

ESMERALDA KOSMATOPOULOS

# “L’amour de loin”

BAR | February 2017

Beirut, Lebanon

# ABOUT

“L’amour de loin” explores the concepts of home, identity and memory thru the lens of exile.

Exile has become an increasingly prominent subject of discussion in the news with the war in Syria and the worldwide refugee crisis it has triggered. However, interest in this concept goes back to antiquity. Books like Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey are centered around the sorrow of estrangement, hospitality and homecoming. However, theoretical interest in this concept goes back Antiquity. The themes of migration, and estrangement are also very present in the Arabic literature as a result of the complex history of the Arab world, making the trope of collective exile, or collective loss of a homeland an overlapping part of the shared imaginative landscape.

The project, created during Kosmatopoulos’ residency in Lebanon, is built around the concept of νόστος (homecoming). She worked for two-months with NGOs based in the refugee camps close to the Syrian border, creating various art-related activities with children that addressed the concepts of memory of home, nostalgia and desire to return. She then appropriated raw factual pieces of these daily interactions that she combined with mythological elements from the Homeric epic and literary references from the poetry of exile arisen from the Lebanese civil war to create a multi-disciplinary body of works that looks at exile through time and space as a fundamental element of our human nature.

As Edward Said wrote in his essay Reflections on Exile, “ Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience, it is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Beyond the physical estrangement from the place they call home, exiles often find themselves torn between a strong attachment to the past and the sobering reality of the present, living in one land and dreaming of and in another. The past itself is reconstructed - bad memories and traumas are slowly erased to make room for the sublimated image of a lost paradise.

# INSTALLATION VIEW



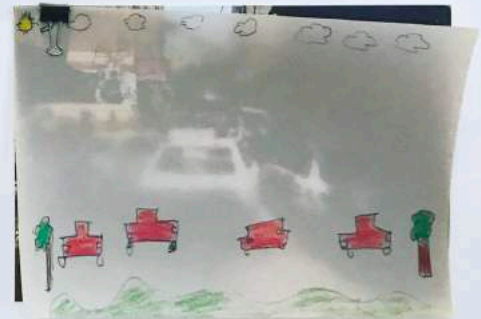
# LIST OF WORKS

*Mémoire voilée* is a body of works that investigate the relation between facts and memory thru the lens of Exile.

This project was created during a two/months residency in Lebanon. The artist collaborated with three NGOs working with children in refugee camps near the Syrian border to reactivate memories of their home by drawing the memory they have from the town they come from.

The artist printed these genuine expression of memory on tracing paper and layered them on top of the first images of that same city obtains thru a Google search. The colorful drawings of a fairways lost paradise remembered by the children act as a veil to the factual horror of the war depicted on the photographs that define the city they come from online.

Disconnected from their owner and displayed together anonymously in the installation space, these unique stories narrate in a poetic and genuine way the experience of these children forced to leave their home and experience exile in the midst of the conflict. The simplicity of these familiar drawing clash with the reality of the conflict, creating along the way a more emotional and personal connection with the viewer.



MÉMOIRE VOILÉE  
2017  
c-print photographs, tracing paper  
8.3 x 11.7 in (210 x 297 mm)

*On my way* explores the concepts of home, identity and memory thru the lens of exile.

The work was created during a two-month residency in Beirut explores the concepts of identity and memory through the lens of exile working in the Syrian refugee camps near the border.

She appropriated Act 4 of the libretto of the opera "L'amour de loin" written by the contemporary Lebanese author Amid Maloof describing the journey of a Western prince to join the Eastern princess he never met but fell in love with based on the sublimated description a pilgrim gave of her. In the piece, fragments of the opera sang by the Lebanese opera singer Matteo El Khodr are layered on top of the raw sounds recorded by the artists of her own daily journey from Beirut to the camps of the Bekaa valley in the local minibus .

Both acoustic elements represent in a different perspective the journey towards from and towards Home. The work continuously vacillates between a poetic and romanticized representation of the trip and the factual reality of it; Imagination comes to clash with reality to highlight the profound duality of exile as experienced by the exile.



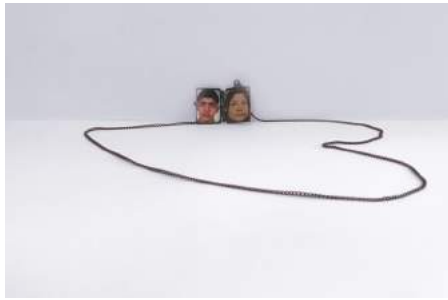
ON MY WAY  
2017  
Sound, megaphone, wood  
Size variable

*HOME in pieces* investigates to relation between the abstract concept of “home” and the material objects attached to it.

The artist collaborated with 3 NGOs working with children in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon. The children were asked one question: “what is the favorite object you carried with you from Syria and what is the story behind it?”. Their answers were recorded and each of them was given a camera to photograph the cherished treasure from the past from his/her own creativity perspective.

