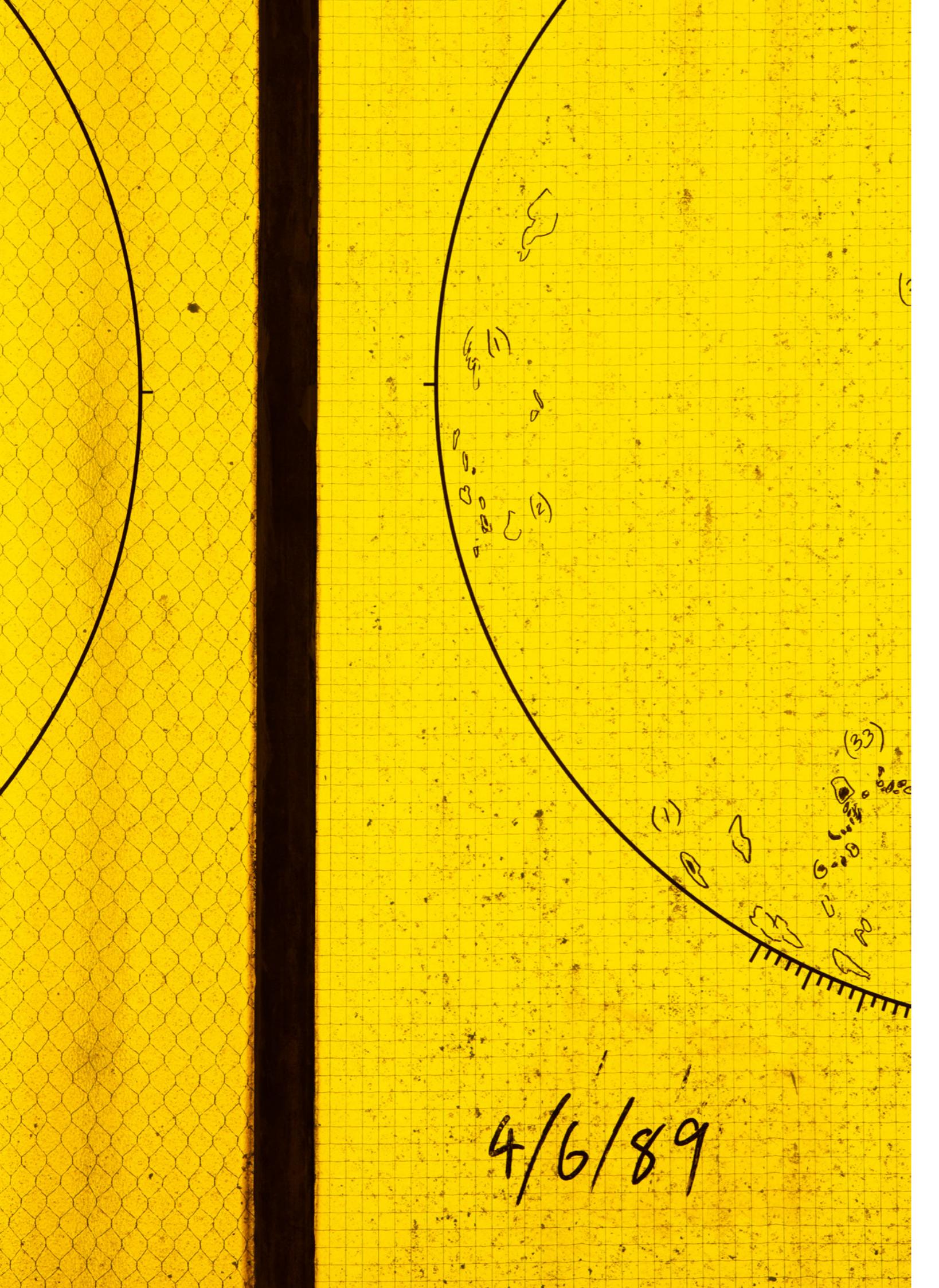


CYCLE 25
Gary Zhexi Zhang

Co-commissioned by
Arts Catalyst & Bloc Projects

June 4 – July 3, 2021



Cycle 25 is a solo exhibition of new works by Gary Zhixi Zhang at Bloc Projects, Sheffield. The exhibition comprises three groups of works relating to Zhang's interest in 'operative fictions' across economics, sovereignty and speculative practices.

The works belonging to *Poyers!* draws on one of the most audacious financial scams of the 19th century, which saw millions of pounds sold in bonds in a fictional Central American nation, Poyais. In the speculative fever leading up to the "Panic of 1825", thousands of British investors and would-be colonists bought into tales of Poyais' immense natural resources, anglophilic "natives", and idyllic tropical landscape – said to be ideally suited to the European temperament. Its legend was furnished with the publication of an extensive guide to Poyaisian flora and fauna (at turns beautiful, likely valuable and delicious), as well as a new fiat currency, the Poyais Dollar. Hundreds of settlers, having swapped their pounds for dollars, sailed for Poyais in 1823. Almost all of them died.

