

CONRAD SHAWCROSS

The limit of everything

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For his first solo show in the gallery and in Spain Conrad Shawcross (1977, London. UK) has created a collection of work that challenges the everyday perception of space and time.

The main work, *The Limit of Everything*, from which the show takes its title, consists of a complex mechanical system that gradually expands and contracts to form, over time, a perfect spiral of light. The work exists, like photons themselves, as both a particle and a wave, reminding us of the razor's edge of the present as its extruded path etches itself into the retina.

The Celestial Meters are a series of nine rods which look at the history of measurement and namely the meter. Conceived during the French revolution, the meter was an attempt to find a standardised unit of length that was more democratic and egalitarian and that was not reliant on another precarious constant such as a human foot or thumb or even time. In the end the new republic decided to use the earth as its measure, and the meter supposed to be one ten millionth of the sector of the earth through Paris. However due to the limitations of the technology at the time, it is not completely correct. The 9 rods, range from 18 cm to 9.5 m long and are all units of 1 meter relative to the circumferences of each planet. Highlighting the fragility of such familiar everyday systems, the work further explores the artists on going interest in the history of science and the way it impacts on our lives and reality.

Perimeter Studies continue the series based on the 4th of the platonic solids, the dodecahedron, and are the first works the artist has made in bronze. The artists sees the works as a series of geometric diagrams of radiant expansions or contractions, inspired by the problems, both philosophical and conceptual, of trying to perceive the implications of the Big Bang.

Slow Arc inside a cube VI, is inspired by the life and work of Dorothy Hodgkin, influenced by a description she used to describe a process she pioneered called *Crystal Radiography* through which she was responsible for discovering the structure of pig insulin, a complex protein chain. She compared this longwinded process of extrapolating this dense protein 'cloud' from reams of chromatographic grids as 'like trying to work out the structure of a tree from purely looking at its shadow'. The work is the last in a series where a small but brilliant halogen light, on the end of an articulated arm, accelerates and decelerates diagonally from one corner of a cube of mesh to its opposite side, the path it draws being a straight line from corner to corner. The piece uses the space as its canvas and is very much about the relationship between the moving point source of light, the cage, which is the only constant, and the changing shadow of this constant projected on to the walls of the space. It is the shadow of a cube, but it is not a silhouette but a shadow from within itself, an inverse shadow of a cube.

Axiom 3 sees a return to a use of wood in Conrad's work. Conceived as an actualised epistemological metaphor, the work takes the tetrahedron, the simplest of the platonic solids, and the ancient Greek symbol of the atom, as its building block which together form a spiralling lurching tower upwards. The modular yet seemingly irrational structure can supposedly continue up and up until it inevitably may collapse under its own weight. Lastly we can see, *Time Rule* (179m) , a unique length of time left over from his epic, critically acclaimed installation, *Chord*, that took place in an abandoned tunnel under London at the end last year. Comprising of 2 identical rope machines that slowly wove a rope down the tunnel as they went, *Time rule* (179m) took 179 minutes for the machine to produce, the structure of the rope treating time as both a line and a cycle; challenging the crutches on which our familiar everyday systems rely.

Born in 1977, Shawcross lives and works in London. He has had solo exhibitions at Jenaer Kunstverein, Germany (2008), The New Art Gallery, Walsall, The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2005), and the National Maritime Museum (2004). His work has also been exhibited internationally at institutions including Musée d'art Contemporain, Lyon (2008), Art Basel | 39 (2008), La Chapelle de L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris (2008), The Saatchi Gallery (2004) and Manifesta 5, San Sebastian, Spain (2004). Shawcross's first public commission *Space Trumpet* installed in the atrium of the refurbished Unilever Building, London in 2007 won the Art & Work 2008 Award for a Work of Art Commissioned for a Specific Site in a Working Environment.

Conrad Shawcross is currently the centenary artist in residence at the National Science museum, London.