On the photographs, the object is standing alone in front of a white background - detached from the specific context and landscape of the camp - to become a genuine expression of that child’s memory of the loved time and place they come from.

The artist gather the audio recordings and images to create an art installation that explores - thru the eyes and memory of these children - the relationship between simple material objects and the immaterial memories they trigger. Disconnected from their owner and displayed together anonymously in the installation space, these unique stories will narrate in a poetic and genuine way the experience of these children forced to leave their home and experience exile in the midst of the conflict. The simplicity of these familiar objects standing on a neutral background and the sound of children’s voices will clash with the reality of the conflict, creating along the way a more emotional and personal connection with the viewer.



HOME IN PIECES (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)  
2017  
c-print photographs, sound  
size variable

**“What I always wanted to tell you but never dared”**

Parasol Project | June 2017

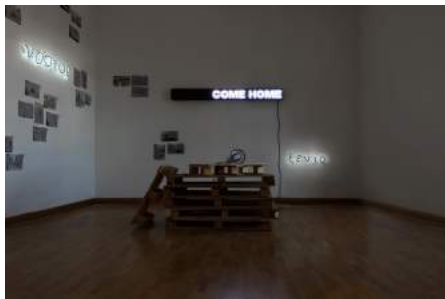
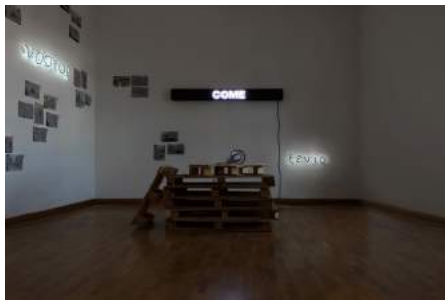
New York, United States

# ABOUT

“What I always wanted to tell you but never dared” is a solo exhibition curated by Clémence Maily that presents a new body of works composed of mail art, video, neon and sound pieces, that uses familiar artificial intelligence tools - namely predictive typing - to explore technology as an extension of one's self.

This project started when, while typing a message on her smart phone, the artist accidentally pressed several consecutive times the predictive text bar on the screen. Kosmatopoulos, then, noticed that through the mechanical gesture of her hand on the screen, the phone had composing “by itself” full sentences following a proper grammatical structure subject-verb-object. The repetitive quasi-automatic movement she was monotonously performing contrasted with the original writing text that was digitally composed on the screen - a text mediated by the phone's artificial intelligence. The virtual machine had been learning from the artist's everyday written communications and was now trying to mimic at its best her writing style, appropriating her most used vocabulary and style, in an attempt to predict her next words. This parapraxis was shedding light in a somehow disturbing way the complex - man versus machine - dialectic as the phone had been anticipating the artist's next words without her consent.

# INSTALLATION VIEW



"WHAT I ALWAYS WANTED TO TELL YOU BUT NEVER DARED"  
2017  
Installation view

# LIST OF WORKS

*What I always wanted to tell you but never dared* is a mail art project that uses and misuses familiar and commonplace Artificial Intelligence tools to explore technology as an extension of our Self.

This on-going body of work started when the artist accidentally pressed several consecutive times the predictive text bar while typing a message on her smart phone and noticed that through the mechanical gesture of her hand on the screen, the phone was composing "by itself" full sentences grammatically correct in their structure. The repetitive quasi-automatic movement she was monotonously performing contrasted with the original text that was digitally composed on the screen - a text mediated by the phone's artificial intelligence. The virtual machine had been learning from the artist's everyday written communications and was now trying to mimic at its best her style, appropriating her most used vocabulary turns of phrases and topics discussed in an attempt to predict her next words. This parapraxis was shedding light in a somehow disturbing way the complex - man versus machine - dialectic as the phone had been anticipating the artist's next words without her consent.

Fascinated by this casual though very personal manifestation of the machine's ability to learn, Kosmatopoulos started asking random people met on and offline to perform the same mechanical act. The text obtained would then be transcribed by hand into a physical letter, signed, and then sent to the artist's mail address. Every letter is the result of this collaboration between the artist, the participant, and its own phone, where each component had a very distinct role: the content of the letter was solely dictated by the predictive function of each given participant's smart phone; while the length of the text, format of the letter, choice of paper or pen were left at the discretion of the author of each letter, the only requirement being to follow the rules defined by the artist and start the letter with "Dear Esmeralda," copy the content provided by his/her own phone's predictive typing software and then sign and mail it.

