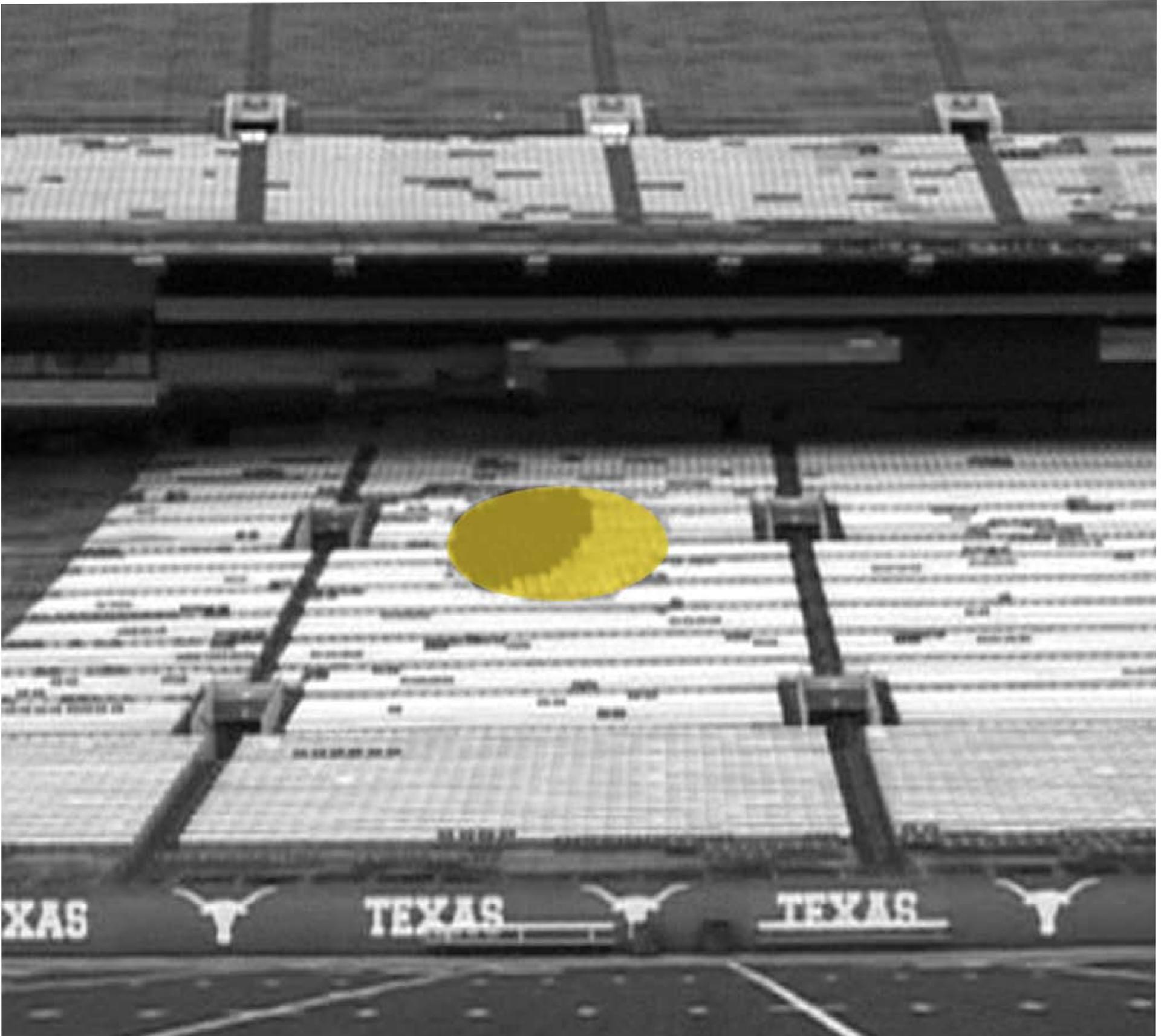


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Pablo Vargas Lugo, *Eclipses for Austin*, November 14th, 2009

