



Pedro Gómez-Egaña: The Great Learning

February 21 – July 27, 2025, Hayden & Reference Galleries



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Pedro Gómez-Egaña, *Virgo*, 2022. Installation view: Biennale de Lyon, 2022.
Photo: Blaise Adilon

Front cover:

Pedro Gómez-Egaña, *Virgo*, 2022 (detail). Installation view: Biennale de Lyon, 2022.
Photo: Pedro Gómez-Egaña

Pedro Gómez-Egaña's exhibition materializes our polyrhythmic experiences of time.

"We live in an age when contrasting temporalities coexist with an intensity that often feels irreconcilable," he has said.¹ "Media saturation, geological alteration, algorithmic immediacy, 24/7 labor culture, supply chain dynamics, and the relentless spectacle of political cycles" all condition how we make sense of the world and weigh on our capacity for apperception.

Across the exhibition, architectural spaces are cut open and multiplied, interrogated, and made to eclipse or dissolve. Objects are cast in precise relationships and move in ways that may evade perception—at times harnessing gravity or finding unexpected alignment. Viewers are spectators, listeners, and animating lenses as they move through the space or pause in curiosity.

The Great Learning borrows its title from a work by British avant-garde composer Cornelius Cardew and is inspired, in part, by Cardew's experimental work with an ensemble of non-musicians known as The Scratch Orchestra. Gómez-Egaña, who trained as a musician and composer before turning to visual art, similarly delegates some of the show's action to a team of gallery attendants, or Orchestrators, who shift the exhibition's physical elements and soundscape. Their gestures—both utilitarian and improvisational—are conceived as a conversation with the works and the space itself. Drawing on features of both architecture and dramaturgy, Gómez-Egaña stages spatial dislocations and moments of uncanniness to expose the affective qualities of objects and the porous, unstable conditions of contemporary life.

¹ All quotes in this brochure are taken from: Pedro Gómez-Egaña, in conversation with Natalie Bell, January 2025.

Great Year, 2025

Virgo, 2022

The exhibition opens with *Great Year* (2025), a projected stop-motion animation that visualizes the moments when both the moon and the sun will be visible in the sky above Cambridge during the exhibition's twenty-three-week run. Each week is represented by a square in its calendar-like grid, and a simple wooden disc affixed to the wall moves left to right to mark the current week. Although the video is silent, its rhythmic loop of dots—marking the paths of the sun and moon and cycles of light and shadow that indicate daylight—suggests a kind of musicality. It also introduces ideas of multiple temporalities encountered in a single image, as well as the notion that repetition (as in stop-motion animation or a film strip) can generate the illusion of motion from still images.