WEBPAGE: <https://www.esmeraldakosmatopoulos.com/what-i-always-wanted-to-tell-you>

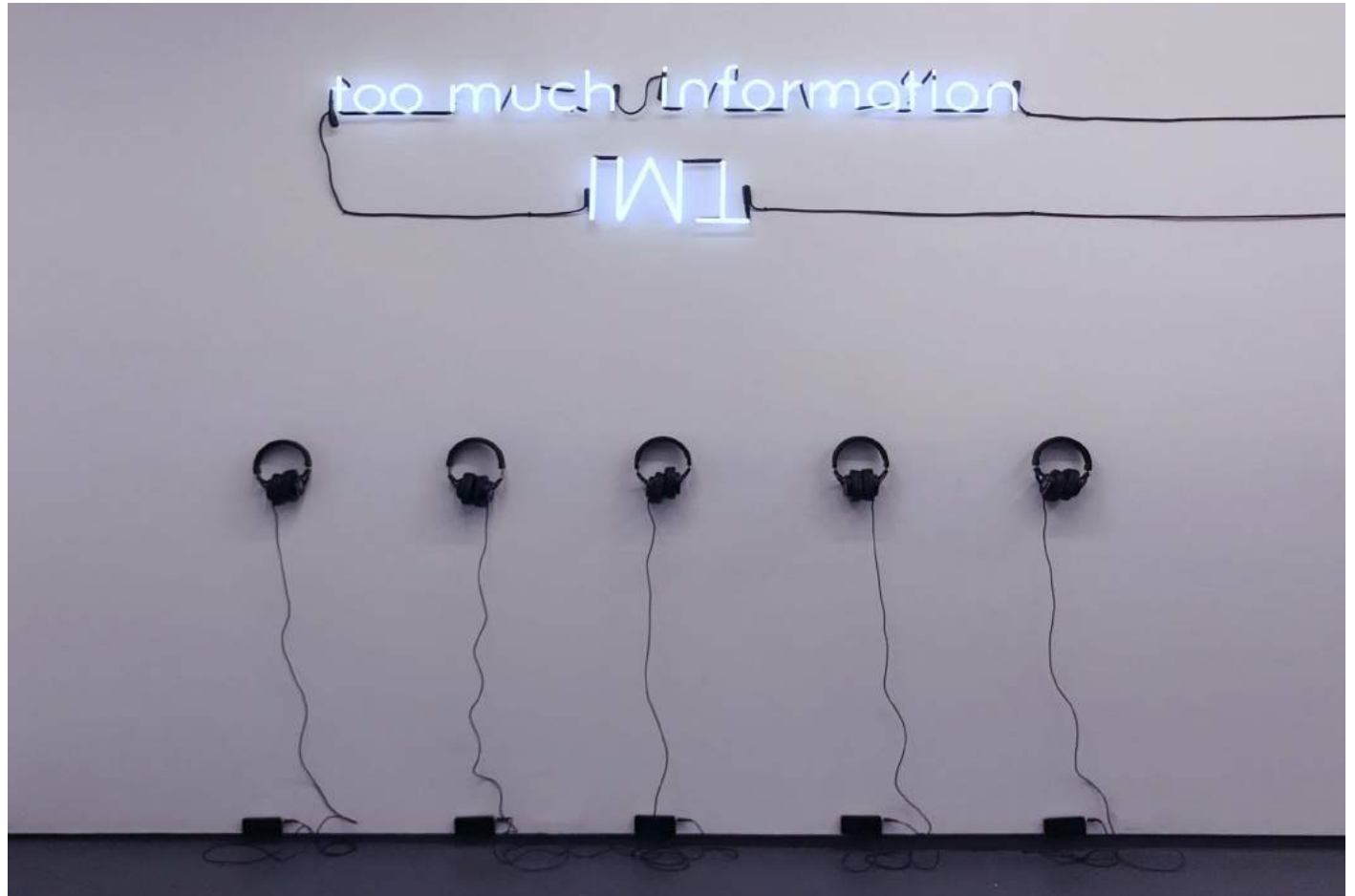


WHAT I ALWAYS WANTED TO TELL YOU BUT NEVER DARED  
2017  
paper  
size variable

*You put these words into my mouth* is a body of five sound installations that that explores the complex contemporary dialectic between man and machine and re-actualizes the surrealists' practice of the Exquisite Corpse in the post-Internet age.