The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin



Eclipses Visible at UT Stadium Under an Unexpectedly Sunny Day

By URSULA DAVILA-VILLA
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AUSTIN, Texas, November 2 -- While living in Mexico City, I witnessed one of the longest solar eclipses of the last decade on July 11, 1991. Never before have I experienced nighttime darkness descend in the middle of the day as the sun became totally eclipsed by the moon and its delicate ethereal corona became visible while the horizon turned into a splendid spectacle of sunset colors. A total solar eclipse is a cosmic optic illusion that allows us to perceive the moon and sun as if they were both the same size in the sky. Many millions of years in the past, the moon was too close to the Earth to precisely occlude the sun as it does during eclipses today; and many millions of years in the future, it will be too far away to do so. But at the present time, the sun is roughly 400 times bigger than the moon, and it is also 400 times further away. When their orbital paths cross under just the right circumstances, the moon completely covers the face of the sun and a total eclipse takes place. On Tuesday October 6th, I witnessed, yet again, another astonishing eclipse— or better said, eclipses. Standing on the lawn of the

Darrel K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium at The University of Texas at Austin, I saw the simulation of the solar eclipses that will be visible from that exact geographic position in the years 2200, 2024, 2205, and 2343. Artist Pablo Vargas Lugo, who in recent years has been developing work around the concept of the eclipse, organized this event as part of the WorkSpace 12 exhibition at the Blanton Museum of Art. Vargas Lugo envisioned this project, entitled *Eclipses for Austin*, as a collective ritualistic experience and a reverse commemoration of events that will take place well after our lifetimes. In order to create the four solar eclipses, the Blanton team organized an open call requesting the participation of 200 volunteers for a card-stunt performance in the stadium's stands for a period of four hours. On the morning of that Tuesday, the group, sitting in a circular arrangement, held and flipped yellow-and-black cards in sequence to create future eclipses. Vargas Lugo collaborated with filmmakers Miguel Alvarez and Ryan Miller to film each eclipse from strategic locations within the UT stadium and with percussionist

Eric Peterson to record a soundtrack based on the card-stunt performance's rhythm. WorkSpace 12: *Eclipses for Austin* is comprised of the final footage of the recreated eclipses, a percussion-based soundtrack, and this publication that documents the research and the event that took place at the stadium.

Before production began at the stadium, I was curious to understand why Vargas Lugo was so deeply interested in eclipses. In conversations with him, he explained that his fascination lies in the varied roles solar eclipses have played within different cultures throughout history. The understanding of these phenomena, and consequently the study of the moon and sun's trajectories, has been important in two very different realms: science and ritualistic practices. Vargas Lugo suggested that solar eclipses are one of the most subjective of astronomical events, and this led him to perceive them as something other than just a cosmic coincidence. For him, solar eclipses and sports are in fact closer than one might think. True, both are associated with idiosyncratic and ritualistic practices and collective admiration, but, for Vargas Lugo, it goes beyond that.

While witnessing the choreographed card-stunt eclipse performance, my mind went

back to Pablo's words and instantly my thoughts diverted to the famous and massive card-stunt sequences organized at the Arirang Performances in North Korea. This annual event was the first to extend the card-stunt to an art form by using flipbook cards to produce enormous hour-long animated sequences. But the first record of a card-stunt performance goes back to 1910, during a Big Game at the University of California at Berkeley. Although card-stunts are performed at a variety of events—from sports to political rallies—they are closely associated with stadiums. When analyzing these arenas, independently of what their specific purpose might be, they all are important settings for the expression of collective identity, where a large group of people commune in shared excitement, expectation, glee, or grief in their support for a team, political party, or favorite band. One of the greatest achievements of *Eclipses for Austin* is that this event and exhibition became the embodiment of the odd but remarkable relationship between sports arenas and astronomy. This project intended to inspire in those participating or visiting the exhibition a sense of achievement and wonder similar to the sensations we feel when we experience real solar eclipses.

But, as mentioned before, eclipses have given rise to subjective reactions, and thus *Eclipses for Austin* might also allow for a number of other associations. Whatever interpretation speaks to us best, the sum of its parts does provide an opportunity to “witness” a future that we will most likely never see. For those of us who participated in the recreation of the eclipses, it also inspired a sense of shared accomplishment among all volunteers that held and flipped the cards not knowing what the result of our work would yield. Collective effort—especially when it relates to the production of art—nurtures a strong sense of community and solidarity for a common purpose. These are important principles that shape societies and create strong personal relationships amongst individuals.

A real solar eclipse might incite ecstasy and result in collective astonishment. Like Mark Twain said, “An occultation of Venus is not half so difficult as an eclipse of the sun, but because it comes seldom the world thinks it's a grand thing.” Twain's words shed an interesting light on *Eclipses for Austin* and allow us to understand this project as a platform that encourages a meaningful sense of shared achievement and inspiration among the members of our very own community. Yes, it was indeed a grand experience!

