



1646, Travels in scale, overview, Agnieszka Polska. Photo: Documentommy

In the Loop: Time as the Equaliser of the Cosmic, the Civic, and the Ecological — Agnieszka Polska at 1646

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10.01.2026

recensie

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In the exhibition *Travels in Scale* at 1646, Agnieszka Polska brings together three bodies of work: the Braudel's Clocks, a pair of sun animations, and a new King's Day projection. Although in different mediums and registers, the works come together in a looping set of existential questions that explore temporality, perception, and the fragile limits of human consciousness.

'we are in a constant state of becoming'. These words greet me as Agnieszka Polska addresses a group gathered for the opening of *Travels in Scale* at 1646 which showcases old and new pieces by the Berlin-based visual artist and film director. I thought I had understood what the sentiment meant, after all, an artistic identity is always evolving. However, throughout the exhibition, it starts to mean more.

I enter a dark room where *The New Sun (2017)*, the exhibition's emblem, plays on a screen. A sun with a face, two eyes, a nose, a not unhappy mouth: speaks, sings, jokes, and asserts cosmic absurdity. Through the headphones, its monologue slips between the lyrical and generous 'the words of the greatest love... the beauty I've seen' and unsettling reminders of scale: 'we don't share the same temporality... your intestines decay under my gaze.' It is cut up with scenes of an everyday street, filmed through an anxious, restless lens which creates a disorienting oscillation between the ordinary and cosmic and an uncomfortableness of having to think about the perpetual yet intangible forces around us.

At the far end of the space and on the other side of a pebbled garden, *What the Sun Has Seen (2017)* mirrors the structure. This time the earth itself, rendered as another circular face, rotates like a vinyl record while posing questions that are half-prose, half-incantation. The spinning form recalls Polska's earlier work *Guns (2014)*, in which images of pistols and gun-like objects rotate around drilled holes the size of a coin; a reference to the 1968 student protests in Warsaw where the guns at the military museum were broken like this to deter violence from the protesters. Rotation becomes a symbol of repetition, of erasure, of time stripped of narrative. Of a gun being stripped of its use and how where once the gun's deformity rendered it obsolete, time has made it relevant again by codifying its symbolism in history.