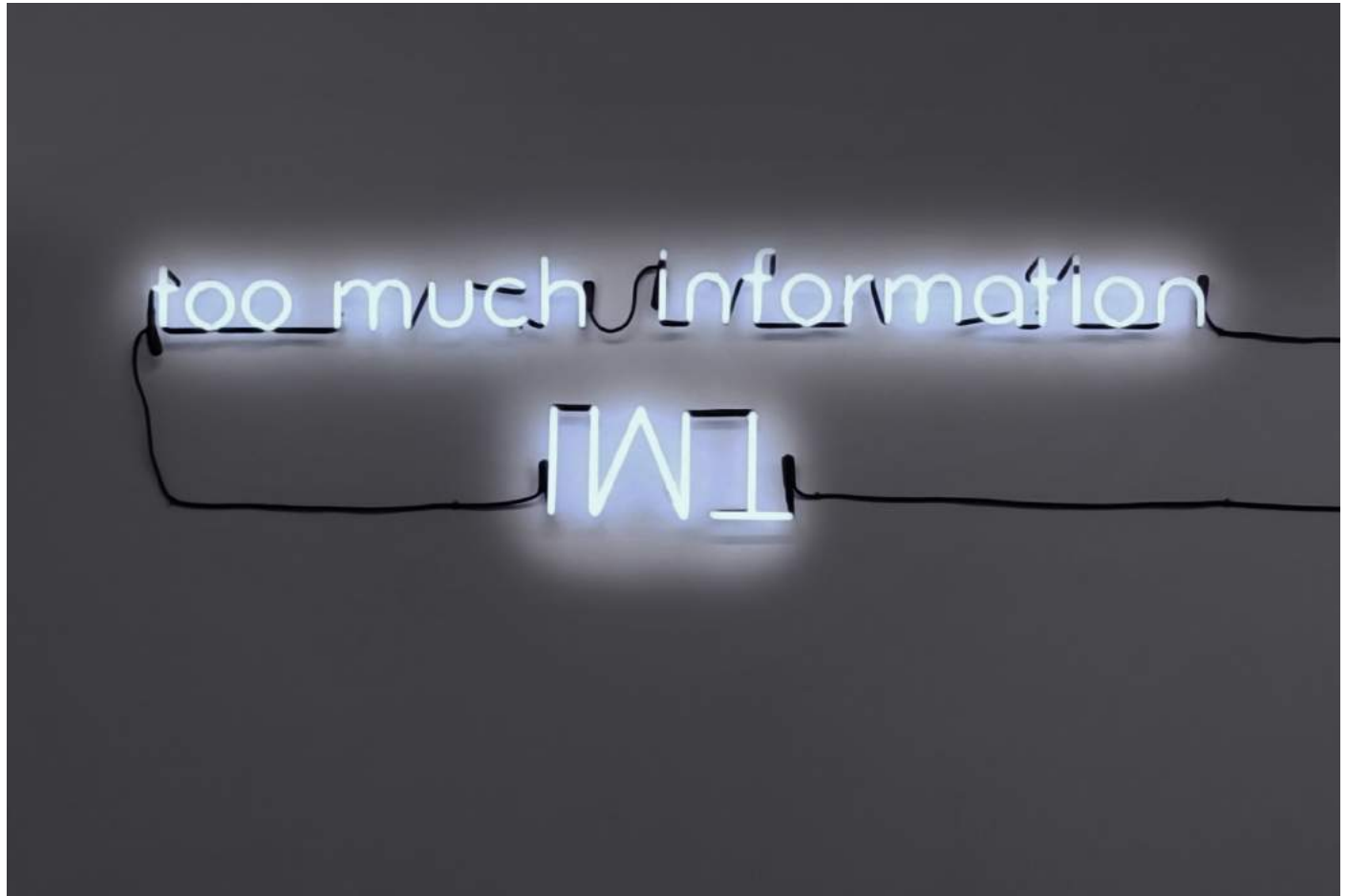
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In the course of a year, the artist collected several texts produced by the predictive typing functionality of her cellphone as the virtual machine was learning from her everyday written communications, trying to mimic at its best her writing style of the very moment the text was produced, evolving at every new message sent. Looking back at the content of these text, she noticed that each of them reflected the vocabulary she used at that time but also the emotional state and physical space she was in. By adding punctuation to five of the texts, she turned them into poems read in each of the five sound pieces.



YOU PUT THESE WORDS INTO MY MOUTH  
2017  
Audio, speakers, MP3 players, cables  
size variable

*:= (equal by definition)* is a body of works that explores in a whimsical way, how language is formed, transformed and simplified by technology in human communication. Each pair of neons place one above the other read common acronyms used in digital communication along with the full sentences they refer to. While the concept expressed remain the same, its visual written representation evolves as language as affected by and digital communication thru our phones.