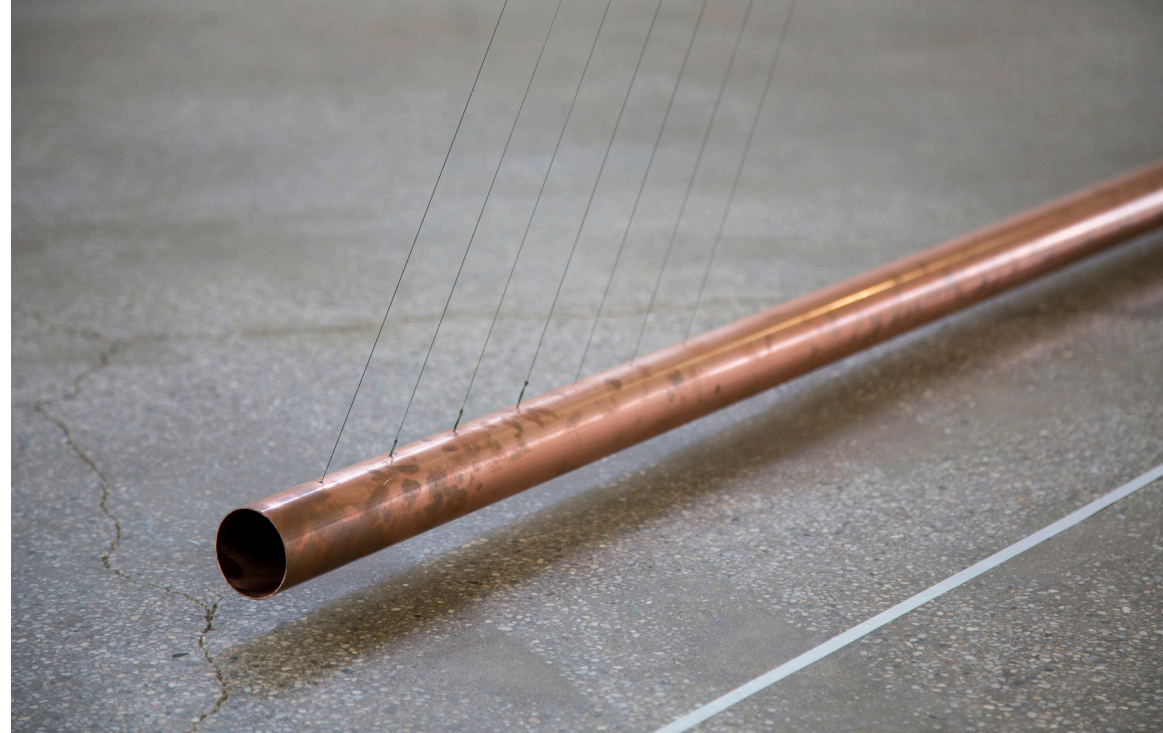
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In *Virgo* (2022), a set-like reproduction of a domestic interior is bisected by twenty-eight walls that repeat throughout the installation, teasing viewers with multiple mise-en-abyme viewpoints. *Virgo* takes its name from the zodiac constellation as well as the Parthenon, which was known as the Temple of Virgo and was built using repeated architectural features and optical illusions. In both the constellation and the Parthenon, certain images appear or disappear, depending on one's alignment or position. Similarly, depending on one's vantage point, *Virgo* appears either very solid and dense or extremely porous and vulnerable. A path for visitors cuts through the work's recursive architecture on a diagonal, and two large steel frames mounted on a hidden system of wheels connect to furnishings and household objects. The frames are periodically pushed and pulled by the exhibition Orchestrators through precise gaps in the walls, creating an uncanny encounter that probes the

affective qualities of familiar objects and spaces.

Virgo also yields unexpected moments of connection with the world beyond: a television plays a video of starlings in flight, a laptop navigates a map of the Richat Structure (a fifty-kilometer-diameter spiral-like geological formation in the Sahara Desert) as it plays altered fragments of Olivier Messiaen's 1941 "Quartet for the End of Time," and an iPhone on a bed displays fragments of text from Annie Dillard's 1982 nonfiction essay "Total Eclipse." Each of these encounters underscores the experience of home as a site of both isolation and constant connection to all corners of the world and moments across history, whether through moving images, written words, music, or memory as a medium in itself.

Virgo also explores a contrast between different modes of experiencing and understanding time. Like stills in a film strip, each space within *Virgo* repeats with slight variation. As visitors move through and encounter each frame of interior space, they act as the animating agent, just as a projector's mechanics animate a series of film stills to create the illusion of time. This mechanical manipulation of time contrasts with cosmic rhythms, alluded to throughout the exhibition, beginning with *Great Year*. With *Virgo*, this can be found in an overhead lighting scheme that simulates the sun's arc from dawn to dusk. An aperture in the gallery's covered window allows a sliver of natural light through and corresponds with the walls' interstices to underscore ideas of porosity and alignment while offering a reminder of the specificity of this space.



Pedro Gómez-Egaña, *The Great Learning*, 2015. Installation view: Mana Contemporary, New Jersey.
Photo: Erin Lee Smith

The Great Learning, 2025

Deep Rivers, 2025

The Ask, 2025

Cordillera, 2025

The works in the exhibition's second gallery are enveloped by bright red walls and carpeting, while bench seating wraps much of the space. Three pendulums (*The Ask* [2025]) knock gently on the walls, seemingly questioning the gallery's spatial boundaries while evoking the basic motion of timekeeping. While each pendulum swings at its own unique interval and may be paused or restarted by the exhibition's Orchestrators, collectively, they make audible multiple temporalities and contribute to the instrumentation of the space as a whole.

For Gómez-Egaña, the "lyrical motor" in this space is gravity. The centerpiece of this room, *The Great Learning* (2025), consists of a copper rod hinged at the floor that the Orchestrators set in a vertical position. From here, it slowly falls to the ground, the result of a meticulous balance between the weight of the rod and its eleven counterweights (the artist's "gram-by-gram approach" to choreography), as well as the friction on microfilament threads and the room's environmental conditions. Rife with existential undertones, *The Great Learning* evokes, as Gómez-Egaña has written, "the

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fall of monuments and the silent, unyielding gravity of death.”