1646, Travels in scale, overview, Agnieszka Polska. Photo: Documentommy

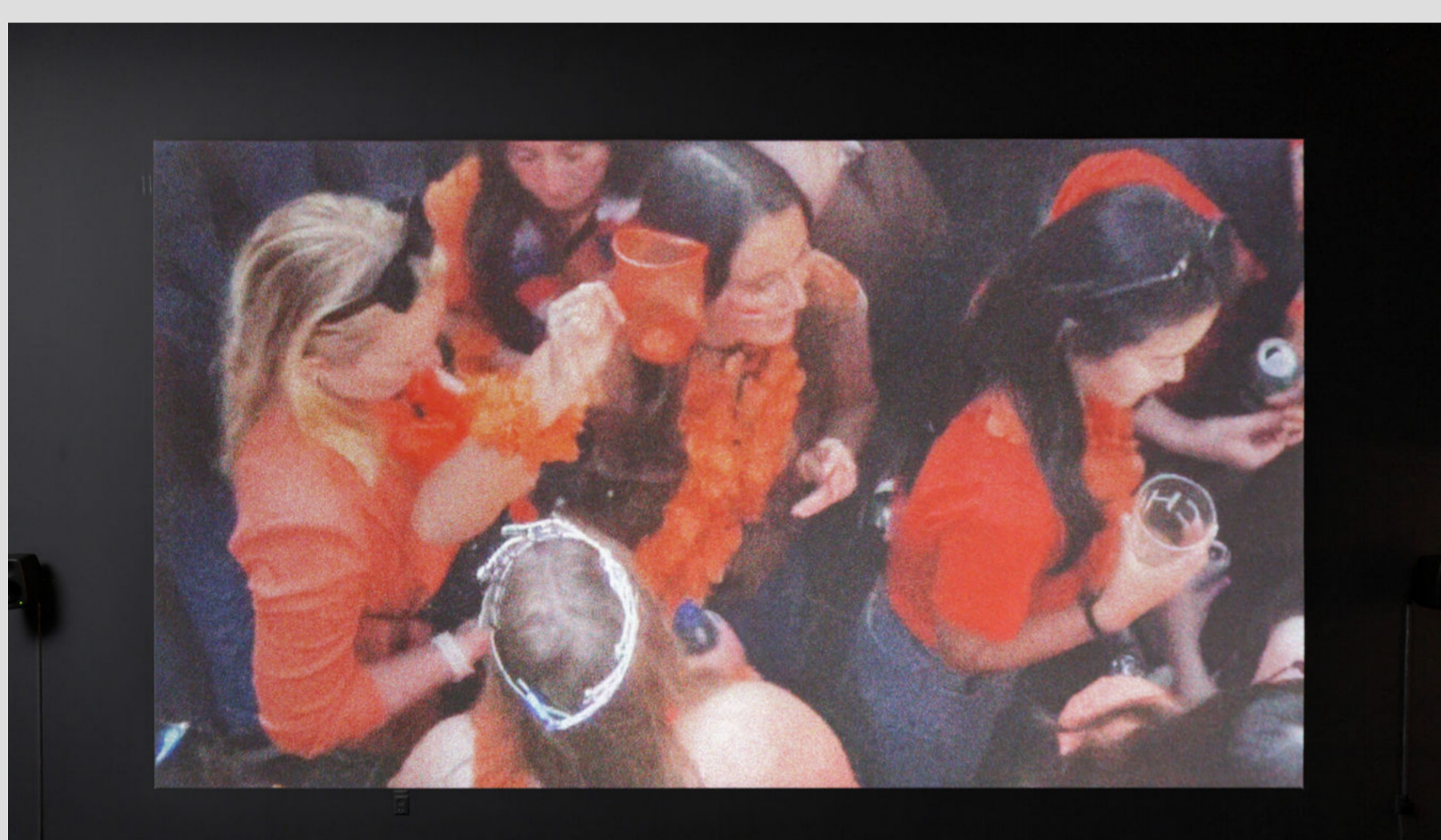


1646, Travels in scale, What the Sun Has Seen (dr Polska. Photo: Documentommy

The show's largest work, *Orange (2025)*, is projected on a large wall in a second dark room. Shot with a 360-degree camera, the video lurches from one person to another during King's Day. A celebration of the Dutch monarchy known for both its exuberance and its excesses. Like a rollercoaster the camera swoops, spins, zooms in and out as if overwhelmed by the sheer density of bodies draped in bright orange on the streets. What looks like a civic ritual, here becomes a whirl of collective performance, joy, intoxication, and nationalism. The music by Dutch producer De Schuurman, adds another interesting layer. A rhythm plays on speakers in the background, and as if the people can hear it, shoulders are moving, heads are nodding to the beat of the steady cadence. If you were to close your eyes the music might conjure up images of carnival in Brazil or the Caribbean but the predominantly white crowd is bopping to something they can't even hear. A testament to the omission of the colonial ambitions in the history of the Netherlands in the joyous swarm of nationalist pride.

The artist also used AI tools to obscure the faces of the people shown in the video. You wouldn't know it but the protagonists, on screen for just a second, have different, unrecognisable faces. Every so often the technology fails and the space around the foreheads and cheeks distorts ever so slightly. Like smoke around a chimney. In this work, time is not cosmic but social: it is the accelerated, slightly hysterical ode to the absurd temporality of a national holiday stained by moral matters, but ultimately disregarded because it's just too fun. Another example of the ineptitude of the human mind to comprehend the past or question the present.

The exhibition leaves the viewer suspended between scales — cosmic, civic, ecological, none of which align neatly