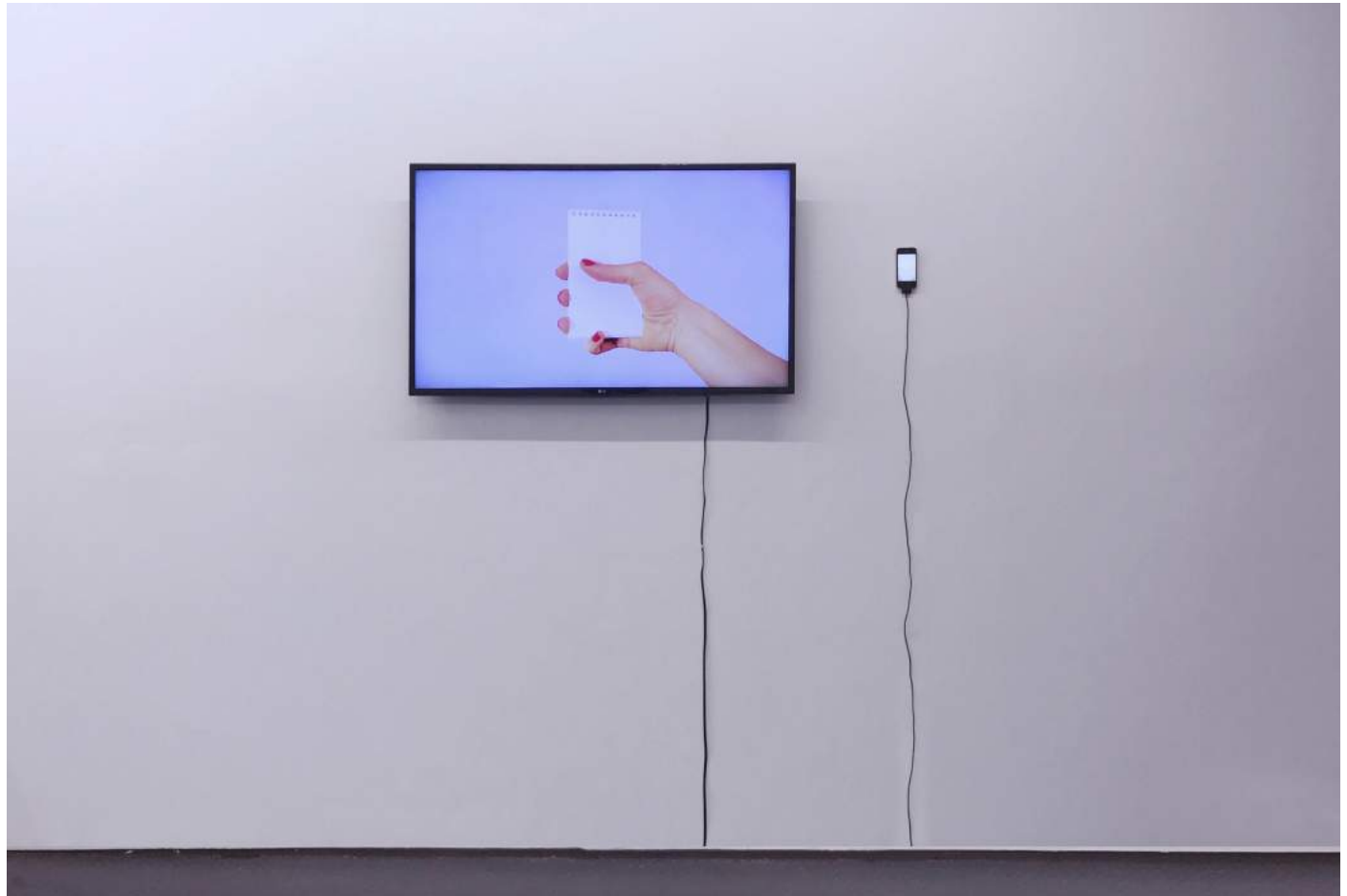
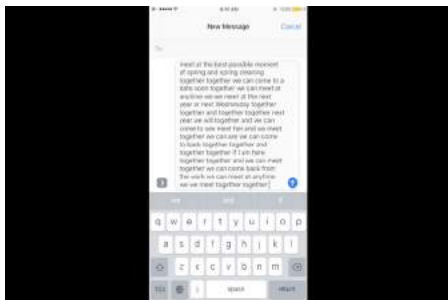
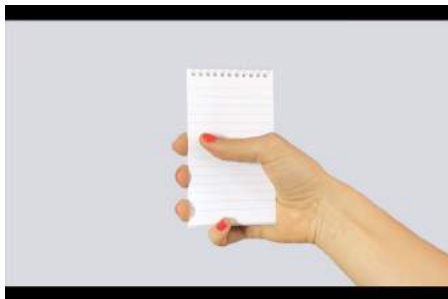
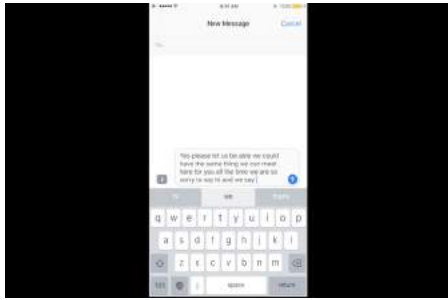
:= TMI  
2017  
Neon, transformer  
72 x 30 in (183 x 72 cm)

*Oracle* is a body of video installations that explores the complex contemporary dialectic between man and machine and reactualizes the surrealists' practice of the Exquisite Corpse in the post-Internet age.

