”*

*(The Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, Galileo Galilei, 1632, First Day)*

For the next 15 billion years we will be able to tell exactly what time it is. Thanks to a group of physicists who have recently developed a new atomic clock, humankind is now provided with the most accurate time-keeping device. Such precise instrument, nevertheless, is subject to alteration: heat and gravity can disrupt its accuracy, for instance. In other words, it will hopefully not be losing time for billions of years, yet it could equally spin out of control any minute now. Time is still mockingly refusing to align with the order we expect of the whole universe.

A huge clock (*Zeitzeichnung*, 2019) is ticking in a dark room, its hand lugging a rock that leaves a trace of its passage. At every lap, the mark is slightly different, for uncontrollable external factors affect its perpetual task, thus revealing a lack of precision. This rather wild timekeeping instrument responds to contingent environmental phenomena we cannot control: small seismic movements, temperature, even the rock's own mass – behaving differently every time.

A pressing subject within human thought, the measuring of time and space has proven to be a crucial challenge which gave rise to extraordinary inventions. Felix Kiessling is walking this path without following preordained paradigms, but rather overturning them. His research aims to question not only time and space, but also the way we tumble through them and the issue of measurability itself.

As we reason, the clock continues to work, imposing its presence also with a persistent sound, constantly attracting our attention and, at the same time, slowly becoming part of the surroundings. Time fills the room acoustically and physically, gradually imposing its corporeal presence as the unquestionable evidence of its own existence. Felix Kiessling neither seeks to depict time, as an artist would do, nor chases an exact measurement of it, as a scientist would.

He is resolved to capture time.

What the artist shares with scientific practice is, however, the most appealing of its qualities: the attempt to make the invisible visible, to turn information into tangible images. Not only metaphorically, but physically. We never look at clocks for more than a couple of seconds, but in front of this one we are invited to pause and stare, for what we are witnessing is the process of time itself which takes a real form right in front of our eyes. This huge machine is time specific even before being site specific.

For thousands of years, man has grappled to understand the universe's geometry; Kiessling's research partly draws from this perpetual human exercise of gleaning dimensions. By measuring it, human beings believed to finally have the world in hand. But we've come a long way since the Aristotelians attached only three dimensions to our planet and, by virtue of them, defined it as "perfect". There are more than three dimensions, and we resigned to add the world "chaos" to that quality of perfection. Unpredictability and scalelessness rule the universe just as much as balance and order.

Staring at this clock, we are invited to accept that things are ultimately out of our control.

Time and space don't have limits; they need to be measured to be perceived, to exist. This perspective turns them into very personal concepts, depending on which system of measurement we choose to rely on. Kiessling has been cultivating an artistic process rooted in a scientific but also very personal understanding of the world. As a man of his time, he ingeniously handles those Einsteinian malleable and multifaceted times, that finally legitimated all the aesthetic representations set in the arts throughout history.

Putting aside the mathematical formulae and pushing further on the concept of scale, Kiessling also set new reference systems. When Galileo Galilei first observed the pendulum movement, he measured its speed against the only reliable clock he could find: his own heart pulse. Similarly, Kiessling put into action a new, personal measurement system made of self-built instruments or even his own body - when he calculates, for instance, the slowing down of the speed of the Earth following the impact of his body landing after a jump (*Der Sprung*, 2014).

While technology becomes increasingly sophisticated, Kiessling provides a visually and technically simplified alternative. His works are conceptually and substantially reduced to their essence.

Along with complexity, accuracy is seemingly not cogent. These devices do not aim for exactitude, but rather welcome inexactness. Thus, in Kiessling's reference system too, imperfection and unpredictability are integral to the process of defining time and space as environmental and experiential dimensions.

A huge vector pierced the Earth from side to side (*Erddurchstechung*, 2018). The artist himself reached two opposite points of the Earth and drove the poles into the ground himself. The vector trajectory is drawn with calculated precision, however, the effort is not addressed to measuring, but rather erasing limits and distances. Two opposite places on the planet are now virtually joined with a gesture which is not solely symbolic, as the poles will stay forever.

