

## Fatamorgana

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Sundials are pretty often decorated with a motto or an epigram, either with a friendly recommendation or with a sinister warning about the transitoriness of human life. These warnings usually are given in coded Latin language. Sundials rarely have names. If a sundial is called Fatamorgana and is also moving by itself, then we are dealing with a rarity which attracts many eyes.



Fig. 1

Fata Morgana is another name for Morgan le Fay, sister to King Arthur and an enchantress skilled in the art of changing shape. A special type of complex mirage, one that sometimes gives the impression of a castle half in the air and half in the sea, is named after Fata Morgana. A fata morgana mirage involves the superposition of several images of one object.

The Italian architect and designer Dr. Giuseppe Ferlenga from S. Maria di Negrar in the North Italian province of Verona created this sundial in summer 2003.

One thing which catches our eyes immediately is the material: Iron (Fig.2)! The beautiful oxidation captivates as a delicate art form. There is another sundial by Ferlenga, made of iron, which he created in 1995 and called “*il Minotauro*”. At this sundial the moment of motion was realised in

a totally different way. It is probably the only “hybrid” sundial which works at the same time as a garden gate and is moved, if one wants to enter the garden. Also with the sundial “*Fatamorgana*” motion is brought into play. You see it immediately: Big wheels are attached at the East and West side of the sundial. You can also see the drive belts, which lead to the upper centre. But now it becomes a bit peculiar: Instead of one shadow-stick [gnomon] there are two! I have to take several images - as the Italian futurists did – in order to show the movement of the two auxiliary gnomons.



Fig. 2

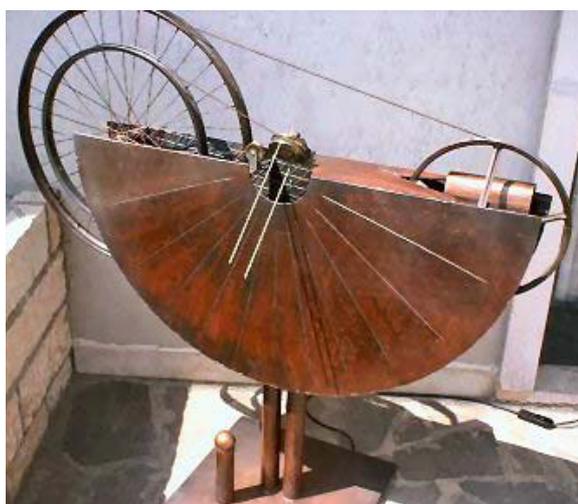


Fig.3

Fig. 3: Here you can see very fine both of the shadow – sticks bathed in sunlight and you can see their two thin shadowlines on the sundial surface, which have approached to one another. On the right, eastern side a curved metal sheet is shining in the sunlight. Underneath an electric motor is hidden, which is driving the transmission belts for the rotating disc in the centre. Ferlenga has taken a 12 volt motor, as it is normally used to turn the roast on a camping site. I can calm down all who worry about wasted energy: The energy consumption is pretty modest – four Watt – and they are only spent if the sun is shining and if the sundial has to work. Ferlenga has placed the approximately seventy kilogram heavy sundial with the units of measurement of 117 to 125 to 30 centimetres under a projecting house roof in order to protect it from direct rain showers. Apart from that, all electrical installations are packed waterproof.

When does “Fatamorgana” know to start working? On the backside of the sundial (see Fig.1) a light sensor is installed, which starts the motor, when the sun is shining and switches it off when the sun is hiding behind the clouds or when night is falling. The Fatamorgana sundial works like a conventional sundial. It is constructed to show real local time.



Fig.4

At figure 4 the two shadows cover one another and indicate the exact time for a moment. Whereas the movement of the shadow at a common sundial of this size hardly can be

watched, we can notice a short indication of point in time, which is right away taken off from the dispersing two shadows. The two “gnomons” rotate around their imaginary centre in a rhythm of fifteen seconds. With this time metaphor it is very beautifully shown that the sundial is extracting more or less “life” from the sun!

A little addendum concerning the naming ought to be attached: In Italy there are two spellings: Fatamorgana and Fata Morgana. The latter refers to a bit different way of illusion with the emphasis on “Fata” in the meaning of fairy.

<http://web.tiscali.it/ferlenga/meridiane.htm>

Giuseppe Ferlenga answers the question about <Who is Giuseppe Ferlenga?> at his very worth seeing homepage. Here he informs about his works as an architect and industrial designer as well as about his sundial works:

“This is a question I also put to myself very often, without ever finding an exact answer. I think I am a person like many others and like others I also have distinctive features which define me within society. In my case these characteristics are the creative power and love for what I am doing, the sincerity and honesty in the wider sense...” You can see Giuseppe Ferlenga at figure 1. He is the person on the right.

I have above mentioned Ferlenga’s “*il Minotauro*” sundial for which also motion is essential, however in a completely different way. I would like to show it from two points of view:

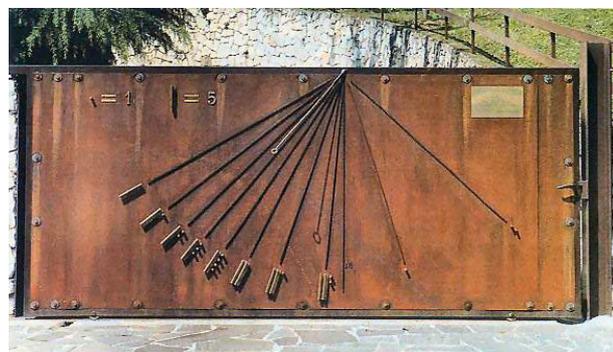


Fig.5

Ferlenga has for the writing of the hour-digits fallen back on Mayan numerals. The Mayans have created a very smart system of points and marks, where you use the defined number of points for the digits from one to four. Five is written as a mark, ten are two marks. Eleven and twelve are shown by one and two additional points (respectively) to the two marks for number ten. These Mayan numbers are also from the artistic point of view an outstanding element of creation. Mayan numbers would, by the way, also be an excellent “tool” for glass-sundials, which have been intensively discussed at Daniel Roth’s sundial mailing list recently.

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Fig.6

