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PALOMAR

PART 1: MAY 2—JUN 7, 2026
PART 2: JUN 10—JUL 12, 2026

Palomar is an exhibition about watching the sky, something that appears deceptively simple at first. Featuring twenty-nine artists, it unfolds in two parts, each five weeks long. Some works remain in place while others come and go, the show becoming an encounter in time, or a double exposure. Gradually, the familiar act of looking up spills over into a sense of life that is more layered and complex, or even contradictory. It turns out there is a lot at stake in the space above us.

Decades ago, after the launch of the first satellite into orbit, humans had big dreams of leaving the Earth. Politicians, poets, and scientists made public comments in this spirit. Today it's mostly billionaires who talk of escape, or of mining the planets out there. The rest of us look to the sky from the ground as life carries on. An earlier age of optimism around space exploration and human progress has given way to successive new eras, as the stars fade from view in our cities, new technologies emerge with unsettling effects, and those in power surveil from above. Through it all, the sky is a steady presence. The sun rises and sets. The moon, too. The stars come out, where you can see them. We organize our lives by these patterns. They infuse our concepts, our sense of time, and our language, even when they're not on our minds.

Part 1 of *Palomar* introduces certain celestial rhythms and cycles, while thinking about astronomy and other forms of observation in everyday life. It also begins to draw out experiences of time, as it is marked, measured, and perceived. Part 2 brings into view changing relationships with technology and the militarization of the skies. Both parts are shadowed by the question of what one sees and what one doesn't, and the roles that images play, often wrapped up with the comforts and discomforts of distance.

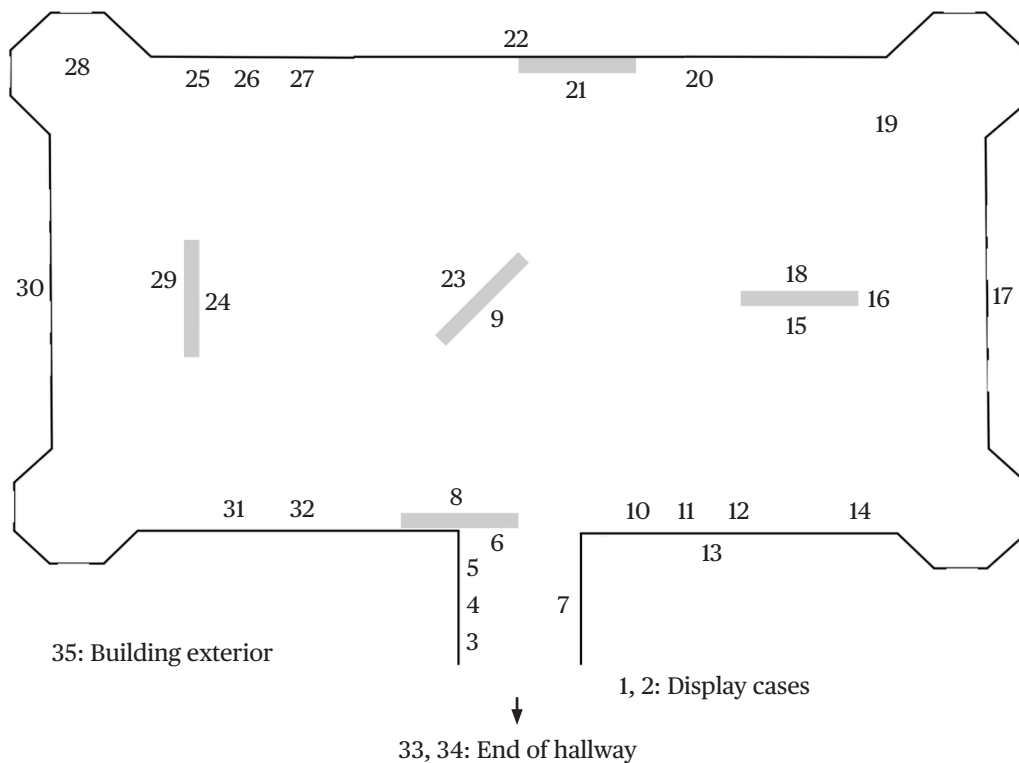
The exhibition borrows its title from the name of an observatory on a California mountaintop, which once had the largest optical telescope in the world. It lost that distinction in 1976, but it is still used to study the stars. In the eighties, Italo Calvino wrote a book about a man who shares his name with that place: *Mr. Palomar*, a seeker of the cosmic in the commonplace and an unflagging, if absentminded, observer. Together, these two touchstones evoke different kinds of observation and attention.