Along with a computer-generated video of Poyais' landscape and a found Poyaisian stock certificate, the artist has reissued the Poyais Dollar, as a Martingale-like scheme. For the duration of the exhibition, visitors can purchase the Poyais Dollar by signing a contract with the artist (drafted by James Ware Stephenson Solicitors). The dollar is an unlimited numbered edition. Each dollar in the series is priced at twice the previous one, and half of each sale is paid out to the previous buyer.*

The *Catastrophe Model* works are an ongoing series invoking socio-politically transformative natural events through artefacts that bore witness to them. Opening the exhibition, *Catastrophe Model, 1755* comprises two nails that survived the Lisbon Earthquake, which occurred on All Saint's Day of that year, which profoundly disrupted the Portuguese empire, overturned the

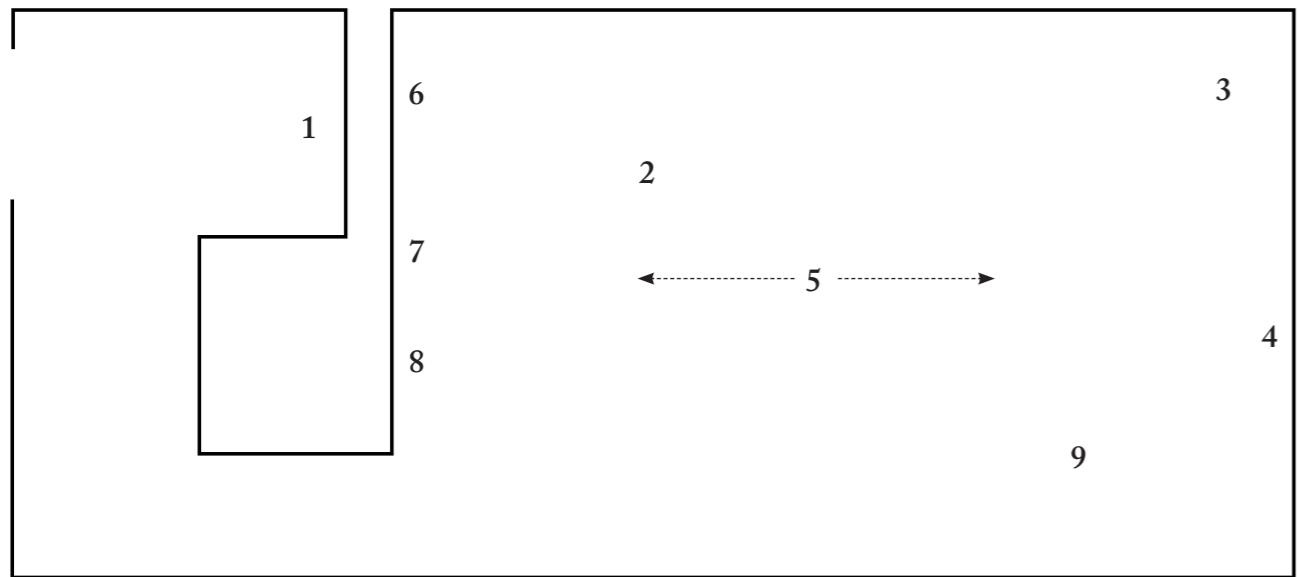
religious and political order of Lisbon and the theodicies of the European Enlightenment. *Catastrophe Model, 1855* references the popular narratives that emerged following the Ansei Great Earthquake in 19th century Tokyo. After the disaster, the catfish deity said to live under the Japanese archipelago became an agent of 'world-rectification' (*yona-oshi*), responsible for the earthquake but also for the redistribution of wealth from the landed class to the merchants and workers who benefitted from the city's reconstruction.

The third group of works, *In the Long Run We Are All Dead* gives the exhibition its title. Cycle 25 is the name of the current solar cycle, a semi-regular temporal series which began, arbitrarily, in 1755. The solar cycles denote the periods of electromagnetic activity on the surface of the sun, causing cooler, darker patches which are observed daily by astronomers as "sunspots".

Originating in an encounter with the Washington DC-based economist Mikhail Gorbanev, the works explore the "beautiful coincidence" first observed by the 19th century British economist William Stanley Jevons, a seminal figure in neoclassical economic theory. Jevons was obsessed by the eerie correlation between the oscillations of solar magnetism and the booms and busts of financial markets. Later, the Russian Cosmist and scientist Alexander Chizhevsky spent much of his career studying the link between sunspots and terrestrial social revolutions. Extending the work of his late predecessors, Gorbanev has found that the "beautiful coincidence" persists, corresponding with the revolutions of the 20th century, as well as many economic recessions and crises up to the present. In *The Long Run*, drawings of sunspot observations taken from globally transformative social upheavals across the 20th and early 21st century cover the skylights extending across the building, filling the gallery with amber light.

*Contact the artist in order to participate in the contract. After payouts, half of the remaining proceeds will be donated to Medical Aid for Palestinians (map-uk.org).

