

# JOAN

Nour Mobarak, *Dafne Phono*

June 30 – August 27, 2022

**Opening: Thursday, June 30, 5-8pm**

**Artist talk: Saturday, July 9, 2pm**

JOAN is pleased to present *Dafne Phono*, a newly commissioned sound installation by Los Angeles and Athens-based artist, Nour Mobarak — and the artist's first institutional solo show. Staged theatrically throughout the gallery, Mobarak's piece is an adaptation of the first opera, Ottavio Rinuccini and Jacopo Peri's *La Dafne*, written in 1598. It expands on the original conceit of opera as an experiment in making music from speech, continuing her ongoing investigation of voice as material.

In Mobarak's version of the opera, the libretto has undergone a series of translations, first from the original Italian into five other languages corresponding to each character, and then into English for an accompanying subtitle track. Four of the languages — Abkhaz, Chatino, Silbo Gomero, and Taa — were selected based on the richness of their morphophonology, with the aim of creating an opera with the widest possible palette of human vocal sounds. Italian and Latin are also used, on the basis of their relationship to the original libretto. From these, the subtitles were retranslated literally, line-by-line into English. When played together, the combined effect is one of "decreation," or a decoupling of speech and meaning.

The opera narrates the story of Daphne and Apollo from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The fable begins with Apollo boasting about his recent conquests. Out of malice, Cupid shoots two arrows — one "golden and sharp and gleaming" that causes Apollo to fall in love with Daphne, and the other "blunt, and tipped with lead" that makes Daphne despise him. He pursues her until, depleted, she implores the heavens to "change and destroy" her body, and is transformed into a laurel tree. Apollo continues his adulation of her, and declares the laurel a symbol of victory and triumph.

Written in 8 AD during a period of political transformation, *Metamorphoses* is widely regarded as a critique of the newly developing Roman Empire under Augustus Caesar, which had previously been a Republic, its peaceful way of life (*Pax Romana*) upheld by unacknowledged violence and corruption. The story of Daphne and Apollo can be read as a critique of love poetry, which belies the violence of love, silences the object of desire, and exalts the experience of the oppressor by disregarding and instrumentalizing the suffering of the oppressed. In Mobarak's adaptation, the story becomes a parable for a modern history of language and hegemony, her work a reflection on the homogenization of language and of bodies as creators of sound, speech, and music.

**Nour Mobarak** (b. 1985, Cairo, Egypt) lives and works in Los Angeles and Athens, Greece. Her works have been shown at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2021, 2019); KIM? Contemporary Art Centre, Riga (2021); Hakuna Matata Sculpture Garden, Los Angeles (2020); Museum of

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Contemporary Art San Diego (2020); Cubitt Gallery, London (2019); and Rodeo Gallery, London (2017). Her performances have taken place at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2020); the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2019); LAXART, Los Angeles (2019); Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2019); Potts Gallery, Los Angeles (2018); and Stadslimeit, Antwerp (2016); among others venues. She was invited to the inaugural Field Workshop: Artists-in-Residence program at the ICA Los Angeles (2021). Mobarak's music has been released by Recital (Los Angeles), Cafe Oto's TakuRoku (London), and Ultra Eczema (Antwerp), and is included in the Whitney Museum Library's Special Collections. Her poetry and other writing have appeared in *Triple Canopy*, *F.R. David*, *The Claudius App*, and the *Salzburg Review*, among others. Her first catalog *Sphere Studies and Subterranean Bounce* was published in 2021 by Recital.

This project is supported, in part, by a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant.

## Vocalists

Apollo: Renato Grieco (Italian)

Cupid: Arnou Argun (Abkhaz)

Dafne: Agnes |xaye (!xoon)

Ovid: Olivia O'Dwyer (Latin)

Venus: Don Eugenio Darias (Silbo Gomero)

Abkhaz Chorus: Liana Ebzhnou, Murman Guaramia, Fatima Kharzalia, and Gunda Osia

Chatino Chorus: Felix Daniel Peña Mendes, José Vasquez Canseco, Catalina Candelario Matias, and Claudia Garcia Baltazar

!xoon Chorus: Franco Tsame, John Djujui Klosi Barase, and Charity Tsame

Clarinet: Steve Kado

Italian translated by Tim Carter, Mattia Cappelletti, Francesca Fantappiè, and Nour Mobarak

Abkhaz translated by Astan Kudzhba

Chatino translated by Emiliana Cruz and Claudia García Baltazar

Latin translated by Julian Thomas Ooi

Spanish for Silbo Gomero translated by Nahui Garcia

!Xoon translated by John Djujui Klosi Barase and Franco Tsame, with input from other denizens of Corridor 17, Namibia