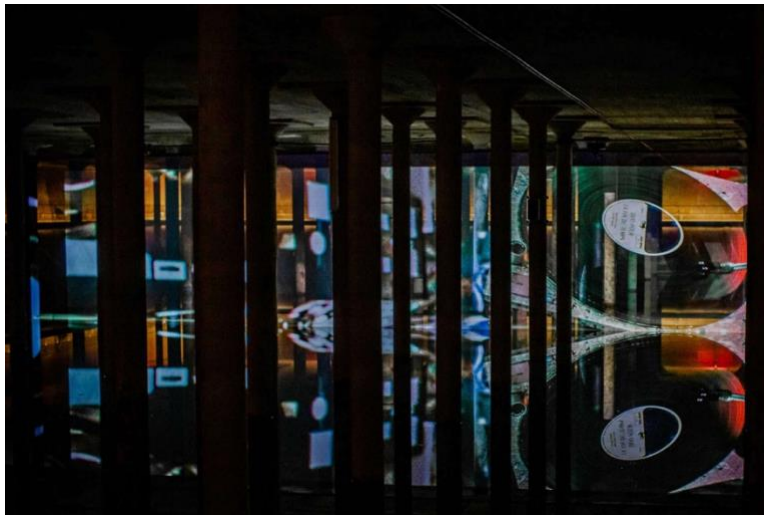


## *Cistern continues being underground cool as it hosts immersive art*

by Andrew Dansby (March 11, 2021)



Immersive new film and sound installation, titled *Time No Longer*, will occupy the Cistern for a period of nine months, Wednesday, March 10, 2021, in Houston. The work is by acclaimed multimedia artist Anri Sala and it incorporates sound and a film projected onto a massive translucent screen. (Marie D. De Jesús, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

Anri Sala circles the perimeter of the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern, surrounded by the space's concrete and the light and sound from his art piece "Time No Longer."

"There are moments when the piece gets darker," he says. "Like now."

Just like that, the space goes nearly pitch black as if Sala had flipped a switch. He's spent a couple of years on "Time No Longer," so the Albanian artist knows every element of the 30-minute audio-and-video piece down to an instant.

"Time No Longer" exudes grandness with its scale and thematic scope. Sala created a film in which a CGI-generated turntable floats in an abandoned space station, its rotations cycling through sunrises and sunsets. His canvas is something to behold: a piece of holographic gauze 22 feet high and 122 feet long — believed to be the largest piece ever woven. His visual is braided together with a haunting new arrangement of "Quartet for the End of Time," composed by Olivier Messiaen 80 years ago.

Though conceived before a global pandemic, "Time No Longer" nevertheless feels rooted in our present. It touches on ideas and feelings prevalent over the past year, namely solitude, connection and time.



(Left to right) Olivier Goinard, sound designer, Anri Sala, artist and Patrick Ghiringhelli, lighting designer, at the entrance of the Buffalo Bayou Cistern, Wednesday, March 10, 2021, in Houston. Sala is touring his new "Time No Longer," a film and sound installation that will be featured inside the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern for the next nine months. (Marie D. De Jesús, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

Curator Lea Weingarten first saw Sala's work at the Venice Biennale. "With his knowledge of architecture and history," she says, "he was perfect for this space."

So the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern commissioned Sala to fill its evocative space with his installation that opened to the public Friday.

Sala's piece certainly makes the most of the totality of the Cistern. When one walks along the sides, the colors have a little more pop. On the back side of the screen, the water along the bottom becomes more visible and reflective. Across 360 degrees, "Time No Longer" prompts experiential variety.

"From the front, it's more of a portrait," Sala says. "But if you walk around this side, it's more abstract. And on the back side, it's more anatomical; you can see its insides."

"This work speaks to space," Sala says.

The statement sounds like it could mean multiple things, and that's by design. Sala made one visit to Houston to scout the Cistern and was instantly enamored with the possibilities it offered. He also considered space beyond the space.

Earlier in the week, he and his award-winning sound designer, Olivier Goinard, and his lighting designer, Patrick Ghiringhelli, dined at a Mexican restaurant in Houston. They were startled at how many patrons were there. Much of their work on the project was done in Berlin, where the pandemic lockdown is more restrictive.

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When Sala considered the project, he was struck by a sense of unflagging expansion in both Houston and Texas.

“Working for this space, you think about exploration of the horizon, the pioneers going west,” he says. “There’s the downward drilling for oil. And then space exploration with NASA. That is in tandem for me with the Cistern in relation to space, being underground.”

The NASA connection is most obvious in Sala’s choice to set his subject, the turntable, in the space station. But the arrangement he conceived for Messiaen’s piece, too, had another Houston connection. Messiaen composed the piece as a quartet for violin, cello, clarinet and piano. The music was written specifically for Messiaen to perform with fellow prisoners of war in Stalag VIII-A in Germany (more on this in a moment). For “*Time No Longer*,” the piece has been modified into about 13 minutes that runs twice during a 30-minute tour. The instrumentation has also been rearranged for clarinet and saxophone.