Looking overhead can be a way to understand one's place in the world, as it has been for thousands of years. Given the many ways people watch the sky or look to the cosmos, from scientific study to the habits of daily life, there are just as many different things to think or feel. The movement of the heavenly bodies offers a measure of continuity in the face of destabilizing change; the view above can be a source of solace, a realm of startling beauty, a reminder of something larger than oneself. The sky can also be a dark premonition, a site of violence or grief, a reminder of what there is to lose, or for many what is already gone. Sometimes it's all of this at once.

Curated by Karsten Lund.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

PALOMAR: PART 2



1, 2. Sarah and Joseph Belknap

4 months of the sun, 2024

12 months of the sun, 2024

Archival pigment prints on metallic paper, black paint
Courtesy of the artists

The Solar Dynamic Observatory, a spacecraft launched by NASA in 2010, stares at the sun continuously, capturing high-res images across multiple wavelengths. For over ten years, Sarah and Joseph Belknap have been returning to SDO's image feed online. As they go about their lives, one of them makes a screen shot every time they think of the sun. Their compilations, which merge 4 or 12 months of sunspots, turn public scientific imagery into a highly personal record of time.

3, 4, 5. Vija Celmins

Untitled (Dark Sky 1), 2016

Untitled (Dark Sky 2), 2016

Untitled (Dark Sky 5), 2016

Mezzotints in artist's frames

Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

The night sky has long been a fixture of Vija Celmins' work, rendered in meticulous drawings or prints. Typically she starts with found photographs, rather than direct observation of the stars, a step removed from nature itself. In this series, *Dark Sky*, the printing process allows differing weights of darkness, fading as if the sky itself was growing light.

6. John Opera

The Observer, 2022

Gum bichromate process on stretched canvas
Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago

Certain sky-bound motifs have recurred in John Opera's work, over time, including the sun, as in his cyanotypes in this show. This grows out a deeper consideration of what it means to be an observer, whether using one's own senses or photographic means. Opera's portraits, like this one, are just as telling in this respect. They ask us to quietly observe other observers, to see other seers, and perhaps reconceive ourselves in turn.

7. Shomei Tomatsu

Atomic Bomb Damage: Wristwatch Stopped at 11:02, August 9, 1945, Nagasaki, 1961

Gelatin silver print

The Rachofsky Collection

In this photograph, time stops, just as it did for this watch on August 9, 1945, when an atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki by the United States near the end of World War II. Detonated 500 meters in the air, the explosion destroyed half the city and killed more than 70,000 people in a second. The initial response in America was supportive but underwent a profound reversal with passing years, trailed by the lasting question of whether technological discovery imposes moral responsibilities that require it to be constrained.

8. Paul Fägerskiöld

New York. New York. USA. View east. January 1, 2100, 2022 Oil on linen

Private Collection, NY, Courtesy of Petit Art Partners

Paul Fägerskiöld's paintings see the stars as if gazing up in specific locations many years in the future, in this case New York in the year 2100. He uses a computer program entitled *Starry Night* to do the actual astronomical calculations. The painting that follows from this process achieves its own sensorial presence. With thick shimmering surfaces and the unpainted stars that reveal layers underneath, it is anchored in the here-and-now, even as it envisions what will come.

9. Heji Shin

Enredo, 2024

Archival pigment print

Courtesy of the artist and House of Gaga

Heji Shin's photographs of fireflies, taken in Mexico during their mating season, could almost be the stars brought down to earth. More simply, it is the fireflies' way of calling to each other, an embodied language of light. As John Kelsey writes, "Their luminous conversation lasts for a brief ten minutes following sunset, a prelude to darkness. The average lifespan of a firefly, meanwhile, is two months. It's an intense, delicate, and short-lived transmission, and the photographer slips into this non-human tempo to capture abstract images before night falls and the signaling stops."

10, 11, 12. Tony Lewis

Blur, 2026

Always, 2026

Cog, 2026

Graphite and rubber cement on paper copy

Courtesy of the artist and Olney Gleason, NY

Five new drawings by Tony Lewis (see also **31, 32**), which appear like gestural abstract marks, each feature a single word in stenographic script—shorthand markings that compress the usual time span of writing. While they formally echo the dynamic lines and trajectories of other works in *Palomar*, they also ground the show; each drawing bears the mark of the artist's feet across them on the studio floor, even as Lewis reaches toward realms of human emotion and hints of time through these words, each one simple but expansive.

13. John Opera

Sun/Sky 14, 2014/2026

Cyanotypes on linen

Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago

Four cyanotypes are hung high on each of the gallery's four walls (see also **17, 22, 30**.) Newly produced for this exhibition, they return to a larger series that Opera began in 2011, in which he uses a cardboard telescopic pinhole lens to

take photographs of the sun from his porch. Across his practice, including his other works in this show, he uses custom-built photographic apparatuses and alternative printing processes to cultivate “environments where subject, light, and matter continuously meld and separate.”

