

Kambui Olujimi

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Water as a Cinematic Metaphor for the Tides of Time

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Still from Kambui Olujimi's *Where Does the Time Go ...*  
(all photos by Sachyn Mital, courtesy of David Rubenstein Atrium, except where noted)

In Kambui Olujimi's short film *Where Does the Time Go...*, water is an apt analogy for the concept of time.

The film begins with a black screen except for a single white light in the lower-right corner. There's the sound of rhythmic tinkling. The seconds yawn in between that opening shot and the appearance of more lights in the lower-left corner, and slowly, very slowly, the camera pulls back to reveal a suspension bridge at night: a terrestrial constellation guiding cars to their ports of call. It's the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit, Michigan to Ontario, Canada. In the next scene, via a split-screen view, a car is on fire in a seemingly suburban neighborhood. Eventually a fire truck arrives. But while I wait, watching, it continues to burn. I expect the extinguishing to happen, but I don't get to see it. Instead, the very next scene gives me a different use for water: as a region for exploration. A boy plays in the sand on a beach, at the water's edge, the fire of a sunset in the far distance behind him.



Still from Kambui Olujimi's *Where Does the Time Go ...* (screenshot courtesy of the artist)

I'm watching Kambui Olujimi's short film *Where Does the Time Go ...* which premiered a few days ago at the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center as part of its ongoing series of free, weekly performances. The screening has a live accompaniment by two jazz musicians, Chris Pattishall and Adam O'Farill. The music they play adds color and mood to Olujimi's film, making certain passages more eerie than they would otherwise be, and making others feel dangerous, as in the scene where one of the main characters, played by Irungu Mutu, begins to climb an impossibly tall wall with his bare hands and sneakered feet, the keyboard's melody screeching and the horn going plaintive.



Still from Kambui Olujimi's *Where Does the Time Go ...*

I'm not sure what the film wants to give me in totality, but what I take is the ways that water becomes a conduit between us and the quotidian, crucial needs of our lives. There are scenes in

which the water is a cleansing agent, as when we see the character played by Jessica Allie washing herself in the shower, and Mutu submerging himself in a bathtub. It becomes a meteorological mantle in the form of snow. Water gets sipped as tea, but is also shown powerfully dashing off cliff faces, and then goes placid again, becoming a smooth surface on which to skip stones. Then, most significantly, water registers as a guiding force for human settlement in a scene where the camera takes me far above a series of channels and among ports that are busy with the business of taking in, organizing, and storing resources conveyed via the sea.



At the Q&A after the film screening, from left: Jordana Leigh, Director of the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center; Kambui Olujimi; and musicians Chris Pattishall and Adam O'Farill

Water is an apt analogy for the concept of time. Both time and water tend to take the shape of their containers: here, water takes on the forms I've mentioned and time stretches to fill the space created by image and music. From this film, this little reservoir of time, I take the emotional rewards of non-narrative exposition, as I come to feel how water quietly plays a mercurial but decisive role in my existence. I also sense that both water and time are irrevocable, that in moments I can only simply watch them meander and go.

*Kambui Olujimi's Where Does the Time Go ... premiered at the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center (61 West 62 Street, Upper West Side, Manhattan) on November 15.*