This project started when, while typing a message on her smart phone, she accidentally pressed several consecutive times the predictive text bar on the screen. Kosmatopoulos, then, noticed that through the mechanical gesture of her hand on the screen, the phone had composing "by itself" full sentences following a proper grammatical structure subject-verb-object. The repetitive quasi-automatic movement she was monotonously performing contrasted with the original writing text that was digitally composed on the screen - a text mediated by the phone's artificial intelligence.

In the installation, the TV screen plays the gestures of the hand on the phone while the phone shows a video of the text being composed by the phone AI when that gesture is performed on it.

Playing on two independent screens, the human quasi-mechanical human gesture is detached from the computer-composed digital creative writing created by the phone in response to this gestures.



ORACLE - TYPING  
2017  
TV, iPhone, video, wires  
Size variable

# “Comment peut-on être #Persan?”

Mohsen Gallery | May 2016

Tehran, Iran

# ABOUT

In the Persian letters, Montesquieu recounts the experience of two Persian travelers visiting France for the first time and, thru their falsely naive comments and innocent astonishments over the local customs and traditions, presents a satire of the French society of the 18th century.

Following a reverse approach, the bodies of works «Comment peut-on être #Persan ? » appropriates the novel's famous sentence "How can one be Persian? " to examine how we approach difference – be it difference of nationality, religion, history, culture or ethnicity - at a time of global cultural homogenization accelerated by new technologies.

The artist takes the Iranian society and her personal experience living in it as a case in point to explore how cultural clichés and over-simplified translations are formed, disseminated and perpetuated when Google map reviews, colorful edited Instagram posts and TripAdvisor comments have become key reference points to locate ourselves physically and culturally in space and define our identity towards what is foreign to us.

Internet and social networks enable us to act both as receivers and emitters of information. Thru the virtual content we generate, we become the author of our own "Persian Letters" written in a simplified techno-language made of images and short posts and delivered anonymously online to an infinite audience.

In «Comment peut-on être #Persan ? », Kosmatopoulos brings together photographs, neons, sound pieces and found objects to paint with humour a playful caricature of the ethnocentric way we approach the Other in the post-Internet age.

# INSTALLATION VIEW



"COMMENT PEUT-ON ETRE #PERSAN?"  
2016  
Installation view

# LIST OF WORKS

*Foreign shadow* takes a critical look at the ethnocentric way we as foreigners approach other cultures in the post-Internet age.

Inspired by Montesquieu's "Persian letters", the bodies of work takes the opposite approach to explore how cultural clichés and over-simplifications are formed, disseminated and perpetuated at a time where personal travelers blogs, colorful edited Instagram posts and TripAdvisor comments have replaced formal tourists guides as we all become virtual receivers and emitters of information.

The work was created during a one month residency in Tehran in the Spring 2016. Kosmatopoulos took the Iranian society and her personal experience living in it as a case in point. She defined a list of historical, cultural and economical stereotypes of how Iranian culture is perceived abroad - be it thru the mosaics of its historical monuments, the Persian carpets sold in the bazar, or the commodities exported abroad - and accumulated photographs that would emphasize these clichés. These raw images genuinely snapped during her daily explorations of the city, were then virtually transformed - beautified with photo editing filters and watermarked with an image of the shadow of my hand holding the phone - before being posted online on social media platforms.

In the installation space, the 150 digitally modified images are printed on glossy postcard paper and casually spread on the floor around a postcard rack. In a world where images are replacing words and social media posts have taken over personal letters, the postcard rack is left empty, looking irrelevant in the middle of a sea of instantly consumable and disposable images.



FOREIGN SHADOW  
2016  
C-print photographs, postcard rack  
size variable

*the shadow of myself* is part of the body of works "Comment peut-on être #Persan" created in Tehran.

The two neons that resemble the red and green neon signs found in every other shops of the Iranian city, read in French and in Farsi the sentence "the shadow of myself".

The artist plays with the double meaning of this sentence that, beyond its literal interpretation, is also a French phrase used when someone looks weakened and sick. In the installation, the words directly refer to the all too common shadow of the Western tourists hidden behind their phone, obsessively documenting and sharing online pretty images of their experience of the local culture.



THE SHADOW OF MYSELF  
2016  
neon, transformer  
118 x 47 x 2 in (300 x 120 x 5 cm)

*Keyhole* explores how culture is now experienced, documented, disseminated and celebrated in the post-Internet age. The oversized-neon follows the outlines of two hands holding a phone, ready to snap a picture of what is standing in front of them.

The wall behind the neon acts as an imaginary screen to this oversized virtual phone - a place where the freedom of the white canvas it offers clashes with the very nature of the wall as an object and the sense of restriction it conveys.

*Keyhole* questions our active role in the conservation and transmission of culture at a time where Internet and social networks enable us to act both as receivers and emitters of information, an information written in a simplified techno-language made of images and short posts and delivered anonymously online to an infinite audience.