Kiessling's measuring experiments originate from the feeling of lacking something that could give a sense of scale within the empirical experience. His works thus result in objects and images that fill this absence and concretely embody time and space. In his previous works, he managed to touch the bottom of an undersea volcano (*Vavilov*, 2015), draw a tangent on the world (*Earth Tangent*, 2017), and dig an imaginary hole through the world, to allow to see New Zealand's sky (*The Sky Beneath Me*, 2017). Far from a desire of control, he involves the visitors to take part in his attempts of experiencing, overcoming and overturning the paradigms of distance and duration.

From ancient allegories to modern iconographies referring to biological processes, the visual arts long engaged the physical and emotive response we encounter at the passage of time. It is the experiential dimension relating with our private and social life that seemed to engage artists the most. Roman Opalka turned himself into an ephemeral clock, showing the adherence of time to our existence. Félix González-Torres staged the role of time in human relationships. Christian Marclay offered a luxurious though disquieting experience of watching time in its perfect linearity and obstinacy.

Yet, in recent years a number of authors increasingly addressed their attention to the idea of geological duration, introducing a new paradigm in art history, as time is no longer only involved in relation to the human being and his emotions. Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* is a "clock" that materializes the environmental composition of time, which is thus no longer merely represented, but also physically involved in its qualities. A melting iceberg that can be observed closely embraces the most cogent ecological concerns on the planet which is supposed to host and ensure life.

Kiessling places himself in this current critical discourse which encloses time as a physical and geological phenomenon. However, his research suggests a further outlook, detaching from any ecological and political perspective, refusing any *memento mori* symbology and not engaging time as a social process or sentimental investigation.

His work steps away from any socially engaged or emotional human-oriented approach, as it ultimately transcends human perception.

Kiessling thus takes another step forward in the contemporary artistic research around time, by pushing its boundaries out of the current human-scaled debate.

The new reference system he has created is a brand new logic that overrides mankind - in a chronological and semantic meaning - reaching beyond the confines of human existence and experience. If, on one hand, this practice could be read as the epitome of the human *hybris* to grasp the universe dimensionality, on the other hand it represents a truce, as it accepts and depicts its elusiveness.

In light of this, Kiessling's clock is off the human scale as it keeps drawing time over time, ignoring its own author. The artist, in fact, has given away his authorship: his autonomous creation is no longer under his control. Such delegation may be nothing new in art. With Kiessling, however, no aspect of this transfer of tasks is part of a social argument. What he removes is not only the authorship of himself as an artist, but as a human being.

Additionally, not only does he remove the authorship of the artist from the artwork.

Most importantly, he removes the authority of time.

If the artist's intention was to capture time, in fact, with this clock he is actually achieving something greater: he frees it. Having removed the function of measure, he ultimately releases time from its role of model of regulation and efficiency for humans.

Kiessling's tools, despite offering a sense of control, rather allow for a greater degree of liberty. Time and space are liberated from any role and definition we could ever attribute to them. A new myth arises in this room: the one of the man who tried to capture time, by paradoxically leaving it uncontrolled. An attempt of connection and reconciliation with the indefinite nature of the universe.

Now we can try to kindly ask time to hold on for a second. Shall it willingly pause?

Lucia Longhi

**Felix Kiessling**, born in Hamburg on January 1st 1980, lives and works in Berlin. Felix Kiessling investigates the experience of time and space. For his artistic interventions he travels the world, creating minimalist land interventions, sculptures and documentations which reflect on dimensionality and scale. He graduated with a master degree (Meisterschüler) under Olafur Eliasson at the Institut für Raumexperimente and University of the Arts (UDK), Berlin. His work has been exhibited in numerous national as well as international galleries and institutions, as for instance Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), Alexander Levy gallery (Berlin), Museum of Modern Art Tokyo, Reykjavik Art Museum and Schinkel Pavillon (Berlin). Kiessling was a participant in Art Basel Cities: Buenos Aires (2018), the Moscow Biennale for Young Arts (2016) and Marrakech Biennale (2012). He received numerous project and artist grants such as: the Goethe Institute (travel grant), Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe (project grant), Federal Foreign Office Germany (project grant), and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (art and science grant).