

## ***I MUST FIRST APOLOGISE...*** ***JE DOIS TOUT D'ABORD M'EXCUSER...*** **JOANA HADJITHOMAS & KHALIL JOREIGE**

Filmmakers and visual artists, **Joana Hadjithomas** and **Khalil Joreige** build their work questioning the writing of history, the production of knowledge and imaginaries, as well as the contemporary modes of narrative making. While rooted on their experience in their own country, Lebanon, it nonetheless transcends borders.

*I Must First Apologise...* their exhibition at the Villa Arson is the outcome of ongoing research, since 1999, on junk and spam e-mail, specifically, advance-fee frauds and scam messages. They have collected, archived, and studied more than 4,000 of these over time. These mails are the electronic or cyber iteration of an old genre that dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (referred to as the Jerusalem letter) and still use the same structure today: a person claims to possess a large sum of money that s/he needs to transfer urgently. A substantial percentage of this money is promised to the person who accepts to help with this, invariably, designated as the only trustworthy person around. If the "victim" chooses to accept, they are then required to gradually pay sums of money intended to cover various imaginary fees before the transfer is effective. Ultimately that transfer never really happens.

Also known as "the Nigerian scam" as a notable number have originated from the country, these frauds have been surprisingly efficient as thousands of people still get conned each year, and hundreds of millions of currencies robbed, sometimes leading to murder and suicide.

How can anyone actually believe these mails ? What exactly motivates this belief ? The scams prey on people's gullibility, and as to better abuse them, weave a plausible reality, rooted in news, or real events, referring to existing conflicts and usurping famous individuals' identities. They are written in the first person, structured like monologues, ranging from confessions of a political figure's wife or child, sometimes those of a notorious dictator, tapping into what seems to be an endless supply of stories.

One comes supposedly across Yasser Arafat's wife, the former Tunisian First Lady, Kadhafi's lawyer, Mubarak's eldest son, PKK leader Ocalan's brother, Liberian president Charles Taylor's wife, the son of Guinea-Bissau's General Assumane Hani, the children of the Ivorian Colonel Coulibaly, Nenita Villaran the widow of the former Minister of finances of the Philippines, the secretary of Khodorkovski, the Ukrainian billionaire but also American army officers in Iraq, anonymous widows, or the children of cocoa merchants, gold-mine owners, ...

Read carefully, these scams tell a history of these past few years: the conflicts, wars, uprisings, shifts in the global economy, financial value fluctuations, raw materials, religious extremism, political changes, and even ecological disaster... These virtual archives outline a cartography of conflicts, a symptom of the state of the world, illustrating complex and often still colonial relationships between the North and the Global South, an imaginary of corruption but also a space for singularly poetic encounters and experiences.

The exhibition is a narrative itinerary, a film that unfolds through installation, sound, video, sculpture and drawing. Here, the artists transform and deconstruct abstract data and language into complex image representations. Here, one will encounter recurring lead characters, and minor ones, scammers, victims, scambeaters, who are eager to scam the scammers, parallel edits, original settings, essential props, scenarios and virtual fictions. Little by little, strange correspondences start to echo across these various different elements of the show.

For the artists, the matter of these scam messages, which is usually re-directed to one's trash folder on computers, unravels a space for transformation. Hadjithomas and Joreige question both narrative and artistic forms produced by the Internet and the relationship to contemporary history, economic and political contexts, as well as art and systems of representation. Collectively, this work explores the odd faith that leads us to believe in the power of images and stories.

### **PRACTICAL INFORMATIONS**

Exhibition from July 6<sup>th</sup>  
to October 13<sup>th</sup> 2014

Open every day except Tuesday  
from 2 PM to 7 PM in July and August,  
from 2 PM to 6 PM in September  
and October.

Open July 14 and August 15  
Free admission.

English guided tour on request.

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Press kit to podcast  
on www.villa-arson.org  
(Espace presse)

Visit for press members  
on July 5<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM.

**READ MORE ABOUT**

Joana Hadjithomas  
et Khalil Joreige  
<http://hadjithomasjoreige.com/>  
et  
<http://www.insituparis.fr/>

Curator : Eric Mangion

This exhibition is realised in partnership with HOME (Manchester - GB), with the support of the Galerie In Situ Fabienne Leclerc (Paris) and of the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.

The installation *It's all Real* receives the support of the FNAGP (Fonds National des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques) ; *The Rumor of the World* is produced with the support of FUTURUM association and Espace Khiasma and *A Letter can Always Reach its Destination* with the one of The Abraaj Group Art Prize.

On the occasion of the exhibition, the artists conceive with L'ECLAT a film program about spam messages, which will become later a publication, and propose on Sunday, July 6<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 pm, an outdoor projection in the villa garden of the film " The Lebanese Rocket Society " (France/Lebanon, 2013, 1h35).

Forthcoming publication with Presses du réel : a collection of texts by the artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, an anthology from the end of the 1990s to today, revealing their relation to art, image, cinema, the writing of history, and lastly a development regarding their latest project on junk emails from the Internet.



"The Rumor of the World", 2014. Video installation, 23 screens, 38 HD movies, variable durations.



"A Letter can Always reach its Destination", 2012. Video installation. Courtesy The Abraaj Group Art Prize.



"Geometry of Space", 2014. Sculpture, stretched steel, 80 x 80 x 80 cm



"2008, A Matrix", 2014. Wood mould, 200 strips of wood, 8 blocks, 1,10 x 1,10 x 1,10 m.

La Villa Arson is a public administrative establishment under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. It is supported by the Région Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur, the Conseil Général des Alpes-Maritimes and the City of Nice.

La Villa Arson is a member of BOTOX[S] - [www.botoxs.fr](http://www.botoxs.fr), of dca association française de développement des centres d'art - [www.dca-art.com](http://www.dca-art.com), and of ANdÉA association nationale des écoles des écoles d'art - [www.andea.fr](http://www.andea.fr)



"It's all Real : Sasha", 2014. Video installation, 2 HD synchronised screens.



"(DE)SYNCHRONICITY", 2014. Video installation, 4 synchronised screens.

For all images : courtesy The artists and Galleries In Situ Fabienne Leclerc (Paris), CRG (New York), The Third Line (Dubai).

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