14. Darren Almond

Perfect Time (16 x 2), 2011

Thirty-two synchronized digital clocks
Private Collection, Denver, Colorado

For over thirty years, Darren Almond’s work has dealt with our vexed understandings of time, and not least of all the “existentialist mechanics of man-made time,” to quote his 1999 exhibition at the Renaissance Society. The flipping clock faces of *Perfect Time (16x2)* announce every passing minute and hour, but the mechanical march of time, in its even units, becomes scrambled.

15. Jordan Kantor

Untitled (Challenger), 2007

Oil on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

In 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded soon after launch. Broadcast on live TV, including in classrooms, millions of people watched the death of the crew –later called a “loss of innocence” for NASA, the federal space agency. Jordan Kantor’s paintings, like this one, begin from images pulled from media sources, where representations of important events can lead to the feeling that they’re culturally shared. The artist is just as interested, however, in the way photographs can disclose information while remaining mysterious and obscure, or how something slips into abstraction.

16. Cynthia Daignault

Midnight Sun, 2026

Oil on linen
Courtesy of the artist and Olney Gleason, New York

Cynthia Daignault’s paintings linger where the natural world meets forms of mediation. They depict not just a landscape but also how it’s perceived through mechanical acts of seeing, whether digital photography, social media, or in

this case an obsolete technology like slide film, the trace of a past era. Her paintings become renditions of time as well. Here, the sky itself tells a story. In some places, under the midnight sun, night waits forever to fall.

17. John Opera

Sun/Sky II, 2014/2026

Cyanotypes on linen
Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago
See **13.** for details.

18. Alec Soth

Near Kaaterskill Falls, New York, 2012

Pigment print
Courtesy of the artist

The photographs in Alec Soth’s series *Songbook* are about contemporary life in America. They also evoke what the artist sees as “longing for a time that has passed,” with outcomes that can feel sometimes surreal. His large-format, black-and-white images call to mind old press photographs as a strong flash fixes his subjects in place. In this particular shot, the camera’s ability to freeze a moment in time becomes a way of destabilizing or rewriting the power of gravity. The figure could be rising to the sky or falling to Earth.

19. Kathleen Ryan

Satellite in Repose, 2018

Glazed ceramic, aluminum, steel
Courtesy of Collection Majudia

Previously shown in a solo show she called *Seven Sculptures at Sunset*, Kathleen Ryan’s skeletal satellite dish is occupied by a group of huddled birds, perhaps asleep. But the title suggests it is also the satellite that has come to rest. Each of the rough-hewn glazed ceramic forms bears the imprint of the artist’s hand, while the color spilling across them suggests more falling night more than avian feathers.

20. Trevor Paglen

CLOUD #865 Hough Circle Transform, 2019

Dye sublimation print

Collection of Nathan Laurell

In *CLOUD #865*, and others in this series, Trevor Paglen studies how clouds look through various computer vision algorithms. These systems are found in technologies such as self-driving cars, autonomous surveillance systems, and guided missiles and drones. The overlaid strokes depict what the algorithm is “seeing” in the image. Paglen gently suggests that humans may not be so different: we have our own ways of seeing these same subjects, ranging from the taxonomies that characterize different kinds of clouds to the tendency to imagine their shapes as faces or animals.

21. Heji Shin

Amor Eterno, 2024

Archival pigment print

Courtesy of the artist and House of Gaga

See **9.** for details.

22. John Opera

Sun/Sky 09, 2014/2026

Cyanotypes on linen

Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago

See **13.** for details.

23. Samira Yamin

All the Skies Over Syria, 2018-2021

All the skies from all the photographs of Syria/Syrians in

TIME magazine from March 2011-December 2019

Courtesy of the artist and Patron, Chicago

Samira Yamin’s *All the Skies Over Syria* transforms imagery from *TIME* magazine into a mosaic-like view of an ephemeral sky. As the title of the work suggests, the small hand-cut pieces are from the skies of every photograph of Syria that appeared in the magazine between 2011, when civil war began, and 2019. She notes that the non-archival paper and ink of the popular magazine will slowly turn blue as years go by and with exposure to sunlight. Yamin says, “I don’t want to preserve an image of war. I want it to be of its time.”

24. Trevor Paglen

Untitled (Reaper Drone), 2010

Chromogenic print

Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman San Francisco

Since the 1990s, Trevor Paglen has sought out the hidden sites of American surveillance, an artist working like an investigative journalist might. This includes photographing isolated military bases in Nevada and Utah from miles away with a telephoto lens. In his photos of the desert skies above, drones appear as small black specks at most. In this one, a Reaper drone, designed for reconnaissance and military strikes, might easily go unnoticed amid the vivid colors and the sublime expanse of the Western sky.

