

Rose Salane

Fission or, Eclipse

INTRODUCTION

Rose Salane uses seemingly mundane objects to explicate systems of evaluation, exchange, and organization that shape daily life. In her practice she studies how an object or group of objects can narrate lived experience through the forces that have granted their preservation. Selecting collected and discarded objects from archives, both institutional and personal, Salane imbues the objects with a greater narrative, one that materializes ways of understanding social memory and urban settings. She acknowledges these charged items in connection to the residue of history they leave behind, placing them alongside one another to “reveal truths within previous circumstances and time periods, examining how the object and their beholders endured.”¹

For her exhibition at the Athenaeum gallery in Athens, Georgia, on view through November 23, Salane presents collected items of disparate origin from personal and bureaucratic archives—the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia, the Atlanta History Center, and the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services—to further understand cycles of power through an object’s recovery and storage. The works in this exhibition, derived from objects held within the respective archives, consider our relationship to time and phenomena, offering an oblique view of tumultuous historical and technological shifts: a series of diary entries describing an eclipse during the last year of the Civil War; a 1947 solicitation letter from Albert Einstein to academic institutions asking for the contribution of funding toward nuclear fission and atomic energy research; New York City traffic light lenses decommissioned once replaced by LED signals.

1. Jamillah James and Margot Norton, eds, “Rose Salane & Dora Budor” in *Soft Water, Hard Stone* (New Museum, New York, and Phaidon Press Limited, 2021), 327.

Each work in the exhibition corresponds to a human relationship with light. Salane's research at UGA's Hargrett library and the Atlanta History Center led her to intimate diary entries describing an annular solar eclipse seen in Georgia during the last year of the Civil War on October 19, 1865. That date became an index for recovering a variety of perspectives in diaries kept by a farmer, a soldier, a woman, and a child, each describing the phenomenon of the eclipse that took place within a time of critical socio-political turmoil in the United States. Four photogravures, a process that etches the image of a photograph into a copper plate by using light and chemicals, depict various entries of the eclipse itself and the memories of those who witnessed it. Toward the back of the gallery, photograms of intersecting traffic light lenses, abstracted in their view, playfully suggest the passing of the moon across the sun as seen from Earth. The photogram, a cameraless process, creates an image by exposing an object to light while placed against light-sensitive paper. Here the semi-transparent traffic lenses are illuminated and reappear through a photograph. Paired with the diary entries, they prompt the viewer to imagine the sky in 1865, a reminder of planetary phenomena through a charged moment when citizens of Georgia paused to observe a force larger than human upheaval.

Such intervals in time, power, and phenomena appear in a more bureaucratic way with a found 1947 donor solicitation letter written by Albert Einstein, on behalf of the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists. Salane came across this letter by accident within the Hargrett archives. In 1946, a year after the U.S. detonated two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Einstein, along with other atomic scientists, formed the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists. Their mission was to bring transparency and information to the public about the findings of atomic energy and its implications for society. In the letter, Einstein wrote, "through the release of atomic energy, our generation has brought into the world the most revolutionary force since prehistoric man's discovery of fire." Salane recreates eight letters that were sent to specific institutions, including the University of Georgia, asking for contributions for nuclear fission and atomic energy education and research.

In the center of the gallery, the decommissioned NYC traffic light lenses indicate another view on power and obsolescence. Salane acquired these colored glass lenses as surplus items from the NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services. They were once installed across NYC traffic lights, in the era before LED signals replaced incandescent bulbs in the mid-1990s

through 2001. Placed above the city grid to organize a systematic stop and go order, the lenses helped control movement at an intersection without conflict, using time as an interval. Detached from their power source they appear pointillistic, discrete objects of primary-colored dots, now suggesting a city grid in banal disarray.

In *Fission or, Eclipse*, Salane sets up intersections of personal and spatial perspectives through dynamic, site-specific objects. Each collection represents a critical era of change, providing a poetic insight into the enigmatic relations between time, war, observation, and power; their narrative contingencies underscore the politics of the archive. Together the object sets position the viewer's gaze upward while recording changing human reactions to the movement of light, motion, and matter across time and space. Challenging viewers to find commonalities and disjunctions among the exhibition's many parts, Salane raises profound questions about the voices and objects charged with telling our histories: Whose thoughts, whether mundane or profound, have been preserved for future generations? What forces distribute technologies like writing or scientific research among people? What objects, though silent, speak on our behalf, and whose job is the work of their translation? Salane's exhibition, a translation in its own right, is also a careful curation that uses the methods of the archive to put its limitations and potential on display.

