

After the Sun

Resistance Tales, Otherworldly Commoning Futures, and Reimagined Myths

“Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars.”
Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 1986

For the past five years, Rebeca Romero’s practice has been devoted to creating speculative artefacts that combine Indigenous American technologies and iconography with new fabrication techniques, including AI, 3D printing, 3D scanning, animation, laser cutting and UV printing. By removing and disavowing artefacts from the confines of history and museums and rekindling them in fiction, Rebeca manipulates them to create new possible futures. Her works construct a visual and narrative otherworldly site, future remnants of a revolutionary civilisation. This mythic culture adorned itself, played music, gathered food, and navigated the earth while practising a society centred on care and communication with plants and stars. Rebeca’s work transforms us into hybrids of storytellers, archaeologists, and astronomers. Through speculation, we piece together the narratives of the community that once used these tools and ornaments.

Rebeca’s drive to reveal the faces of this lost community—an integral part of the epic mythology she has been constructing—continues in this exhibition. Here the face of a hero is unearthed, and we finally discover who played and used these artefacts, who produced them, and to what ends their technology served the needs and vision of this society. History has often promoted a single, linear version of events, erasing the faces of heroes who no longer contribute to a narrative preferred by the victors—colonisers, those who have been licensed to write and immortalise these stories as official knowledge. By presenting a tangible reconstruction, *After the Sun* invites us to reconsider how history is told, whose stories have been silenced, and which stories we want to reclaim and hear anew.

To construct the myth of *After the Sun*, Rebeca draws on Professor Irene Silverblatt’s research on Andean women who refused colonial evangelisation and were derogatively labelled witches by Spanish clergymen. These women escaped to the highlands, creating an ideology of their own and crafting a method of resistance to defend their culture and their *own* theory and stories of the universe’s origin. Rebeca asks: what if these women who gathered and established a new matriarchal society had succeeded? What if these women reclaimed back the identity of witches and crafted a forward-thinking and magical community?

Rebeca introduces us to the *Sower*, a feminised entity depicted playing *Kawra*, a horn inspired by zoomorphic trumpets from the Mochica civilisation of what is now Northern

Peru. She emerges as a heroic figure who challenges the passing of time in the shape of a reconstructed wall relief. Seen against the high reliefs and sculptures in museums that no longer possess an identifiable face—sometimes lacking a nose, a mouth, or even a complete head—this exhibition challenges the loss of identity in historical narratives. The *Sower* is a high priestess named after her craft. She studies the stars and the earth to determine the best crop seasons, crafting rituals to foster a relationship of care and communication between earthly beings and the celestial. Whilst this fictional narrative and matriarchal society live within their *own* specific temporality, points of convergence emerge, evident in the *Sower's* materiality, where the technological past is embedded in clay, whilst an alternate future is reflected in the shiny PLA. The beheaded hero refuses to be forgotten, holding on to any possibility of reproduction and reconstruction.

In *After the Sun*, myth-making is intimately associated with the observation of stars, particularly the Seven Sisters, an open star cluster that features in numerous myths about the sky, the winter solstice, and the delimitation of agricultural eras. One of the pieces in the exhibition, *Gathering*, consists of seven mirrored stainless-steel stars connected by clay spindle whorls, resembling the arrangement of rosary beads used in Catholic traditions to count prayers. In this piece, the Seven Sisters, once turned into stars by Zeus to escape the pursuit of the hunter Orion, are reunited once again, actively offering new ways for this matriarchal society to navigate and sustain a flourishing relationship with the earth and the skies.

In referencing this myth, where women escape a hunter, Rebeca alludes to Ursula K. Le Guin's redefinition of technology in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. In this essay, Le Guin hacks and challenges the linear, progressive understanding of human evolution and, instead of positioning the weapon, sword, stick, and other killing tools as the zenith of history, introduces the container—the trustworthy bag, the home setting, the shrine holding the sacred, the sky holding the stars—as the greatest invention.

The work symbolises the women who gathered and fled to the highlands as an act of defiance against colonisation. Acting as a form of cartography, *Gathering* encourages us to identify uncertain lands for diverse experiences, knowledge systems, affects, and beliefs that can better inform the world we strive to create. *Gathering* and the *Sower* assert that these women are the heroes of our time. By intertwining weaving with astronomy and faith, Rebeca reintroduces weaving and astronomy as portals for rethinking our understanding of time, thereby creating new temporalities and possibilities for worship.

The exhibition features musical technologies from this future-past matriarchal society. *Katari*, *Kawra*, and *Uturunku*—horns used for communication rituals—amplify sound and signal the sowing season. The *Sower* is seen playing her beloved and trusted *Kawra*, asserting her voice against historical erasure. Also on display is *Journey*, an ensemble of four heraldic flags that honour plants and roots through durable and highly technical materials like ripstop and reflective fabrics.

Rebeca describes her work as ‘future-past’, existing in a constellation of tenses that reshape our experience of time. Embracing a circular, non-linear process, she fuses ancient knowledge with cutting-edge technology, weaving past, present, and future together: past in the original technique, present in its digital reinvention, and future in its power to inspire new myths. As we interpret these narratives, a threshold towards collective meaning-making, or commoning, emerges. The bonds of solidarity formed through the shared act of storytelling are just as significant as the story itself.

After the Sun insists that a new world remains to be built. It urges us to imagine and construct a different world, one where magic shapes our future. Now, more than ever, in a context where utopia has been co-opted by the linear narrative of capitalism, extractivism, and colonial culture-making processes, exercising our imagination and creative forces through storytelling and world-building becomes urgent, if not vital. This exhibition offers a counternarrative, tapping into a heartfelt collective urgency for science fiction novels of resistance strategies, of alternative ways to live and embrace life. While the *Sower* is the heroine of this matriarchal society, the true hero of this exhibition is the license to create these alternate futures. As Le Guin once said, the hero is the story itself, created when we make sense of the contents of *After the Sun*.

By reclaiming a lost past, Rebeca reveals how artistic creation can act as a portal, bridging history and speculation. Her work challenges the role of creativity in the present. Through the figure of the *Sower*, a highly skilled producer of affect, rituals, and storytelling, Rebeca questions the purpose of making art today and asserts her commitment to life-affirming creative practices. She calls us to rethink and re-establish our true relationship with the universe by crafting fictions, speculative storytelling devices, and new myths. *After the Sun* reminds us that there are still many stories to be told, seeds to be gathered, and songs to be sung. The eternal search does not end here—it begins anew.

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