

## Solar Equation

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By Stephanie Lam

One installation of the Lumiere festival that attracted a lot of attention from students was the 'Solar Equation', a model of the sun hung directly above the Science Site. Initially unlit on Thursday night due to high wind speeds, the white globe was transformed into a captivating sight when lit by projectors on Friday.

Created by the electronic artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, the piece was originally commissioned for the Federation Square in Melbourne. Its original site was somewhat similar to the University Science Site; the Solar Equation was hung above the square with metal riggings and poles in an empty space between a circle of buildings.

Despite being set in an open space, the Solar Equation was an installation that offered an impressively immersive experience. From far away, viewers could not hear the sound effects of the piece, but the model of the sun still shone brightly against the dark backdrop of the evening and was a fascinating sight.

Seen in the late afternoon, the real sunset also gave the installation an extra layer of romance. The colours of the globe blended with the sky to form a beautiful but slightly surreal sight. Streaks of red running across the blue sky formed the backdrop of the installation, and it was almost as if the Solar Equation was causing the sunset.

The surface of sphere was lit by ten surrounding projectors, with constantly shifting colours and patterns; blood red backgrounds with spontaneous orange flares transitioned into a startling, pale yellow background dotted with dark grey spots.

Up close, varying sound complimented the changing hues of the installation. Ominous rumblings and roarings filled the viewers' ears as if invoking the flowing of thick liquid.

What viewers may not have known is that the changing displays on the globe were not randomly created. Solar observatory imaging technology from NASA and live mathematical equations were used in an attempt to accurately bring the live conditions on the sun itself to viewers at Durham.

The installation clearly made an impression on students as they emerged from their lectures at the Science Site. There were audible gasps and open-mouthed wonderment, before smartphones were produced to capture this weird and wonderful sight.

For some viewers, this piece of work raises the serious issue of the need to harness solar energy. At the very least, the Solar Equation formed a charming sight and a reminder of the beauty of nature.

*Photograph: Stephanie Lam*