Katie Geha



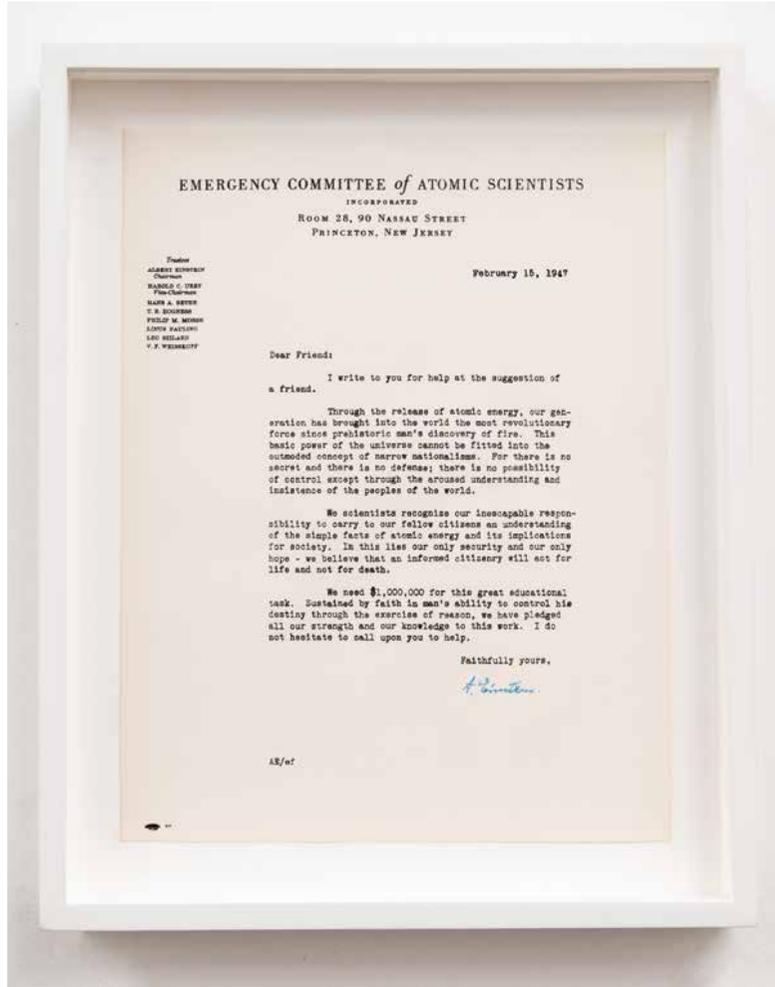
Rose Salane

Rose Salane is an artist living and working in New York City. Solo presentations of Salane's work have been held at Tank Shanghai; Carlos/Ishikawa in London; Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; and the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work was featured in the 2021 New Museum Triennial, *Soft Water Hard Stone*, and in the 2022 Whitney Biennial, *Quiet as It's Kept*. A recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, Salane completed her MA in urban planning at the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture, City University of New York, and her BFA at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

Images courtesy of the artist.



Detail of *Intersection, a grid in points* (2024), obsolete traffic light lenses from New York City traffic lights acquired from NYC Department of Administrative Services in 2024 (years in use approx. 1980–2000), dimensions variable.



Dear Friend; February 15, 1947 (2024), solicitation from Albert Einstein found at the University of Georgia, screen print on typewriter paper, 11" x 13.5"



Installation view of Dear Friend series (2024), screen print on typewriter paper, dimensions variable.

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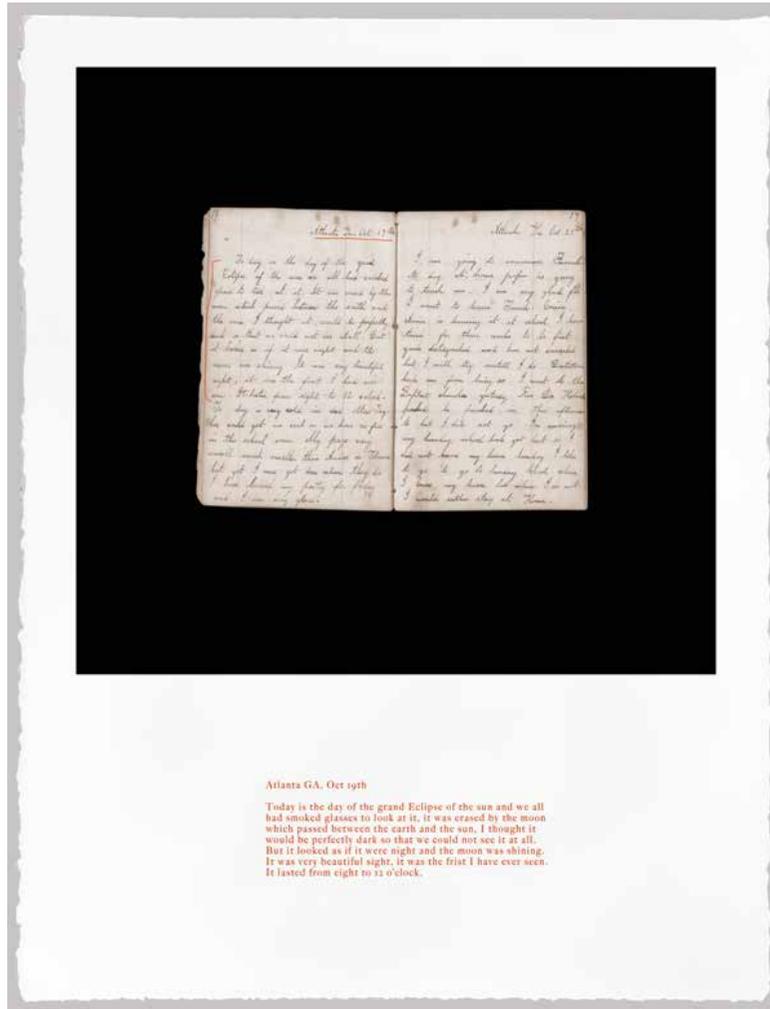


