

MIT List Visual Arts Center

Media Contact:
Mark Linga
mlinga@mit.edu
617-452-3586

The MIT List Visual Arts Center

presents

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige: I Must First Apologize...
February 19, 2016 - April 17, 2016

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 18, 2016, 6-8PM

January 25, 2016—Cambridge, MA The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to present the culmination of a major project by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *I Must First Apologize*, an exhibit featuring an extensive body of work that looks at the history of online spam and scamming through film, sculpture, photography, and installation. Hadjithomas and Joreige have collected and archived more than 4,000 scams, a certain kind of spam e-mail—unsolicited messages from strangers—since 1999. Written in the first person and structured like monologues, the scam messages often usurp famous individuals' identities, with the writers posing as the children or wives of politicians, or as notorious dictators claiming to possess a large sum of money they need to transfer urgently. The scammers base their scheme on a plausible reality, rooted in news or real events, often referring to present-time conflicts and with the aim to exploit people's gullibility.

Based on historical confidence tricks such as *The Jerusalem Letter*, which dates back to the eighteenth century, these frauds have been surprisingly efficient; thousands of people are conned every year, and victims of scams have committed suicide or murder in revenge. Collectively these e-mail scams delineate a map of recent geopolitical conflict, social unrest, and economic upheaval. The exhibition charts a kind of narrative itinerary ranging from various works that present intimate correspondence between scammers and victims and several video works that feature real or fictional protagonists of scams.

Among the works included in the exhibition, the video installation *The Rumor of the World*, 2014, presents an immersive environment where non-professional actors of various ages and origins recite email scams and stories directly to the viewer from 13 video screens and over 100 loudspeakers. The resulting chorus of voices evokes the saturation of the online world while blurring the distinction between truth and falsehood. *Geometry of Space*, 2014, is a series of sculptures and drawings that track the virtual network and geographic circulation of over two hundred scam emails sent over the course of 2005 and 2008. These spherical sculptures, made from oxidized steel, give form to a type of data visualization, an alternative way of writing a history of our contemporary time and a colonial imaginary of corruption. Two "scam atlases" gather the selected emails for those two years. *The Trophy Room*, 2014, evokes a strange virtual museum highlighting the intimate correspondence between scammers and so-called scam-baiters, whose objective is to scam the scammers themselves, by tricking them into performing bizarre and humiliating acts to prove their good faith. The resulting collection of "trophies" (videos, photographs, paintings, sculptures, performances) blur the lines between victim and scammer. The multi-channel video installation, *It's all Real*, 2014 gives a voice to some of the non-professional actors appearing in *The*



Rumor of the World, a range of individuals with incredible stories of their own. Most of them are immigrants, who express feelings of displacement and the experience of hardships brought upon by cultural and religious upheaval, stories often appearing as incredible as those described in the scams.

As the narrative unfolds, a new map of the world is presented, one where the victim and the scammer have paradoxical relations. *I must first apologize...* acts as a narrative itinerary and a cinematographic exhibition. It unfolds in the shape of installations, sounds, videos, sculptures and drawings, deconstructing data and transforming it into images. The viewer will encounter recurring characters—scammers, victims, and scam-beaters and parallel edits, scenarios, and virtual fictions.

Throughout this body of work, Hadjithomas and Joreige probe into the structures of belief and storytelling: they unfold a complex set of relationships marked by intimacy, trust, faith, greed, and desire, all in relation to the internet and technology.

Hadjithomas and Joreige (both b. 1969, Beirut, Lebanon) live and work in Beirut and Paris. They have collaborated as filmmakers and artists since 1997. Their award winning films such as *A perfect day*, *Je Veux Voir (I Want to See)* and *The Lebanese Rocket Society* have been shown all over the world. Their photographs and installations have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Victoria & Albert Museum, London; SF MoMA, California; New Museum and Guggenheim, New York and numerous biennales including the last Venice Biennale...

To learn more about their work visit: www.hadjithomasjoreige.com

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige: I Must First Apologize... is organized in collaboration with Villa Arson, Nice, France; and HOME, Manchester, UK; and is curated by Eric Mangion for Nice, Omar Kholeif and Sarah Perks for Manchester, and Henriette Huldish, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA.

