

You Received a New Memory

curated by Fabian Flückiger

Miriam Laura Leonardi
You Received a New Memory

Atlas, Brussels

August 20–September 19, 2021

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Zurich-based artist Miriam Laura Leonardi (b. 1985) interrogates objects of desire, continuously examining their statements for tensions and expectations typical of the zeitgeist. For her first solo show in Belgium, she has conceived a sculptural landscape where various information loops and symbols collide. The exhibition title **You Received a New Memory** reads like a message on a smartphone, one that appears only to be quickly suppressed by the next new message. In the fast and furious over-inscription of news, Leonardi formulates a stance that takes a critical approach to questions of the environment and the media.

With this text in hand, you are entering the exhibition space on the first floor of the former warehouse of the beer brewery Atlas, built during the transition from art nouveau to art deco in the early twentieth century. Upon entering the space, 900 square meters large, you are immersed in the work **Tangle Trap: The Glimpse into Chaos or Essence**, a structure of fishing nets and fishnet stockings. They spread out like a spider web in this ruin of modernism and make the space seem like a trap or a place of retreat that symbolically takes up the complexity and confusion of the online media that surround us.

The fishnet stockings are initially a garish green, the color that the musician Billie Eilish veiled herself in from her hairline to her toenails before her image transformation as a rejection of the sexualized gaze on her body. Just as Eilish has different phases when it comes to her image, information in general is mutable and displaces other information in terms of their novelty, so that the memory of the prior state soon fades.

I don't know what it's like for you. Whether you get yourself caught up in the trap, the digital rabbit hole of endless newsflashes, or whether you have comfortably set up a place for yourself in the cocoon of a contradictory-free media bubble. You can answer the question quite simply by deciding whether you define the time spent online or if you are defined by the draw of the constant flow of spectacle. The jelly-fish-like lamps **Member** present the ambivalence of an anodyne gentleness and a toxicity, as if they stood for the unending stream of newsflashes; upon contact with their poisonous tentacles, you are arrested in passivity, as if gazing at the face of the Gorgon Medusa.

The ocean, the animals, outer space, all have been drawn and redrawn, imagined, categorized, and visually quantified, often detached from the “when” and placed in a non-time. But all this loving attention seems at odds with what many have argued is a current inability to speak with visual clarity and power to the when of climate change, extinctions, pollution, and the other evidences of environmental devastation. What might it mean if visual culture cannot be mobilized to address the most altering events in the story of humanity?

Alexis L. Boylan, *Visual Culture*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2020, (epub), p. 33.

Whatever the answer might be, you move onward and perhaps find yourself asking what a fishing net and fishnet stockings have in common. Is their affinity merely in the material and the mesh of the net or does it also involve the problematic of what is captured how? In both nets, bodies are captured, those of people and those of maritime animals. In the rapid sequence of push messages on our smartphones, the proximity of sexism and the exploitation of the world's oceans is easily conceivable. Perhaps the fishing nets and fishnet stockings can be brought together metaphorically and allow us to recognize a similar avarice and patriarchal structure in the exploitation of the world's oceans and the exploitation of the female body.

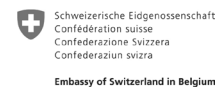
In the second set of installation landscapes **Tangle Trap: Je m'étais couchée avec le téléphone**, the nets are pale rose and garish pink. They contrast with the green and symbolize a feminine-connoted color in a heteronormative system that still strongly shapes our world, although for some time parts of our society have been attempting to change the structure of our way of life together to make it more gender-neutral, freer, more ecological, and more inclusive. The title of the work is taken from a passage from *The Telephone Book* (1991) by Avital Ronell, where Ronell describes how technology takes over society and how the telephone is an object that stands for the physical absence of a person. But the book also describes the refusal of a call or the cancelling of certain callers, whereby technology and issues of gender or identity politics can be linked and thought further. With the introduction of the iPhone in 2007, Ronell's theses about the telephone as a technology of dependence, transmission, connection and surveillance has dramatically increased in the shortest period of time.