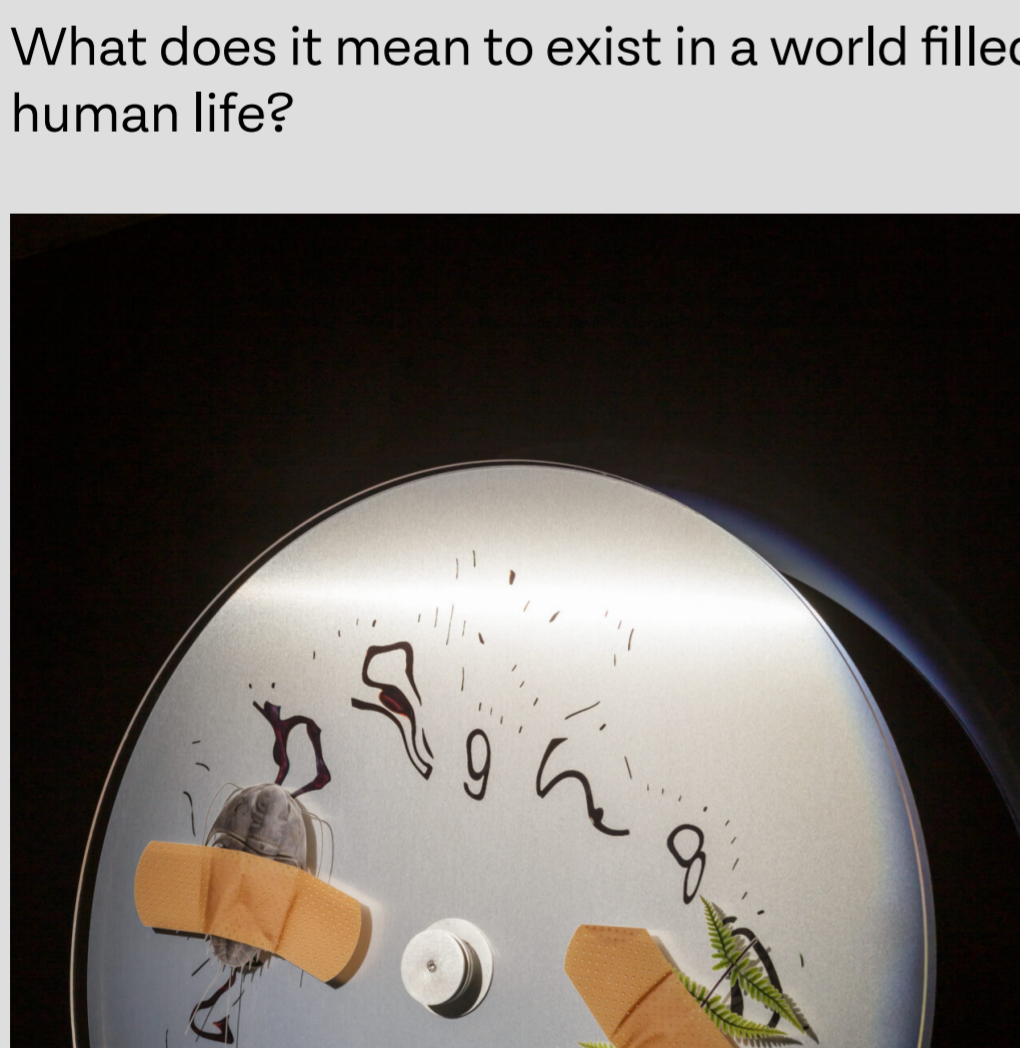
1646, Travels in scale, Orange (detail), Agnieszka Polska. Photo: Documentommy



1646, Travels in scale, Orange (detail), Agnieszka F Documentommy

The third set of works consists of three circular clock faces. The numbers are melted and almost Dali-esque. The hands of the clocks have been replaced by UV images of objects and animals on acrylic glass. On the first one called *Braudel clock – Fern and Trilobite (2022)* a trilobite rotates adjacent to a fern leaf. The trilobite looks eerily similar to the horseshoe crab, which is often used in pharmaceutical testing. Massive conglomerates hunt the crab for its blood to check for bacterial contamination when making medicines, even though there are chemical alternatives. The fern leaf becomes a testament to yet more contamination in the earth that the poor thing has to filter in a careless cycle. The clock becomes an ecological warning: our survival hinges on creatures and processes we simultaneously exploit. Additionally, trilobites are one of the earliest groups of arthropods to appear in the fossil record, they were among the most successful of all early animals. We cannot even begin to conceptualise their life because of their death 252 million years ago. So, what do they mean now?

Braudel clock – Snail (2022) features a snail in beautiful violet-pink hues, prompting an absurd but productive question: what is time to a snail? The final clock *Braudel clock – Wash liquid (2022)* in the second room, spins objects like a Tide pod and a cigarette butt; things that outlast us, leaching slowly into soil and water. Polska lets the viewer connect the dots: how do we relate to forms of time we can't perceive? What does it mean to exist in a world filled with objects whose temporality exceeds human life?



1646, Travels in scale, Braudel Clock, Fern and Trilobite (detail), Agnieszka Polska. Photo: Documentommy



1646, Travels in scale, Braudel Clock, Wash liquid (detail), Agnieszka Polska. Photo: Documentommy

The exhibition leaves the viewer suspended between scales – cosmic, civic, ecological, none of which align neatly. It has to be said that at times the animations feel irritating in their tonal shifts and have a close likeness to face filters on social media, but one hopes that the friction is intentional: To illustrate the tensions between the sun and us on earth. If this disparity is coming from an acknowledgement that we could never understand the star, then the work has done well. But this was often not the feeling I was left with. Where the friction in the work *Orange (2025)* serves a purpose, the tension in *The New Sun (2017)* through the many face filters on objects on the internet and now having to listen to one go through tonal shifts and philosophical musings becomes a kind of torture. It is unclear whether this feeling is intentional or because I was vexed and overwhelmed by the density of the work. But then again, is this subjectivity also not a product of the time we're in? If we zoom in and out and 'travel in scale', maybe this feeling can become something spiritual again.

