

## ***Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society***

**Maryam Jafri**

10.04.25 - 24.05.25

Matteo Cantarella is pleased to present *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, a solo exhibition by Copenhagen-based artist Maryam Jafri. The exhibition debuts new works from the series *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* alongside *BEER*, a multiple from the series *Generic Corner*, first exhibited by Jafri in her solo show of the same name at Kunsthalle Basel in 2015. The exhibition marks Jafri's first solo show with the gallery.

*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* is an ongoing series of works made from vintage computer keys and cardboard, where from afar the work spells one word but up close, another word comes into view. The series is named after the 1976 publication by Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, which mapped the evolution and meaning of over 100 words in the English language, highlighting their often complex and contested histories. Williams revealed language to be a site of social struggle, marked by the vicissitudes of class, gender/sexuality, ethnicity, race, geography, and generation. As Williams made clear, language is not static but continues to evolve, a tendency turbocharged by social media.

In the first work from the series, titled *Doom Loop*, the keys spell LOOP but up close, the word DOOM comes into view. Doom Loop refers to a self-reinforcing downward spiral. Originally an economic term that gained traction during the 2008 financial crisis, doom loop is now broadly used in other fields including climate studies, political science, and urban planning, as well as in everyday language. Taking her cue from Williams' seminal work, Jafri posits language as a cultural material that reflects dominant values of society but which is also capable of transcending them and able to narrate those political, social and economic struggles that are genealogically validated and inscribed in our cultural imaginary. Like post-war concrete poetry, which emerged in part as a political and poetic response to the degradation of language under fascism, this series comes during a similar moment when language is under attack once again by online (and offline) reactionary forces, the aim being to render language meaningless, incapable of clarifying, explaining or illuminating, untethering language to any shared sense of reality or human agency.

The work *BEER* (2015), a multiple from the *Generic Corner* series, consists of vintage unpressed beer cans, once a product of the generic brand line that appeared in supermarkets in the late 1970s across the United States. Generic brand products were a line of items developed to give consumers a low-cost alternative to everyday household items. The typical package design was a white label with black text merely identifying the contents, the idea being that by eliminating all design, marketing, and advertising costs, the savings could be passed directly onto the consumer. What now looks to us as rather appealing packaging from a design perspective, was once a form of stigmatization for those consumers who, not being able to afford the top shelf brands, had to get by with their generic counterparts. The phenomenon highlights a forgotten episode of vernacular consumer culture, with Jafri's work bringing forward the relationship of consumer products to questions of economic disparity, branding and speculation.

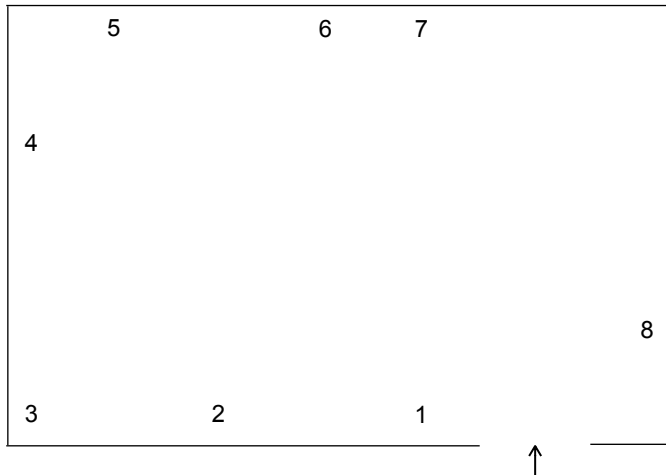
For over twenty years Maryam Jafri has worked across diverse media including video, installation, and photography, with a specific interest in questioning the cultural and visual representations of history and political economy and their impact on our quotidian experience.

**Maryam Jafri** lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark. Her work has been widely exhibited, including in solo shows at Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (US), Blaffer Museum of Art, Houston (US), Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (NL), Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (CH), Betonsalon, Paris (FR), Gasworks, London(UK), Kunshtal Aarhus (DK), Museet for Samtidskunst Roskilde (DK), Malmö Konstmuseum (SE), Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (AUS), Contemporary Art Gallery of Vancouver (CA) and elsewhere. Recent biennials include Front International (Cleveland Triennial), Sao Paulo Biennial, Venice Biennial (Belgian Pavilion), Manifesta 9, Shanghai, Taipei, Bucharest, Thessaloniki, and Quebec City Biennial, among others.

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1.

*DOOM LOOP (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
66.0 x 40.0 cm

2.

*ARSE HOLE (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
66.0 x 40.0 cm

3.

*NUT JOB (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
53.0 x 32.0 cm

4.

*SELF HELP (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
66.0 x 40.0 cm

5.

*SEX ISM (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
53.0 x 32.0 cm

6.

*BLUE PILL (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
66.0 x 40.0 cm

7.

*THE END (from the series Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society),*  
cardboard on alu-dibond, keyboard keycaps,  
53.0 x 32.0 cm

8.

*BEER (2015),* unpressed beer can, wooden  
frame, 20.0 x 28.7 x 3.0 cm (dimensions  
framed). Edition of 50 + 10 AP