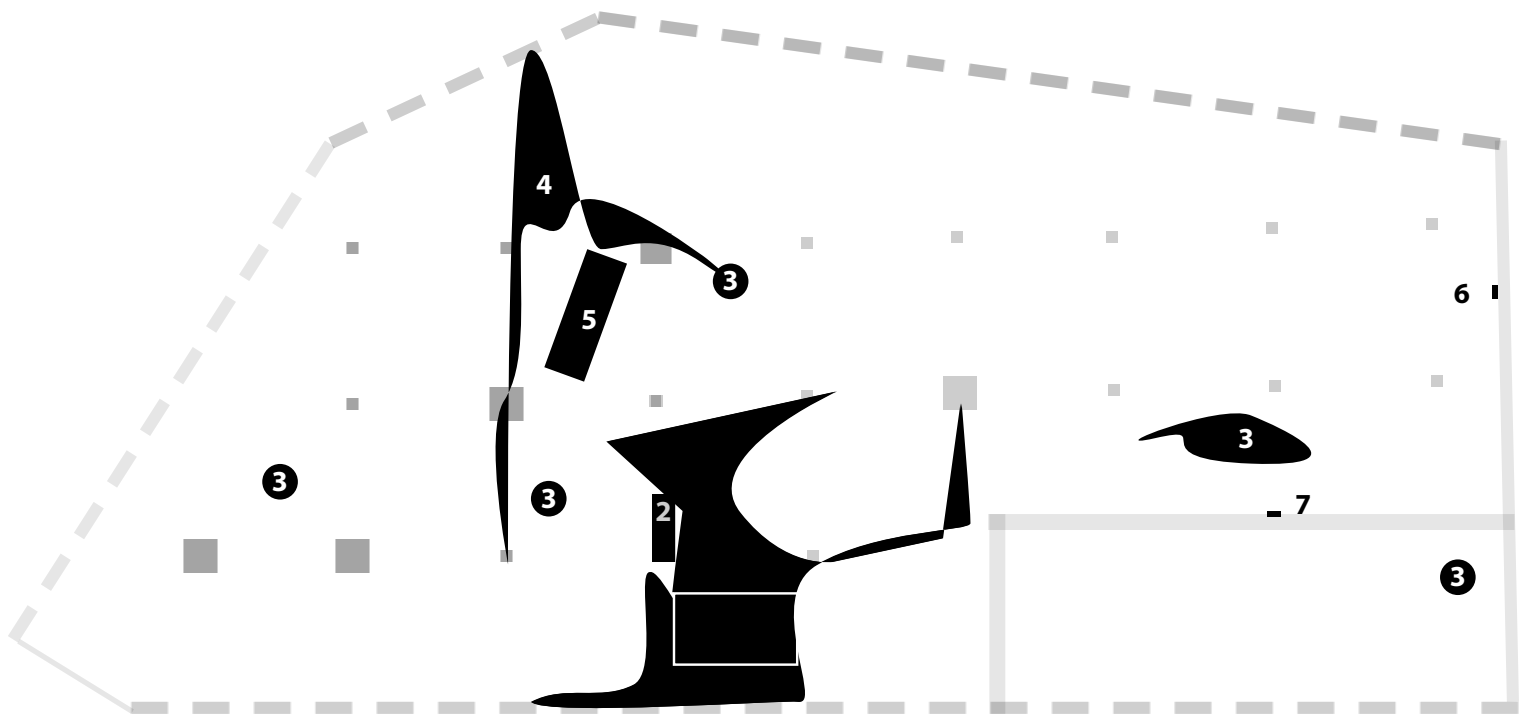
Maybe you have already seen the video appropriated by Leonardi **Corruption, Anger, Chaos, Incompetence, Lies, Decay** on your smartphone, that in the meantime operates like an extension of your body. The video is a modified screen recording by the artist. It attests to the polarization of society and comes from an online platform of the New York Times. Here, the newspaper published several articles about the imminent crisis of American democracy during the presidential election of 2020. The design of the platform is revealing for the increasing tendency of the mainstream media to use infotainment to reach a larger readership, recalling the work of media critics like Neil Postman and his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

For *You Received a New Memory*, Leonardi included her work on paper **Transformation in Time**. In 2018, she

listed modes of thought, social structures, scientific realms and technologies that have over time changed. She contrasts her list with rather static values and questions whether morality, ethics, the natural scientific laws or our libido will also develop further. In expanding this work for this exhibition, Leonardi takes up power structures and identity codes and addresses the question of *whose loss is who else's gain*.

The exhibition is supported by Swisslos Fonds des Kantons Solothurn, Ernst und Olga Gubler-Hablützel Stiftung, Embassy of Switzerland in Belgium, Galerie Maria Bernheim, Burgergemeinde Bern.





Checklist

- 1
Tangle Trap: The glimpse into Chaos or Essence, 2021
 Fishnets, fishnet stockings, thread, metal hardware
 dimension variable
- 2
Built and Re-Built, 2021
 Snow globe, acrylic
 8 x 6 x 12 cm
- 3
Member, 2021
 Papier maché, paste, printed textile ribbons, light bulb,
 cable
 each ca. 30 x 30 cm
- 4
Tangle Trap: Je m'étais couchée avec le téléphone, 2021
 Fishnets, fishnet stockings, thread, metal hardware
 dimension variable

- 5
Corruption, Anger, Chaos, Incompetence, Lies, Decay, 2021
 HD video, color, 4:3, loop, no sound
 0'51"

- 6
Transformation in Time, 2018
 Typewriter on paper, framed
 29.7 x 21 cm

- 7
Transformation in Time, 2021
 Typewriter on paper, framed
 29.7 x 21 cm

Miriam Laura Leonardi (b. 1985) studied photography at Gobelins, l'école de l'image, Paris and received her MFA at Zurich's Hochschule der Künste. Since 2021, she has been a Ph.D. Associate at Collegium Helveticum in Zurich. Her work has been presented in numerous solo and group shows internationally, including at Bel Ami (Los Angeles), Kunsthalle Bern (Bern), Kunsthalle Fri Art (Fribourg), Galerie Maria Bernheim (Zurich), Aguirree (Mexico City), Centre d'art contemporain (Geneva), Forde (Geneva), LUMA Westbau (Zurich), Istituto Svizzero (Rome), Marbriers 4 (Geneva), Plymouth Rock (Zurich) and in the context of alternative projects funded by the Swiss Institute in New York and Galerie Natalie Seroussi, Paris.