FLOOR PLAN



1) Catastrophe Model, 1755
Two steel nails that survived the Lisbon earthquake of 1755
 2021

2) Poyers! (Fiat)
Two tables, holding reissued Poyais Dollar in a locked security case and a contract of sale, each to be replaced upon a sale
 2021

3) Poyers!
Game engine video, continuous length
 2021

4) Poyers! (3%)
Poyais 3% consolidated stock certificate, 1827
 2021

5) The Long Run
Vinyl overlay and ink sunspot drawings across nineteen skylight windows
 2021

6) Interview with Mikhail Gorbanev
Single-channel video, 34min
 2021

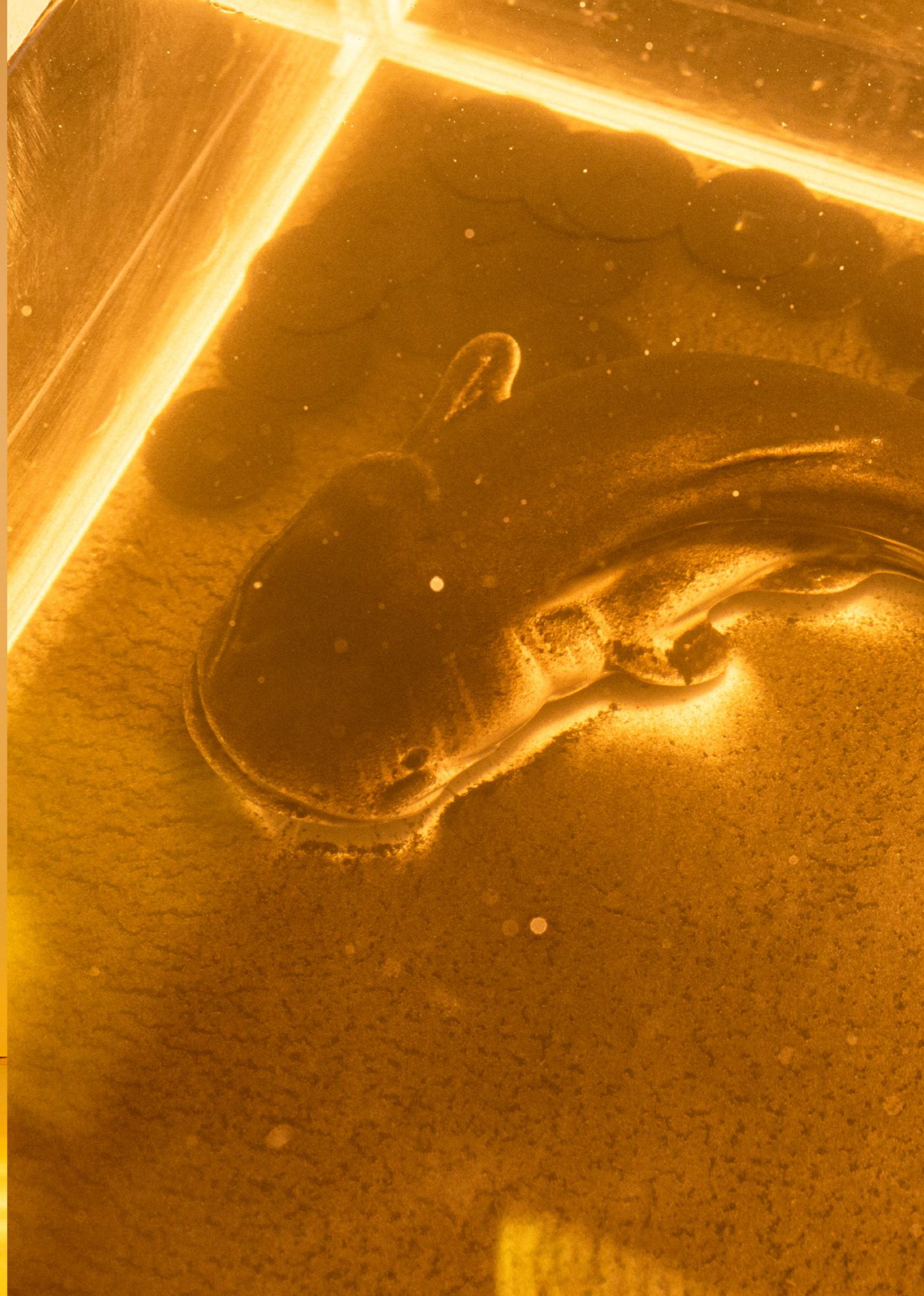
7) ‘The Advent and Demise of Communism in the XX Century’, by Mikhail Gorbanev
Digital print on paper, mounted on wood
 2021

8) ‘Selected Revolutions that overlapped with Solar Maximums’, by Mikhail Gorbanev
Digital print on paper, mounted on wood
 2021