The exhibition is accompanied by *The Rumours of the World: Re-thinking Trust in the Age of the Internet*, a new publication edited by Omar Kholeif and published by Sternberg Press, with special contributions from Nicolas Auray, Finn Brunton, Norman M. Klein, Franck Leibovici, Laura U. Marks, Jacques Rancière, Rasha Salti, Uzma Rizvi, Omar Kholeif, Henriette Huldish, Sarah Perks, Eric Mangion, and the artists.

Support for this exhibition has been generously provided by the MIT School of Architecture + Planning, John Makhoul, and the Cultural Service of the French Consulate in Boston, with additional support from the Council for the Arts at MIT, the Office of the Associate Provost at MIT, Terry & Rick Stone, the MIT List Visual Arts Center Advisory Committee, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and many generous individual donors. Special thanks to CRG Gallery, New York.



Public Programs

Thursday, February 18, 6-8PM

Public Reception

February 12 – February 20, 2016

Harvard Film Archive Film Series

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige - Lost Films and Mediations

This film screening organized by the Harvard Film Archive (HFA) is presented to coincide with the List Center's exhibition.

Screenings take place at the Carpenter Center, Harvard University, 24 Quincy St., Cambridge.

For more info: <http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/>

Film Schedule

Friday, February 12, 7PM

A Perfect Day (Yawmon akhar)

Directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

With Ziad Saad, Julia Kassar, Alexandra Kahwagi

France/Lebanon/Germany 2005, 35mm, color, 88 min.

Arabic with English subtitles

Khiam 2000-2007, The Film, 9 PM

Documentary, 2008, digital video, 104 min.

Arabic with English subtitles.

Saturday, February 13, 7PM

I Want to See (Je veux voir/Badi Chouf)

Directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

With Catherine Deneuve, Rabih Mroué

Lebanon/France 2008, 35mm, color, 75 min.

French and Arabic with English subtitles

Monday, February 15, 7PM

Rounds (Barmeh)

Directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. With Rabih Mroué

Lebanon/France 2001, digital video, color, 8 min.

Arabic with English subtitles

The Lost Film (El film el mafkoud)

Directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Lebanon/France 2003, digital video, color, 43 min.

Arabic with English subtitles



Friday, February 19, 7PM
Special Event Tickets \$12
Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in Person

Aida, Save Me

Performance by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, 60 min., Multimedia, in English

"During the Beirut premiere of our second feature film *A Perfect Day*, an extraordinary incident, 'unbelievable but true', was to disrupt the film release and resonate strangely vis-a-vis our work. A series of disappearances followed. " This story measures the distance between recognition and representation of oneself, and recounts this adventure whereby fiction has, all of a sudden, taken the appearance of a document."

Ashes (Ramad)

Directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. With Rabih Mroué, Nada Haddad, Neemat Salamé
France/Lebanon 2003, 35mm, color, 26 min.
Arabic with English subtitles

Saturday February 20 at 7pm
Special Event Tickets \$12
Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in Person

The Lebanese Rocket Society

Directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
Lebanon/France 2013, DCP, color, 92 min.
Arabic & French with English subtitles

About the MIT List Visual Arts Center

Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with a space to freely experiment and push existing boundaries. As the contemporary art museum at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the List presents a dynamic program of six to nine special exhibitions in its galleries annually, a program of evolving site-specific work by emerging artists known as the List Projects, as well as a broad range of educational programs, events, and publications. The List also maintains and adds to MIT's permanent art collection; commissions new works through the MIT Percent-for-Art program, a collection of more than 50 site-specific artworks throughout the campus; and oversees the Student Loan Art Program, which lends more than 600 works of art annually to MIT undergraduate and graduate students.

Originally named the Hayden Gallery, MIT established this center for the visual arts in 1950 to provide a dedicated structure upon which to build the Institute's existing relationship to the arts. It was renamed the List Visual Arts Center in 1985 in recognition of a gift from Vera and Albert List, and relocated to its current expanded location in the Wiesner Building on the campus of MIT, which was designed by MIT alumnus I.M. Pei (B.S. Architecture, 1940) and Partners Architects. In 2015 the List Visual Arts Center celebrated 30 years as MIT's contemporary art museum.



Open hours are: Tues-Wed: 12-6 PM; Thurs: 12-8 PM; Fri- Sun: 12-6 PM
Closed Mondays and major holidays.

For more information: listart.mit.edu