"I wish you could have seen them" (2024), photogram of NYC traffic light lenses, 30" x 50".

CARLOS/ISHIKAWA



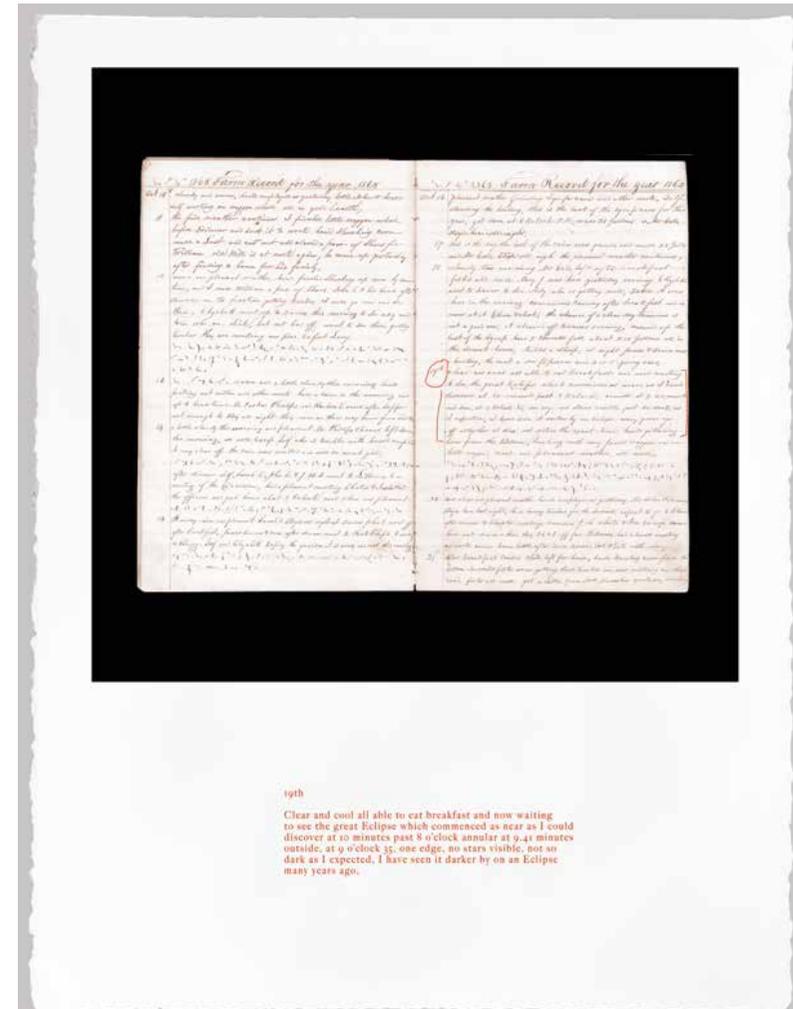
"I wish you could have seen them" (part 2) (2024), photogram of NYC traffic light lenses, 30" x 50".



Atlanta GA. Oct 19th

Today is the day of the grand Eclipse of the sun and we all had smoked glasses to look at it, it was erased by the moon which passed between the earth and the sun. I thought it would be perfectly dark so that we could not see it at all. But it looked as if it were night and the moon was shining. It was very beautiful sight, it was the first I have ever seen. It lasted from eight to 11 o'clock.

MSS 176 Girl's Diary, 1866-1867 (Box 4, Folder 5), page 22 (2024), photogravure and silkscreen on archival paper. Diary sourced from Kenan Research Center at Atlanta History Center.



18th

Clear and cool all able to eat breakfast and now waiting to see the great Eclipse which commenced as near as I could discover at 10 minutes past 8 o'clock annular at 9:41 minutes outside, at 9 o'clock 35, one edge, no stars visible, not so dark as I expected, I have seen it darker by on an Eclipse many years ago.

MSS 145 Farm Diary, 1859-1866 (Box 1, Folder 4), page 25 (2024), photogravure and silkscreen on archival paper. Diary sourced from Kenan Research Center at Atlanta History Center.