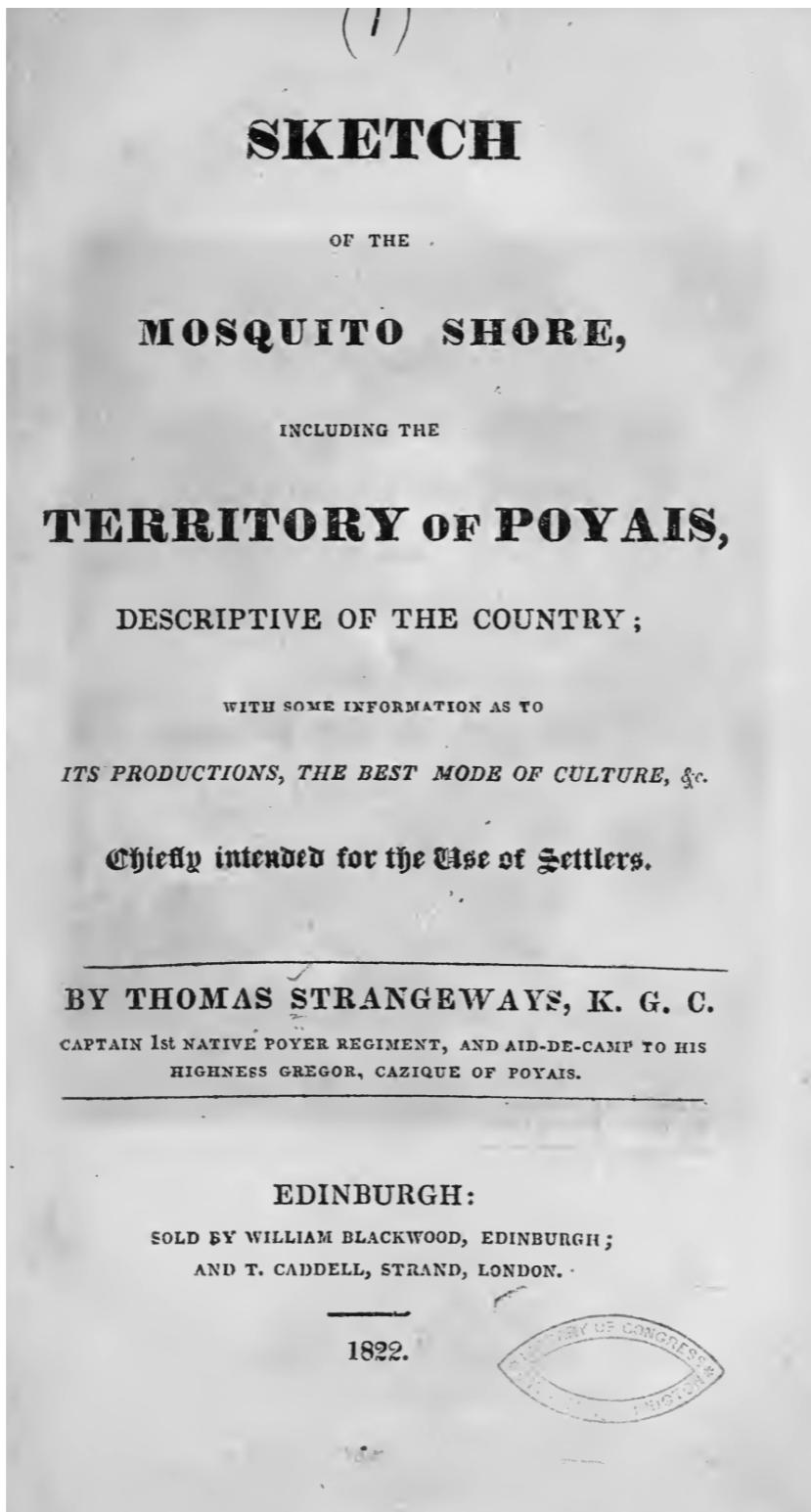
9) Catastrophe Model, 1855
Porcelain catfish and a hundred Edo-era Japanese Mon coins in a locked perspex tank, filled with water and hydrogen and iron sulphides (kala namak), lit by a hanging high-powered sodium bulb



Above, installation view.
 Overleaf, *Catastrophe Model (1855)* and *Poyers! (3%)* behind.



Previous, *Catastrophe Model (1855)*, detail view.
Below, title page of *Sketch of the Mosquito Shore* by Thomas Strangeways



Above, *Poyairs! (Fiat)*, installation and detail view of Poyair's Dollar.

