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JOANA HADJITHOMAS & KHALIL JOREIGE:  
**I MUST FIRST APOLOGISE...**



**HOME**

**12 SEP - 1 NOV**



**JOANA HADJITHOMAS & KHALIL JOREIGE: I MUST FIRST APOLOGISE...**

*Curated by Omar Kholeif and Sarah Perks*

*Co-produced with Villa Arson, Nice, and MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge USA*

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## INTRODUCTION

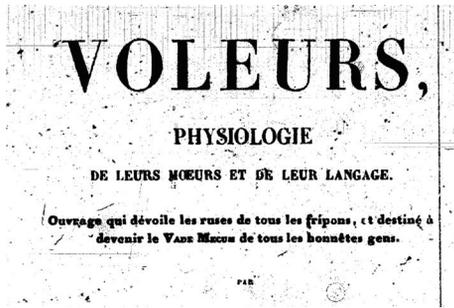
This major new exhibition from Beirut-based artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige explores the history of online spam and scamming through film, sculpture, photography and installation.

Giving a face to the ambiguous and hidden voices found in junk email, Joana and Khalil create an immersive world that seeks to challenge how we think about the world of scamming. How do we connect and form relationships with individuals who we've never met? How does this challenge our ideas of believing things at face value?

Since 1999, Joana and Khalil have collected and studied more than 4,000 scams in the form of junk emails. Written in the first person and structured like monologues, the spam messages often usurp famous individuals' identities, posing as the children or wives of politicians, or of notorious dictators claiming to possess a large sum of money they need to transfer urgently. The scammers base themselves on a plausible reality, rooted in news or real events, often referring to present-time conflicts with the aim to manipulate people's gullibility. A substantial amount of this money is promised to the person who agrees to help - a stranger nominated as the only trustworthy person. Also known as the Nigerian scam, as they have often originated from that country, these frauds have been surprisingly efficient to the extent that thousands of people still get conned each year, and hundreds of millions of currencies are robbed, sometimes leading to murder and suicide.

The artists map out a genealogy of online scamming, revealing a complex world where greed and desire question traditional ethics. As the narrative unfolds, a new picture of the world is presented, one where the victim and the scammer have paradoxical relationships. Through these tales, a map emerges, a chronicle of conflicts, a strange history of our contemporary time, but also a place of singular encounters and poetic experiences.

*I must first apologise...* acts as a narrative itinerary, a film that unfolds in the shape of installations, sounds, videos, sculptures and drawings. You will encounter recurring lead characters and minor ones, scammers, victims, scambeaters eager to scam the scammers, parallel edits, scenarios and virtual fictions.



## ● THE JERUSALEM LETTER

*Digital prints, photo prints on archive paper, 2014*

The narratives produced by the scams are part of a literary tradition known as the Jerusalem Letter. The Jerusalem Letters were a hoax originating in France at the end of the 18th century, telling stories of lords and their servants fleeing the events of the French Revolution who were looking to retrieve a treasure with the help of the recipient, seemingly the "only remaining trustworthy person". In his book, *The Thieves (Les voleurs, 1836, subtitled A study that reveals all of the ruses used by thieves, and destined to become the vade mecum of all honest men)*, Eugène-François Vidocq strips down the mechanisms by which the ruses operated. According to him, the letters talked about nostalgia for the ancient regime, a sentiment felt by some after the French Revolution. The name, The Jerusalem Letters, originates from the fact that most of the con artists were imprisoned near Paris, in the Bicêtre jailhouse, partially located in rue de Jerusalem.

Their dissemination took various forms, first circulating by word of mouth, then by letters, and developing in the 20th century in the form of printed or photocopied fax. Finally they have undergone a remarkable evolution with the rise of the internet, to be widely distributed via email, establishing a contemporary version of the scam two centuries later.



## ● THE RUMOUR OF THE WORLD

*Video installation, 17 screens, 100 loudspeakers, 38 HD digital videos. Variable lengths, 2014*

Non-professional actors of various ages and origins recite scams and stories directly to the viewer. These faces and voices are spread out onto 17 screens and 100 loudspeakers, weaving a network and chorus of voices. The chorus starts to fade when the viewer approaches a screen. Only at this distance does the scam, related by a single individual, reveal itself. Whereas the original scams were sent out in a blind and collective manner, here they are relayed directly to the observer.