Testimonial

October 6, 2009 was a day that quite literally brought the words “communal” and “interdisciplinary,” as they relate to the arts in Austin, into a completely new playing field. Two hundred people from all walks of life gathered in the grand poobah of collegiate stadiums to join together to actually create a work of art. The choice to produce the work inside of the imposing architecture of the stadium was, in and of itself, one large step for art kind. Never before, to my knowledge, had football and contemporary art joined forces on campus, even though they are

technically two sides of the same coin. Now, throw in the mix students with various majors, artists, businesspeople, children, museum staff, Texas heat and tight seating for hours on end and what you have are many potentially problematic variables. Not to say that I have ever thought of the people of Austin as being anything less than cultured and open to new thoughts (we are Austin, after all) but the pessimist in me was truly wondering how on earth we would actually pull this off. I have to say the experience in the end was extremely uplifting. Put any group of strangers

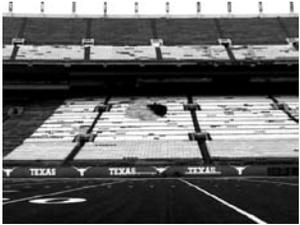
in one place for multiple hours and give them something they have to focus on as a collective and you're bound to have a mess on your hands. However, much to my surprise there was no complaining, no fits, no trouble whatsoever. Kudos to Pablo and the Blanton staff for making it all happen and kudos to the people of Austin for bridging the countless gaps we bridged that day.

Mark Rosen, UT alumni from the Art and Art History department

Photos by Douglas Marshall
and Santiago Forero



Interview



0. Why would you do something like this?

1. To animate something through a card stunt

2. To make an artwork that works as a prediction

3. To present an accurate and objective observation through excessive means

4. No dwelling in the past

5. No current events

6. To commemorate the future

7. The state of things 15 years from now, 334 years from now

8. Will Texas exist as Texas?

9. Will it look like sun worshipping?

10. To put an expiration date on an artwork, that erodes parts of its validity through time

11. How will it look once the eclipses pass?

12. To become a great visionary through a great misunderstanding

13. Why would people join something like this?

14. To choreograph something, the catch being that the thrills and the beauty will come through imperfection

15. To put a soundtrack to it

16. A music of the spheres where everything is slightly off-beat

17. To ground a site-specific piece on an observation point

18. It doesn't matter what you see somewhere, it matters what you see from there

19. The Voyager record

20. To pluck the thread tying a massive ideological display and a playful stunt performed

as a show-off to your peers and rivals

21. To point towards the aspirations that materialize in image-building, and the awe that they provoke

22. The tears of Misha (Moscow 1980)

23. Shining Path guerrillas in Peru, performing card stunts in their prison rallies

24. The rush of ecstatic stadium crowds; the oppressive perfection of Mass Games choreographies in North Korea.

25. Support, submission?

26. To do: Mass Games meet Sambodrome

27. Feathers, scales, mimicry

28. Is it a sea of people or an island of people?

29. The stadium crowd mimics the sun and the moon

30. The life-giving sun as a blank eye

31. The eclipsed sun as the eye finally animated

32. The eclipse as the peak in a series of cycles

33. To concoct a new series of cycles out of different eclipses

34. Future simultaneous

35. The eclipse as cosmically irrelevant, as a subjective experience, as an optical illusion

36. A shadow

Pablo Vargas Lugo
Lima, November 2009

WorkSpace 12:
Eclipses for Austin
by Pablo Vargas Lugo

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Cantanker
...might be good

Eclipse data provided by Jean Meeus and Fred Espenak through the *Five Millennium Canon of Solar Eclipses: -1999 to +3000* and *Five Millennium Catalog of Solar Eclipses: -1999 to +3000*.
Based on eclipse maps by Xavier M. Jubier.
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Eclipses for Austin was curated by Ursula Davila-Villa for WorkSpace at the Blanton Museum of Art.

WorkSpace is a project dedicated to exploring new developments in contemporary art. WorkSpace features commissioned works by emerging and mid-career artists from around the globe.

Pablo Vargas Lugo was born in Mexico City in 1968. He lives and works in Lima, Peru

Ursula Davila-Villa is Interim curator of Latin American Art at the Blanton Museum of Art.