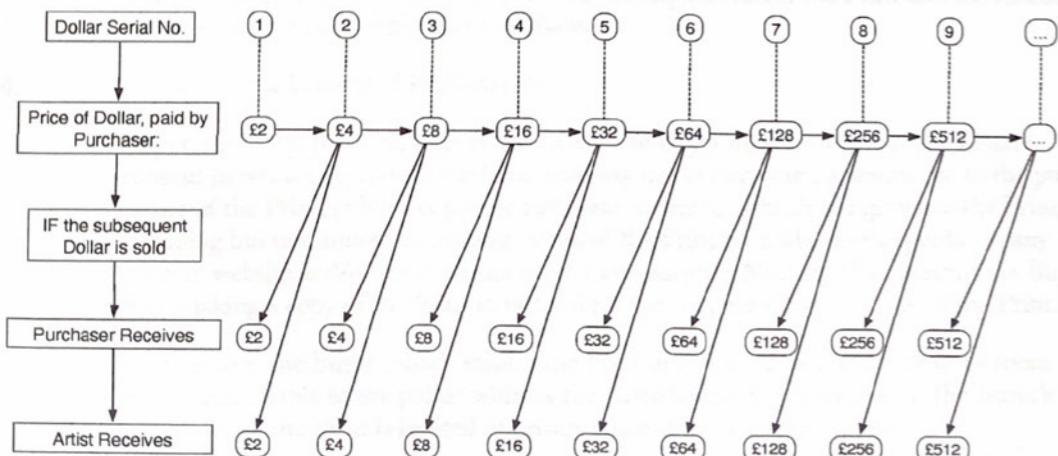
THIS AGREEMENT is made on the [4th] day of [June], 202[/]

BETWEEN:

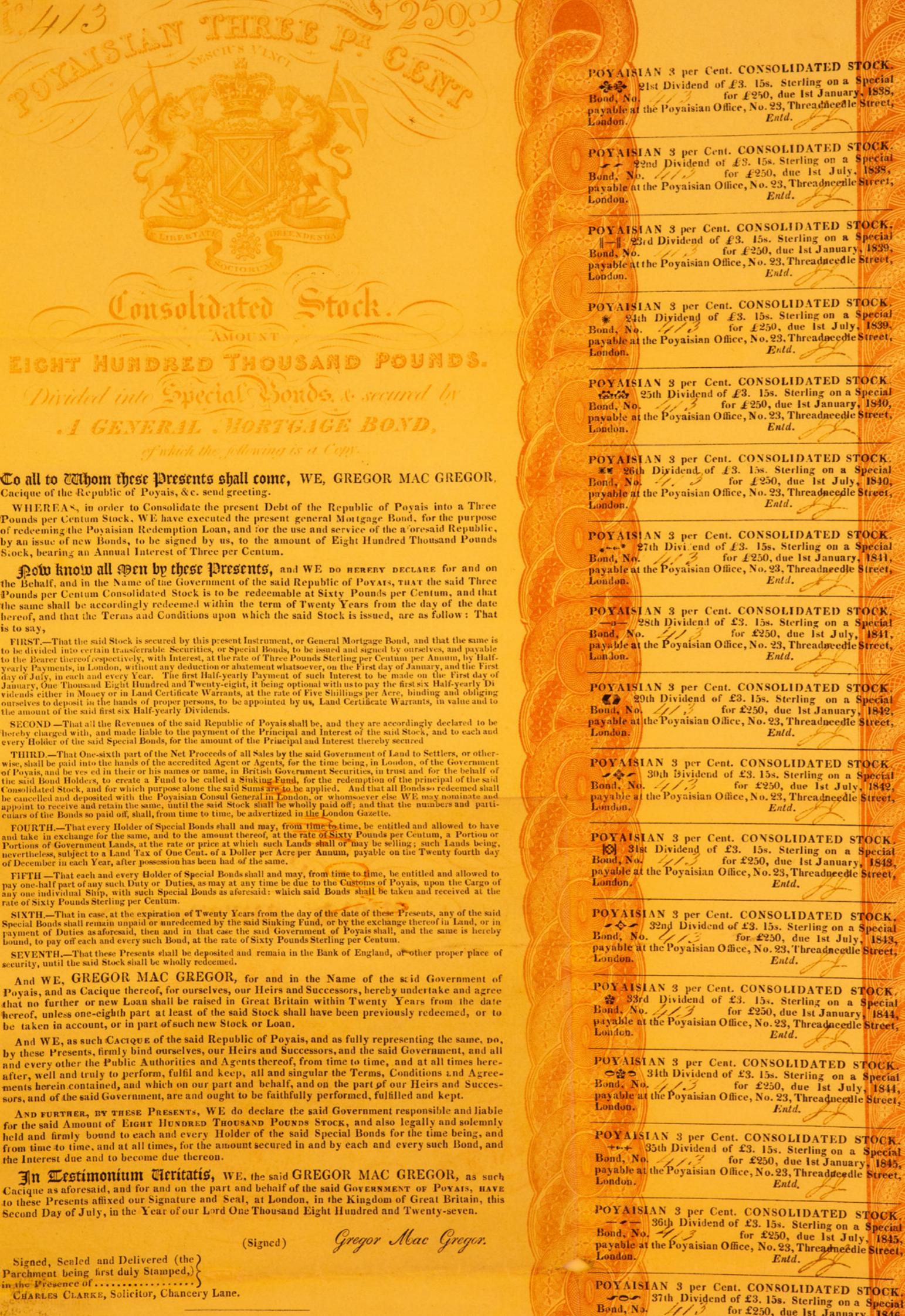
1. GARY ZHEXI ZHANG of [Vault 8, Somerset House Studios, New Wing, Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA] ("the Artist") and
2. [] of [] ("the Buyer")