25, 26, 27. Sebastian Jefford

Clock Test (age unknown 3), 2022

Clock Test (age unknown 2), 2022

Clock Test (65 Years old), 2022

Polyurethane foam, acrylic, wool

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Opdahl, Stavanger, Norway

Sebastian Jefford’s *Clock Tests* show the results of diagnostic tests used to detect or observe dementia in people of different ages. The patient is asked to draw a clock at a particular time in a blank circle. Jefford says “I’m always drawn to materials that wear time on their sleeve” and “to this idea of cycles within cycles.” The *Clock Tests* are made of polyurethane foam, manufactured from crude oil, a material with its own ties to air quality and rising mental health risks as carbon emissions grow.

28. Erin Shirreff

Moon, 2010

Color SD video, silent, 32 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins

This video appears to observe the moon under changing conditions, a slow-moving timelapse. In fact, it records a single photograph as its illuminated from various angles, a still image placed in variable lighting contexts. The artist

notes, “Most of the human population only ever sees the moon from the vantage point of it being an image in the sky.”

29. Torbjørn Rødland

Wordless No. 3, 2010-17

Chromogenic print

Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery

It’s hard to know exactly what’s happening in any of Torbjørn Rødland’s photographs, an artist who has mastered the making of images that feel true to life’s emotions while remaining complex and uncertain—a story hovering but not quite told. This photograph is from a series of five, all titled *Wordless*, that show a younger person’s head held by a pair of older hands. In this moment between two generations, there is the past and the present and the future.

30. John Opera

Sun/Sky 08, 2014/2026

Cyanotypes on linen

Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago

See **13.** for details.

31, 32. Tony Lewis

Unasked, 2026

Attachment, 2026

Graphite and rubber cement on paper copy

Courtesy of the artist and Olney Gleason, NY

See **10.** for details.

33. Eadweard Muybridge

Animal Locomotion-Plate 755, 1887

Inkjet print from scan of archival negative

Public domain

Muybridge’s pioneering studies of animal location, made between 1884 and 1885, use a “chronophotographic” technique to break down movement into a sequence of discrete moments. Turning fluid time into observable, regimented fragments, his practice was also an important precursor to cinema. Among the different species he photographed, were pigeons.

34. Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Air Conditioning, 2022

Inkjet prints mounted on ultraboard

Courtesy of the artist

Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s work is guided by research and the analysis of sound as evidence. *Air Conditioning* is a monumental work that draws on open-source data from the United Nations Digital Library. It maps out all instances of the violation of Lebanese airspace by Israeli military aircrafts over a fifteen-year period, from 2007 to 2021, following a United Nations Security Council Resolution at the end of the 2006 war between the two countries. Each panel visualizes one year of data, with different cloud layers representing different vehicles—drones, unmanned aerial vehicles, and fighter jets—and the height representing the frequency. Three out of fifteen panels are shown here, covering the last three years of the project: 2019, 2020, and 2021.

35. Sarah and Joseph Belknap

Solargraphy camera

Courtesy of the artists

The process of solargraphy uses a long photographic exposure to make an image of the sun as it moves across the sky, capturing both its daily rise and set and its shifting trajectory across the seasons. For *Palomar*, Sarah and Joseph Belknap have installed a handmade pinhole solargraphy camera—made from a metal tea box and a precisely designed aluminum armature—on the outside of the building. (It’s just barely visible from the window in the gallery’s southwest corner.) It will stay there for the next year, making a single image.

Office

John Opera, *Sun/Sky 13*, 2014/2026

Courtesy of the artist and DOCUMENT, Chicago

Gibeon Meteorite (4.5 billion years old)

Private Collection, New York, Courtesy of Pettit Art Partners

POSTER

Myriam Boulos

Beirut, Lebanon. 2 July 2020

© Myriam Boulos | Magnum Photos

The photograph by Myriam Boulos on the front of the exhibition poster is a trace of the artist looking up in a particular place and time. Boulos is a member of the international photographers' collective Magnum Photos. She took the photo in the summer of 2020, as Lebanon was facing economic and political collapse, and state power utilities supplied electricity for as little as a few hours a day. Both protests and pandemic lockdowns were ongoing. The photo echoes the iconic "Blue Marble" image of the Earth in the black void of space, but in reverse. It is not an astronaut's view; instead, we see the moon above in a field of stars, like Boulos saw it then.

ONLINE VIDEOS

Viewable online through July 12 at

<https://renaissancesociety.org/publishing/955/palomar-online-videos/>

Allora & Calzadilla (in collaboration with Ted Chiang)

The Great Silence, 2014

HD video

16 min 22 sec

Chantal Peñalosa Fong

The Weather Watchers, 2021

HD video

25 min

Simon Starling

Black Drop, 2012

35 mm transferred to HD video

27 min 42 sec

Alice Wang

Space Analogs, Pyramids and Parabolas III, 2024

16mm transferred to HD video

16 min 51 sec

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