ΔS ≥ 0

Text by Dr Iris Pissaride

In her solo exhibition *ΔS ≥ 0*, Elena Adamou investigates the tangible aspects of time. According to contemporary physics, there is no universal time. We agree on terms and measurements in order to communicate time, but it would be an illusion to believe that it is measured or experienced in the same way throughout the wider universe: clocks run at different speeds depending on motion and gravity, and there is no single "now" shared across the universe. As the physicist Carlo Rovelli argues, the fundamental equations describing the world have no direction of time. They work just as well forwards as backwards. For Rovelli, only entropy separates before from after: the law that disorder never decreases, written as $\Delta S \geq 0$. This formula, which Adamou borrows for her title, is the one place where the difference between past and future is written into the laws of physics. Time, in this reading, is not a river carrying us along. It is heat passing from warm to cold, wax becoming smoke.

The arrow of time is the arrow of entropy. It is this arrow, marking change through tangible materials, that Adamou sets out to make visible and to unsettle: her work follows its path, but it also pauses it, folds it back, and gathers many temporalities into single objects.

Adamou investigates the ways in which we live through time but also challenges the ways in which we collectively and personally decide on the parameters for counting and calculating its passing. Her practice focuses on the ways in which we understand time in its multiplicities: as a measure, as a concept, as the stories we tell about ourselves, as the way we transform past and future.

In her work, historical time is not just of the past, something that has ended. Rather, using repetitive motions, territories as trace-makers, and living matter that decays, Adamou patiently closes the gap between "then" and "now", visualising the past as constantly spilling into the present. Her practice echoes Walter Benjamin's call to stop thinking of the past as a "sequence of events like the beads of a rosary," and instead to grasp the constellation that our own moment forms with particular earlier ones. History, in this sense, would not be just a line we move along but a relationship we keep making with the past. Rovelli arrives at something similar from the side of physics. For him, humans are like time machines in that we are constantly computing and constructing time, forming and reforming our relationship to it.

Stretching out our relationship with time and its traces, Adamou's works involve counting with slow personal rhythms, marking and archiving with fragile materials, visually shaping chronologies outside of conventional linearity, making moving images

static and static images move in time. For Adamou, time is not fleeting but can be brought before us as material substance, as a way to think of ourselves as both multidirectional and time-bound beings.

Her textile embroideries and Time-Counters, make alternative timekeeping literal. Each stitch is a unit of time spent, pulled through the fabric and fixed therein. Where the clock divides time into the identical, exchangeable hours of capitalist timekeeping, what Benjamin called “homogeneous, empty time”, Adamou’s Time-Counters resist this logic. They make their own parameters, choosing a slower and more intimate account: time that has been lived with the hands, one gesture after another, and that remains visible as thread and as process. They belong to a long history of needlework, so often the unpaid and unrecorded labour of women.

Her engraved apple is painted with gold varnish and enclosed in a transparent container. Sealed off from the air, the fruit slowly shrinks and rots while its surface stays golden, decay continuing inside the gilded skin. The value painted on the outside holds while the substance beneath it gives way. By capturing this process through a series of photographs, Adamou turns the shutter against its traditional purpose of freezing time. Here, the gold skin and the glass attempt to force the fruit into a visual standstill, mimicking what theorist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay identifies as the violence of a frame that claims to provide a finished, truthful account. Yet the tools of preservation cannot halt the decay; they only slow it down. Adamou’s sequential images expose the failure of the object’s frozen frame. The gold and the glass aim for $\Delta S = 0$, a perfect standstill in which nothing changes and nothing is lost; the apple insists on $\Delta S > 0$. This is entropy made visible. Gesturing to both the ideal of preserving time and the real impossibility of keeping life still, Adamou’s “still life” exposes how tools that frame time never tell the whole story.

Adamou’s work patiently traces the ways we make, follow and live through time: with bodies, materials, gestures, and organic substances. In doing so, her practice opens up ways of seeing our polytemporalities, the many times we inhabit at once.