KEYHOLE  
2016  
neon, transformer  
45 x 60 x 1 in (115 x 152 x 5 cm)

*My #east is my #west* examines the legitimacy of geopolitical frontiers at a time of virtual globalization.

WEBPAGE: <http://www.esmeraldakosmatopoulos.com/my-east-is-my-west>



MY #EAST IS MY #WEST  
2016  
globe, books, iphone  
30 x 30 x 30 in (75 x 75 x 75 cm)

*Je suis à l'#Ouest* is part of the bodies of work "Comment peut-on être #Persan" created during a residency in Tehran in the Spring 2016. Appropriating all the codes of the neon signs found in every other shops of the Iranian city, the work challenges the notion of East and West and physical location in space in the post-Internet age.



JE SUIS À L'#OUEST  
2016  
neon, steel transformer  
32 x 24 x 3 in (80 x 60 x 7 cm)

# "THE \_\_\_\_\_ IS ABSENT"

Galerie Christophe Tailleur | December 2016

Miami, United States

# ABOUT

The \_\_\_\_\_ is absent explores the concepts of presence and absence in the post-Internet age through a series of sculptures, text works, neons, videos and digital prints, inviting us to investigate this new state of "semi-presence" that we find ourselves in, where we constantly try to negotiate our identity between analogue and digital self.

New technologies have placed us in a universal predicament; we function within simultaneous planes of existence, we co-exist in analogue and virtual worlds, dissociated from our own bodies, fragmented in space and time. The phone (ie. \_\_\_\_\_) ultimately serves as a gateway to this physical absence. At any given time and without further notice, it can withdraw us from the "here" and the "now" - the present moment of the material world. We vanish into this digital place, this intangible 'non-place'.

# INSTALLATION VIEW



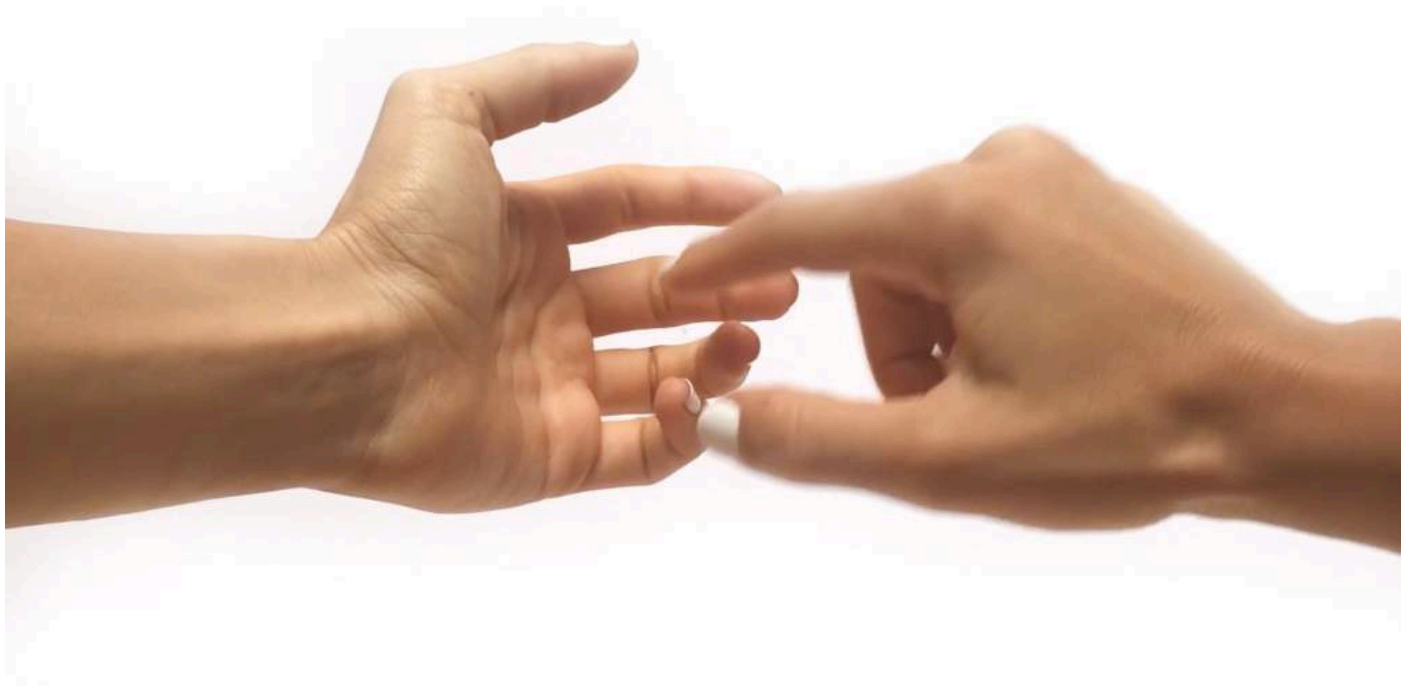
"THE \_\_\_\_\_ IS ABSENT"  
2016  
Installation view

# LIST OF WORKS

*CLiMAX* is a bodies of four video works that explore the emotional relationship we have developed with our cellphone and the quasi-continous tactile connection we have established with it.