In any case, Polska reminds us that everything that participates in time is both meaningless without context and profoundly consequential. The works don't resolve into a single narrative; rather, they 'become' in front of us, just as Polska suggested. *Travels in Scale* ultimately gestures toward a difficult realisation: a relationship to time is the great equaliser, yet our ways of living rarely acknowledge the other forms of life that sustain or outlast us.

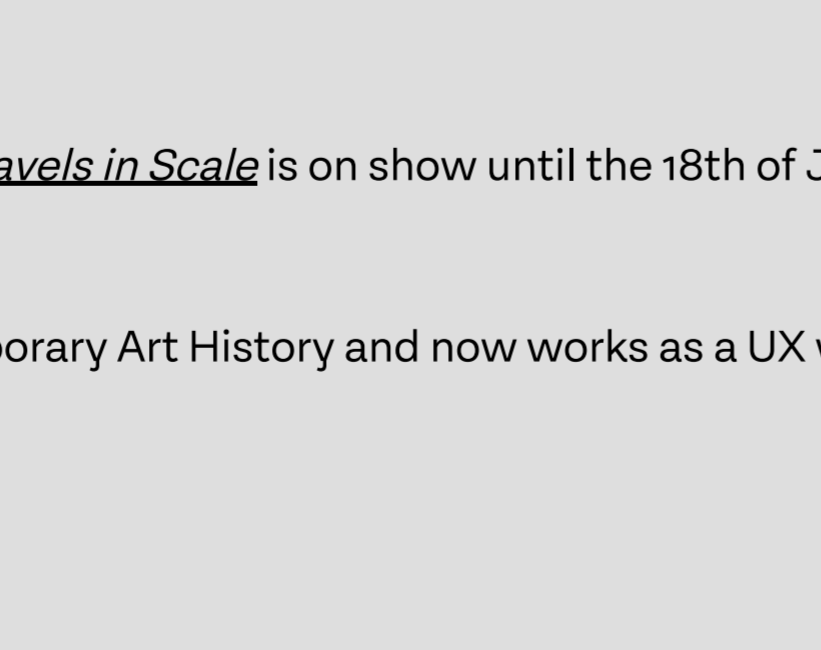
The exhibition *Travels in Scale* is on show until the 18th of January at 1646

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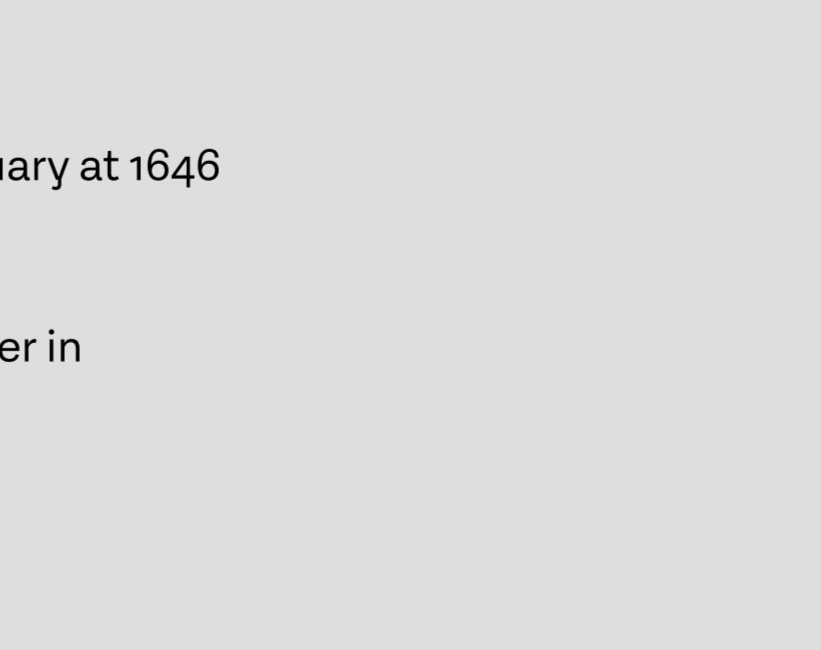
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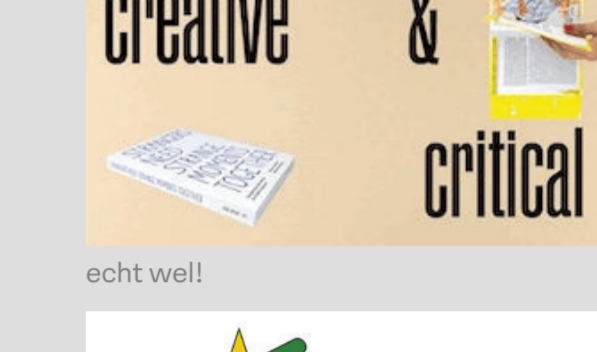
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