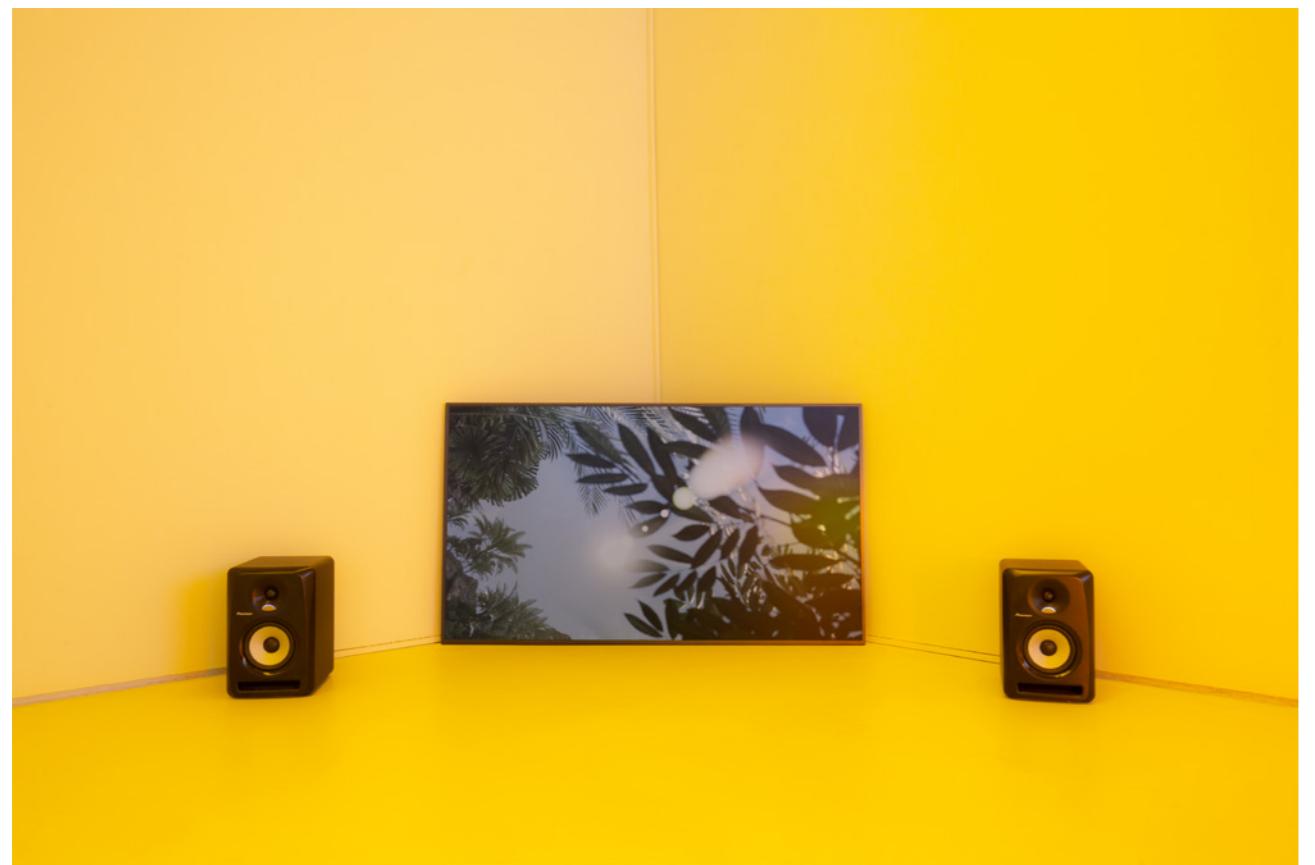
WHEREAS:

- A. The Artist has created an artwork which is a re-issue of a "Poyais Dollar", a currency first minted for the principality of Poyais in the early 19th century.
- B. The "Poyais Dollar" is in the public domain. This photographic reproduction by Godot13 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>). Attribution: National Numismatic Collection, National Museum of American History.
- C. The Artist has produced an unlimited edition of prints based on the artwork each with their own serial number ("the Print or Prints") to be sold at the gallery or online during an exhibition period of "Cycle 25" at Bloc Projects, Sheffield from [4/6/2021] to [3/7/2021] ("the Exhibition Period").
- D. The Artist intends to sell the Prints during the Exhibition Period, and during future public exhibitions of the Prints. The artist will not sell the Prints when they are not on public exhibition.
- E. The price of the first Print is £2 and apart from the buyer of the first Print each buyer of the Print with the immediately following serial number will pay double the price of the previous sale price which will be paid in equal shares to the buyer of the previous Print and the Artist ("the Concept").
- F. By way of illustration only the Concept up to the sale of the tenth print is as diagrammatically shown below:



Poyers! (Fiat), installation view
Overleaf, *Poyers! (3%)*, detail

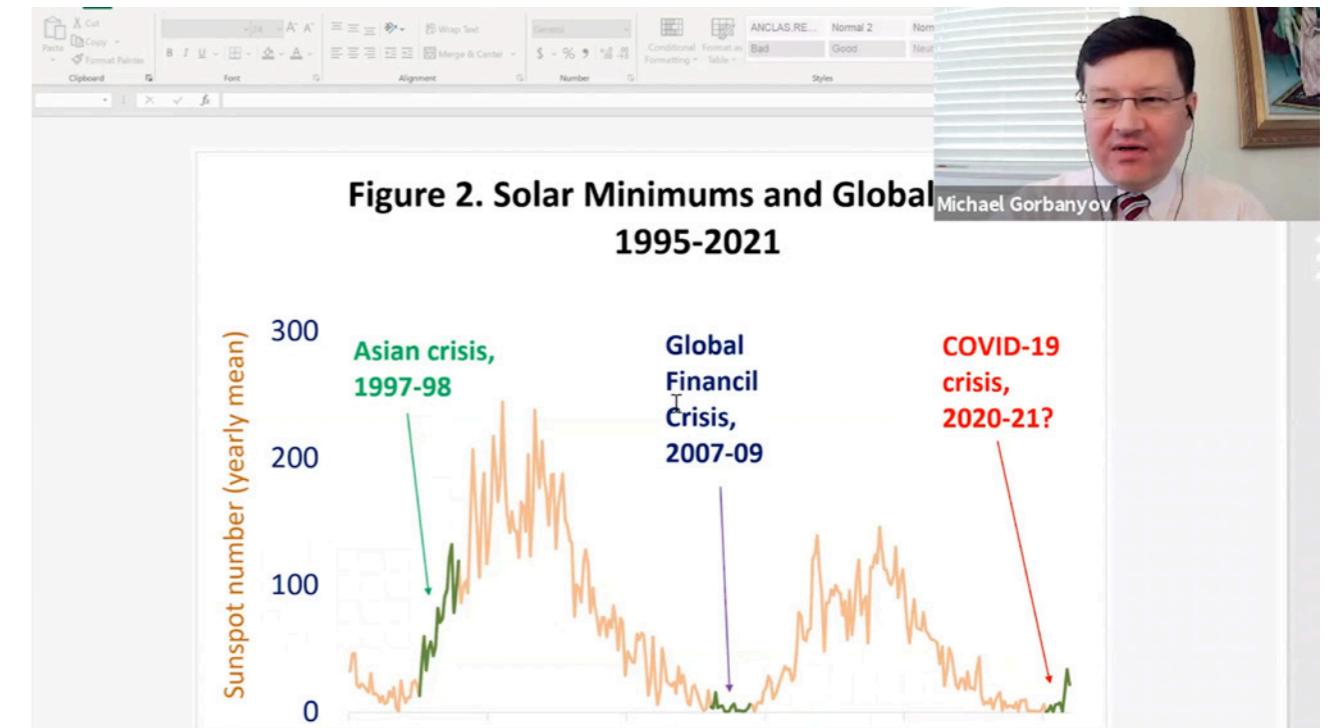
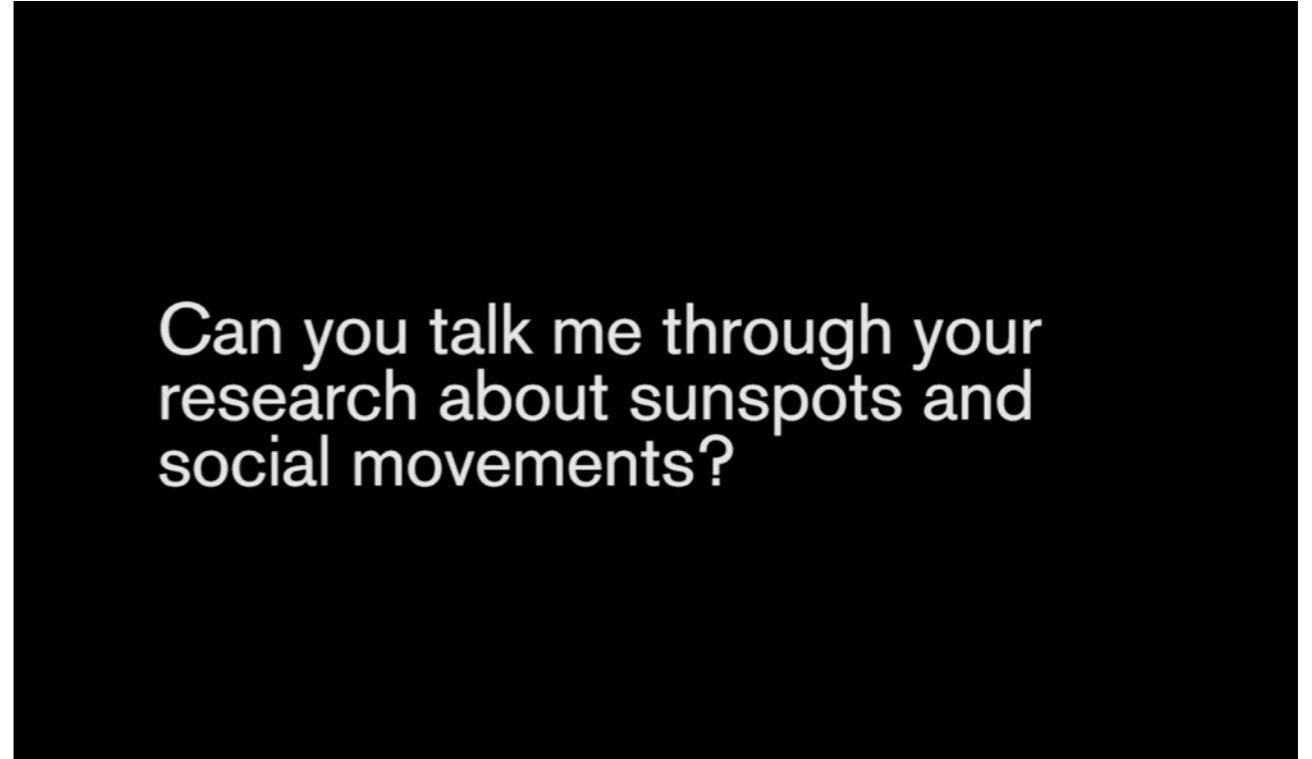