As with theatre, the spectator subscribes to the actor's performance rather than reality. For an instant, the monologues seem credible, until the character mentions money, immediately throwing doubt on their authenticity and blurring the line between truths and lies.

Can these emails, often marred by the comical inaccuracies of Google Translate, become a source of serious literary material? Can we regard them not just as scams but as works of fiction in their own right? As the exhibition pieces them together, all these faces and tales make up *The Rumour Of The World*.



## GEOMETRY OF SPACE

*Stretched oxidised steel sculptures, scam atlases, murals, 2014*

In an attempt to make their scams convincing and believable to the victims, scammers use information and facts from recent political, religious and economic events. They choose countries where corruption seems plausible for them to locate their stories - focussing on Africa, Asia, Russia or the Arabic world. As a result, these scams draw a map of contemporary conflicts and revolutions, reflecting the state of the world, and suggest an alternative way of writing a country or region's history.

A series of sculptures and drawings track the geographic circulation and physical journeys of over two hundred scam emails sent over the course of a year. The sculptures give physical shape to the virtual network, as well as chronicling the events charted in a year of scams.

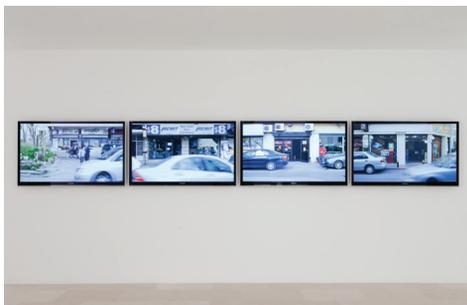
The two sculptures correspond with two prolific years in internet scamming, 2005 and 2008. For each, the dated and localised trajectories around the globe are drawn on the walls of the spaces, chronologically. Two 'scam atlases' are also presented, gathering all the selected emails for those two years.



## FIDEL

*HD digital video, 11 mins 48 secs, 2014*

Amongst the non-professional actors who were cast to act in *The Rumour of the World* (see page 2), one man from Lebanon appeared to be very familiar with the scam that he was asked to memorise. Fidel explained that he had been a scammer in Nigeria in the past, before coming to Lebanon. In a short video, he agrees to speak about the different steps scammers undertake to bait their victim. From the manner of speech to the accessories (a Rolex watch or Armani shoes for example) and the choice of location, everything about the scam is staged, almost like a film in the making.



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## (DE)SYNCHRONICITY

*Four synchronised HD digital videos, 2 mins 30 secs, 2014*

Internet cafes are a constantly evolving network where anyone is allowed to invent a life, anonymously shielded behind their computer.

In this piece, four synchronised shots show four different Lebanese internet cafés. People come and go between them (played by sixteen actors, including Fidel), encountering one another both physically and virtually, moving from one scam to the next. Some appear and disappear quickly, while others engage in a strange choreography, walking through one screen to another, before disappearing entirely.

All those who enter the internet cafes become prisoners, trapped within the screens, while the cyber café network evolves progressively, redefining the ideas of here and there, of mobility and immobility.



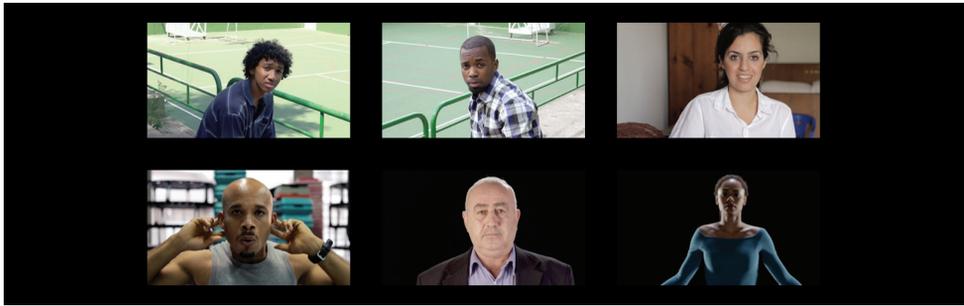
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## THE TROPHY ROOM