The latter change is a subtle nod to astronaut Ron McNair, the physicist, astronaut and musician who died in the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986. McNair was to have made the first music recording in space on that mission, which was going to be incorporated into a new piece of music by French star Jean-Michel Jarre.

In 1988, Jarre performed a landmark concert — “*Rendez-Vous Houston*” — downtown. His performance included a tribute to McNair. The show drew a reported 1.3 million people, many of whom staked out a space along Buffalo Bayou, where the Cistern is.

“I was intrigued by that,” Sala says. “The idea of, What is a sound intention? An action that won’t happen.”

All of these thoughts, histories and contexts rotated through Sala’s mind like a record. “*Time No Longer*” became the stylus, moving across them to tell a story.

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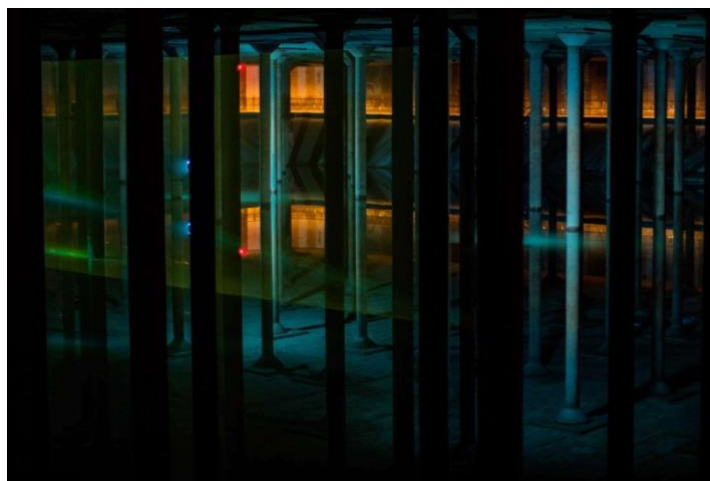
(Left to right) Olivier Goinard, sound designer, Anri Sala, artist and Patrick Ghiringhelli, lighting designer, at the entrance of the Buffalo Bayou Cistern, Wednesday, March 10, 2021, in Houston. Sala is touring his new "Time No Longer," a film and sound installation that will be featured inside the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern for the next nine months. (Marie D. De Jesús, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

Sitting outside the Cistern, Sala gestures to show the spin of his turntable. His right hand sports a large ring: a skull wrapped up in two nonskeletal hands.

Sala's choice of a turntable offered a vehicle compatible with the sonic component of "Time No Longer." But he also found the turntable metaphorically rich: The rotations of its platter are perfect, but the tone arm goes about the bumpier business of moving along the contours of a record's groove, with little interruptions when the stylus loses contact with the record.

"These changes reflect the way we perceive time," he says.

With his chosen visual, Sala finds both the repetitive passing of days as we measure them and also the aberrations that arise within each day.



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The music itself certainly possesses jarring moments, befitting the circumstances of its creation. Not only did Messiaen — who was drafted into the French army and captured by German forces in 1940 — write it while in a stalag, “Quartet for the End of Time” had its world premiere in a prisoner-of-war camp.

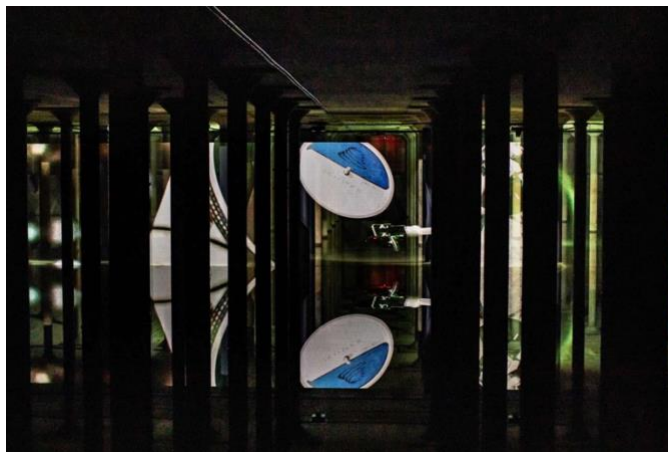


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Sala’s choice to rearrange the music was part of the overall thematic design. He wanted a pair of woodwinds because “they create that feeling of solitude, loneliness, breath,” he says. “Their sound comes from breath.”

The clarinet and the saxophone never harmonize because Sala didn’t want a “classical duet.” He describes the two sources of sound instead as embedded with each other.

“These two instruments are together, yet they never become one,” he says. “It’s not about fighting solitude. But rather within that solitude trying to create a sense of empathy.”



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