Above, Poyers! (*This Little Colony*)
Overleaf, Poyers! (*This Little Colony*), video still



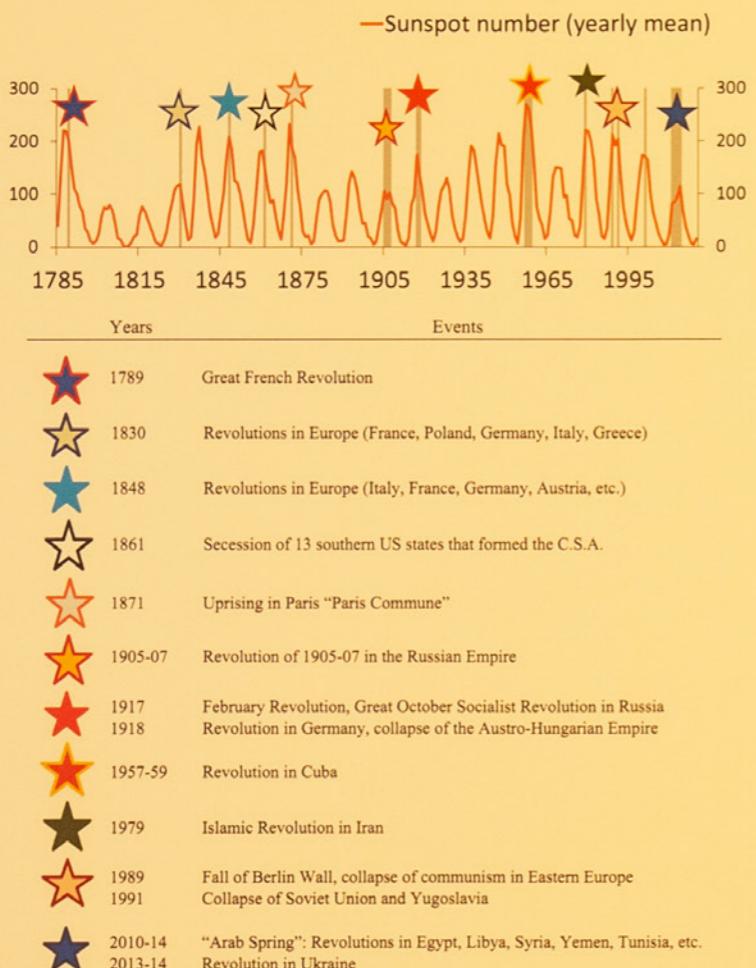




Interview with Mikhail Gorbanev, installation view and video still

Interview with Mikhail Gorbanev, video still
Overleaf, Selected Revolutions that Overlapped with Solar Maximums, 1785–2020

Figure 1. Selected Revolutions that Overlapped with Solar Maximums, 1785-2020



The Long Run, installation view
Overleaf, *The Long Run*, window detail

14/19

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(5)



CREDITS

Curation: Anna Santomauro and Sunshine Wong
Installation Support: David Orme, Fergus Carmichael, Above the Below
Voiceover Work: Iona Campbell
Print Services: K2 Screen, Signs Express, JoiN Frames
Legal Services: James Ware Stephenson Solicitors
Software Support: Agnes Cameron
All photography credits: Fergus Carmichael

SUPPORT

Cycle 25 was co-commissioned by Arts Catalyst and Bloc Projects, and is supported by Arts Council England, the Elephant Trust and the Henry Moore Foundation. The video work, *Poyers! (This Little Colony)* is co-commissioned by Para Site, Hong Kong.

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END