*Concrete, glass and photographs, photographic prints on rolls, 2014*

In response to the scams, a group of individuals calling themselves scam baiters or scam beaters, originating mainly in the United States, have decided to fight against the scammers. Their aim is to scam the scammer, by answering the emails and playing along in exchanges that can last for months. The objective is to waste the scammers' time and money. The strategy also includes tricking them into performing bizarre and humiliating actions. These include asking the scammers for proof of 'good faith' by completing a questionnaire, dressing up in costume (including a medieval knight, clown, rock star or even Jesus Christ) or completing a task (painting a portrait of a dog, sculpting a wooden computer keyboard, remaking a Monty Python sketch or getting their arm tattooed). Regardless of how absurd the requests become the scammers' will to believe always remains. This game can be very cruel, blurring the lines of credulity, abuse, power and capital, developing a strange link that shifts every role in the story.

The collected material (videos, photographs, paintings, sculptures, performances etc) are called 'trophies' by the scam beaters, and are exhibited in this 'trophy room' evoking a strange virtual museum, inspired by a scenography of Lina Bo Bardi, produced in the Sao Paulo museum for André Malraux's *Le Musée imaginaire* (Museum without walls). In the exhibition, photographs of these 'trophies' are shown alongside the correspondence between scammers and scam beaters. These exchanges are detailed by the scam beaters and bragged about as achievements and adventures, complete with twists and suspense.



## IT'S ALL REAL

During the filming of *The Rumour of the World* (see page 2) in Lebanon, and meeting the various non-professional actors, Joana and Khalil came across a range of individuals with incredible stories. They were predominantly immigrants with no choice but to leave their country and live as temporary exiles, seeking refuge or a job, aspiring for a better life. Some were labourers or domestic workers, some received social insurance, others didn't. Born 'undocumented' in Lebanon, they struggled to obtain legal papers and move around freely.

With the exception of Fidel (see page 4), none of them were scammers. Yet their stories are similar to those of the scammers, including tales of economic woe and problems with migration. In their own way, they embody the feeling of displacement triggered by the scams and endure constant upheavals between cultures, religions and living situations.

The series of videos, under the overarching title of *It's All Real*, give a voice to these people who are often hidden from society.

### OMAR AND YOUNES

*Video installation, 2 synchronized HD videos, 14 mins 50 secs, 2014*

Two teenagers, Omar and Younes, are illegal immigrants born in Lebanon to African fathers and Asian mothers, who dream of the wider world. They are part of a generation that questions its affiliation, origins, identity, and position. Through a split-screen, the installation reflects their entrapment, isolation and solitude, as well as their aspirations. Their own territory is the basketball court where they meet every day. They show family photos - traces of the past - and talk about their lives, expressing their torment, but also contemplate the future and their faith in things to come.

### TAMARA

*HD digital video, 8 mins 47 secs, Monastery of Saint Charbel, HD digital video, 2 mins 19 secs, 2014*

Tamara, a young Iraqi doctor of Christian faith, was forced to flee Baghdad and lives in Lebanon as a refugee. She now works in a 'christotherapy' centre, curing drug addicts through prayer and invocation of Christ. Her smile is unsettling, as she constantly repeats that she is happy, refusing to acknowledge her victim status and hanging onto her beliefs. She presents her faith as a new identity, in opposition with the scientific approach she defended not long ago. She establishes a link between her fictitious presence in the exhibition and her real one, claiming that life is like a movie.

### FIDEL

*HD video, 3 mins 38 secs, 2014*

The former scammer, Fidel, explains his trajectory and how, filled with remorse, he gave up this activity, moving from Nigeria to Lebanon, where he works as a sports coach and occasionally as a stripper.

### ADIB

*HD digital video, 50 secs, 2014*

Adib, a Syrian who recently fled his country and arrived in Lebanon, like more than a million and a half of his fellow countrymen, doesn't act as he cannot speak. He looks at the camera, mute, staring helplessly. His gaze becomes a language, his only way of speaking.

### SASHA

*Video installation, 2 synchronised HD digital projections, 4 mins 23 secs, 2014*

Born to a Russian mother and Nigerian father, Sasha lives in Lebanon but is torn between her dual origins. As a dancer, she chooses to express her feelings in a strange choreography. She appears to be dislocated and dismembered in an agitated movement that seems like an attempt to recompose the body. Mirroring the cycle of life which is made up of collapses and revivals, she falls, gets back up, disperses herself then finds the strength to re-assemble again.