The artist determined four main gestures we daily perform on the phone screen - scrolling down, typing, swiping right and swiping left - and, in each video, mechanically executes one of them in loop for 5 minutes without holding the phone itself. By removing the technological device, she isolates the movement and revealed the obvious and somehow disturbing sensuality of it.

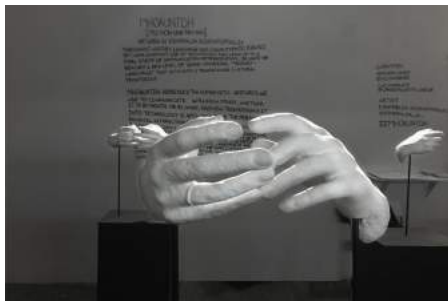
[WEBPAGE: http://www.esmeraldakosmatopoulos.com/climax](http://www.esmeraldakosmatopoulos.com/climax)



*Fifteen Pairs of Mouths* investigates the relationship between human body and technological devices and explores the new role of the hand as a vehicle for communication in the post-Internet age.

Thirty dismembered hands casted in white plaster stand on brass mounts in various positions. Each pair is unique in its shape and the gesture it performs, but all mimic a specific way of texting on a cell phone, a way personal and distinctive to each of the fifteen people invited to “lend their” hand for the project. The phone itself remains absent; leaving a negative space in between the fingers that turns these familiar and commonplace gestures into a collection of figurative sculptures that seem almost abstract.

With the increase of computer-mediated interactions, cell phones have become an extension of the human body that extends its abilities. The hand is transformed along the way into a virtual mouth that verbalizes messages from one screen to the other in a virtual space where audible language and even physical presence are no longer needed. The project comes to challenge the traditional definition of the word “speak” itself at a time where we are increasingly speaking with our fingers.



FIFTEEN PAIRS OF MOUTHS  
2016 - present  
Plaster  
Size variable

*SOMEW#HERE* is a bodies of neon works that invite the viewer to revisit the meaning of the word "here" and the core concepts of presence and absence in the light of the changes new technologies have brought in the definition of the self.

In this series, the artist invents a new word - #HERE - a word referring to this place of non place that is the digital world. She appropriates simple sentences find in dictionaries to exemplify the use of the word "here", and simply replaces it in them with "#HERE". The hashtag that now predisposes the 4 letters of such a basic term, comes to challenge the meaning of the whole sentences. Their tone, that at first was very basic, naive, almost simplistic, clashes with the complexity of the newly created and unfamiliar term "#HERE".

When read while thinking of "#HERE" as this place of physical withdrawal, these strings of words come to question the relationship between analogue and digital selves in the post-Internet age.

any body #here?

NOTHING TO SEE  
#HERE

my home is a long way from  
#here

I  
WILL STAY  
#HERE.

*What is left of...* is a body of seven text-based works that examines the concepts of presence and absence in the light of the changes new technologies have brought in the definition of the self.

At a time where our identity is constantly split between analogue and digital self, living every moment in a state of semi-presence where a vibration of our phone can withdraw us instantly from the physical world, the artist invites the viewer to re-think the meaning of the fundamental concepts of physicality and temporality. She appropriating seven basic and simple words attached to these concepts and, using the visual codes of a hangman game, replaces the vowels in them with dashes. The physical manifestation of the words is transformed in the process as are the definition of the concepts they represent in the post-Internet age.



*SIRI&me* is an art experiment that translates the formula of analogue storytelling into the virtual world. The work takes the form of a Tumblr, a Facebook and Twitter account.

Build as a sitcom of 3 seasons of 10 episodes, the virtual story investigated the complex relationship humans have developed with technology through the evolving friendship of its two characters – Siri and Esmeralda. Each episode consisted of a screenshot of a real text conversation between iPhone's Siri and the phone's owner, Esmeralda, revealing the complex relationship humans have acquired with technology through the evolving friendship of its two characters. It is a story of friendship between two entities; one is human and one virtual, but both equally real.

The social media sitcom aired Monday through Friday at noon EST on Tumblr and reruns on Facebook at 5PM EST from September to October 2013 last year (before the movie *HERE* was released!). As in traditional television programming, the show is advertised through multiple platforms - Tumblr and Twitter. More than a simple transposition of TV content onto the web, it aims at translating its codes and practices into a virtual space, the social media world.

Winner of the 4th New Media Artist Prize in 2014.

WEBPAGE: <http://www.esmeraldakosmatopoulos.com/siri-me>