The Great Learning is inspired, in part, by the work of British composer Cornelius Cardew and his experiments with composition and pedagogy. Working with the Fluxus-inspired ensemble The Scratch Orchestra, Cardew created the 1971 piece also called “The Great Learning,” borrowing the title from Confucius’s text of the same name, which also reflects on collectivism. Similarly, Gómez-Egaña’s sculpture resonates with ideas of shared learning and interdependence, as its carefully distributed elements come together in a single understated gesture. Installing the work itself, which can take up to a week, is a rigorous process of calibration and rehearsal, in which the most minute adjustments can affect the overall operation.

The equilibrium essential to *The Great Learning* is paralleled in the harmonies of *Deep Rivers* (2025) and *Cordillera* (2025), both conceived for this exhibition and designed to complement the sound in the exhibition as a whole. *Deep Rivers* appears

as a nightstand embedded askew in the exhibition seating. A talismanic domestic object, the nightstand is a midnight companion, a vessel of reassurances: medication, water, tissues. Here, the Orchestrators periodically reach inside, generating a sustained minimalist drone from a bellows-driven instrument within. Its steady hold of a single interval resists the time being measured by the pendulums of *The Ask*.

Cordillera emanates from multiple speakers hidden throughout the gallery’s surround seating. *Cordillera* (meaning “mountain range” or “string” in Spanish) is itself composed of multiple temporalities. This minimalist, phased composition brings together harmonies associated with Andean music—which, for Gómez-Egaña, are both “cosmic and melancholic”—as well as recordings of everyday sounds from his own home and his parents’ home in Colombia. Collectively, they yield an unsettling, atmospheric soundscape over which stringed instruments evoke the tension of the filaments suspending *The Great Learning*.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Great Year, 2025

Video, silent, 12 min.

Virgo, 2022

Installation with wood and metal panels, metal frames, interior furnishings, video, sound
20 × 70 ft. (6 × 21 m) overall (approx.)

The Great Learning, 2025

Copper, monofilament, mixed metals
196 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 196 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 118 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (500 × 500 × 300 cm)

Deep Rivers, 2025

Wood, paper, brass reeds
35 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 21 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (90 × 55 × 45 cm)

The Ask, 2025

Steel, mixed media; three parts
Dimensions variable

Cordillera, 2025

Three-channel sound installation,
32:46 min. loop

All works courtesy the artist and Zilberman Gallery

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pedro Gómez-Egaña (b. 1976, Bucaramanga, Colombia) lives and works in Oslo, Norway, where he is Professor of Sculpture and Installation at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. He holds an MFA and PhD in Visual Arts from Bergen Academy of Art and Design and a BA from the Goldsmiths’ College, London, where he studied performance and music composition. Recent institutional solo exhibitions have taken place at: Podium, Oslo (2023); Kode Museum, Bergen, Norway (2021); Munch Museum, Oslo (2019); Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku, Azerbaijan (2018); Entrée, Bergen (2017); and Prosjektrom Normanns, Stavanger, Norway, and Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen (2015). He has also exhibited at the 16th Lyon Biennial, France (2022); MAMBO, Bogotá (2021); Henie Onstad Art Center, Oslo (2021); TENT Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2018); the Contour Biennial, Mechelen, Belgium (2017); the 15th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2017); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2017); Kochi-Muziris Biennial, India (2016); and Performa 13, New York (2013); among many others.

Pedro Gómez-Egaña: The Great Learning is organized by Natalie Bell, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

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PUBLIC PROGRAMS



Artist Discussion:
Pedro Gómez-Egaña
in conversation with **Natalie Bell**
Thursday, February 20, 2025, 5:30 PM
In-person program



Graduate Student Talk:
Félix Antoine-Gélineau
Thursday, April 10, 2025, 5:30 PM
Hybrid program



Curator Tour:
Natalie Bell
Friday, April 11, 2025, 12:15 PM
In-person program

Graduate Student Talk:
Megan Masterson
Thursday, April 24, 2025, 5:30 PM
Hybrid program

All List Visual Arts Center programs are free and open to the public. Registration is required. For more information about events and programs related to this exhibition, please visit: listart.mit.edu/events-programs

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