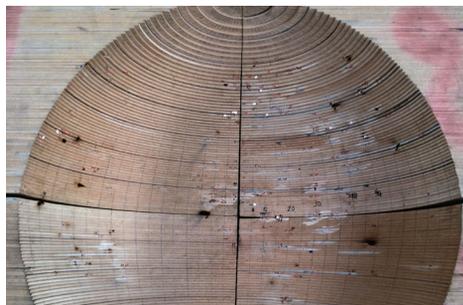


## ● A LETTER CAN ALWAYS REACH ITS DESTINATION

*Video installation, 2 synchronised HD digital  
videos, holographic screen, 122 mins, 2014*

The video title is a reference to Jacques Lacan's seminar around Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, with comments by Slavoj Žižek, who claims that "when one receives a letter, one instantly feels as the recipient of this letter. Even if one were not, one becomes it. Thus, a letter always reaches its destination". This installation echoes *The Rumour of the World*, featuring the same cast of non-professional actors. They interpret the scam emails, embodying them, making them tangibly audible and visible.

Standing side by side, the characters rotate on a screen at the back of the room. One at a time, they step out from the line-up and tell an individual story, moving from one reality to the other. As they step forward, they appear on a second screen, like a hologram. The superimposed screens generate spectral presences, uncertain and virtual. Its starting point is an absence – a virtual communication through emails – and then through the actors' presence and performance, attempts to impulse life into an abstract fantasy.



## ● ...ABOUT LOVE

*Ghost, 2014*

Usually, the victims of these scams remain anonymous and hidden. The ghost that haunts this exhibition represents the thousands of people scammed by these emails and who have lost a lot of money. You could wonder how it's still possible to fall for these scams, and yet the victims are a lot closer to us than we think.

In an unexpected coincidence, the artists learned of a close friend who had fallen victim to a scam. He refused to accept advice, repeating relentlessly, "No, my situation is different, it's not the same" just like a love story or an addiction. This is true for a number of scam victims who believe they were chosen specifically by the stranger who is writing to them from far away because "they are the only remaining trustworthy person".

## 2008, A MATRIX

*Wood sculpture, 200 strips of wood,  
soundtrack, 2014*

The matrix is the wooden cast from which the steel sculptures that form *Geometry of Space* (see page 3) were made. It evokes planet Earth, tracing the trajectory of the scams. A representative voice is heard for all the countries where the scams and encounters happened. Beyond the scams, the victims, the scammers, scam beaters and actors are linked together, tracing a network, a virtual constellation, of various histories, both political and artistic.



## BIOGRAPHY

Filmmakers and visual artists, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige build their work questioning historiography, the production of knowledge, imaginaries, and narrative. Although rooted in their experiences in their own country of Lebanon, their work is recognised internationally. Their work encompasses fiction films, documentaries, photography and art installations which create strong thematic and formal ties between their different productions.

Their films are both documentaries (*Khiam, The Lost Film, The Lebanese Rocket Society*) and fictional narratives (*A Perfect Day, I Want To See*). Their work and research is inspired by stories kept secret from political documents, personal and family archives.

They have been exhibited in some of the most important international museums and biennials and their works are part of some major private and public collections.

[hadjithomasjoreige.com](http://hadjithomasjoreige.com)

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## CREDITS

This exhibition is co-produced in partnership with Villa Arson (Nice) and MIT List Visual Arts Center (Cambridge, USA), with the support of the Galerie In Situ Fabienne Leclerc (Paris), The Third Line (Dubai), CRG Gallery (New York) and 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 Rumour of the World* is produced with the support of FUTURUM association and Espace Khasma and *A Letter Can Always Reach Its Destination* with the support of The Abraaj Group Art Prize. All the works, with the exception of *A Letter Can Always Reach Its Destination*, are co-produced by Villa Arson.

*Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige: I must first apologise...* was first exhibited at Villa Arson, Nice, curated by Eric Mangion (Sun 6 Jul – Mon 13 Oct 2014). In February 2016, the exhibition will travel to MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, USA, curated by Henriette Huldish (Fri 19 Feb – Sun 17 Apr).

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## EVENTS

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### EXHIBITION TOURS

Sat 12 Sep & Sat 3 Oct (BSL),  
14:00

Free

An in-depth look at the exhibition asking why scam emails are still effective and what this says about the state of the world today.

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## PUBLICATION

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### THE RUMOURS OF THE WORLD: RE-THINKING TRUST IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

A new publication edited by Omar Kholeif entitled *The Rumours of the World: Re-thinking Trust in the Age of the Internet* will be published alongside the exhibition. Published by Sternberg Press and MIT List Center, HOME and Villa Arson it contains contributions from Nicolas Auray, Finn Brunton, Franck Leibovici, Laura U Marks, Rasha Salti, Uzma Rizvi, Omar Kholeif, Norman M Klein, Henriette Huldisch, Sarah Perks, Jacques Ranciere, Eric Mangion, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

Available for purchase in the HOME bookshop

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## ACCOMPANYING FILM PROGRAMME

To complement the exhibition Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige have worked with the HOME film programming team to curate a selection of films from the artists' back catalogue including shorts, documentaries and feature films. To complete the season, the artists have selected a screening of Alexander Payne's wonderfully touching *Nebraska*, a film which explores the exhibition's topic of scamming and the will to believe.

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## FILM

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### THE LOST FILM AND SELECTED SHORTS + Q&A (CTBA)

Sat 12 Sep, 16:00

Dirs Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

This specially selected programme of rarely seen shorts from artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige explores the breadth of their work from the documentary *The Lost Film*, in which the artists follow the trail of their first feature film which disappeared in Yemen, to the video piece *Rounds*, which presents an evocative portrait of Beirut through stories and sounds.

This screening will be followed by a post-screening Q&A with artist and director Khalil Joreige.

### Films featured in this compilation:

Ashes (2003, 26 mins)

Rounds (2001, 7 mins)

The Lost Film (2003, 42 mins)

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## FILM

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### NEBRASKA (15)

Sun 18 Oct, 18:00

Dir Alexander Payne/US  
2013/114 mins

Woody Grant is a prickly, aging father of two with advancing dementia. When he receives a letter notifying him of a massive sweepstake win he insists on making the journey to Nebraska to claim his prize. Woody's son David reluctantly agrees to the road trip and the drive takes them through Woody's old hometown, where word of his windfall spreads through like wildfire. Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* perfectly balances comedy, drama and pathos, and features an excellent performance from Bruce Dern as the irascible Woody Grant.

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## FILM

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### I WANT TO SEE (JE VEUX VOIR) (CTBA)

Sun 1 Nov, 16:00

Dirs Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige/FR LB 2008/  
French, Arabic w Eng ST  
Catherine Deneuve, Rabih Mroué, Brigitte Curmi

This poignant road movie sees French screen icon Catherine Deneuve journeying through war torn Lebanon, with the enigmatic actor Rabih Mroué as her guide. *I Want to See* is a stunning homage to cinema, bristling with a fervour that transcends the devastation of the Middle East conflict.

IMAGINE BECOMING ALLERGIC TO EVERYTHING YOU ENJOY...

# SAFE

**SAT 14 NOV 2015 – SUN 3 JAN 2016**

**PREVIEW FRI 13 NOV**

Curated by Louise O'Hare and Sarah Perks

This major new group exhibition takes Todd Haynes' influential film masterpiece, *Safe* (1995) as the starting point for a series of new commissions in moving image, sculpture, print, writing and performance.

## HOME PROJECTS

**DR. ME: CHOICE CUTS**

**FRI 11 SEP – SUN 8 NOV**

**GRANADA FOUNDATION GALLERY,  
LEVEL 1 AND 2**

The second HOME Projects is a selection of work by DR.ME, taken from their recent year-long project, *365 Days of Collage*, in which they created a different collage for every day of the year, inspired by a stay in the home of collage artist Paolo Giardi.

## THEATRE

**LA MÉLANCOLIE DES  
DRAGONS**

**THU 1 – SAT 3 OCT**

A unique masterpiece, combining performance and visual art in a truly enchanting mix. After touring the world, it comes to HOME for its UK premiere.

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