

## Sara Niroobakhsh: Zaghareet

May 4 – September 2, 2019

Opening: Friday, May 10, 7 to 9 p.m.

Ululations, known in Arabic as *zaghareet*, are loud, rhythmical, high-pitched howls capable of expressing lamentation, joy or reverence. When presented by multiple voices, *zaghareet* recall the pagan worship of hidden gods that play just beneath the surface of our collective consciousness. Their piercing sound transports us to a time when language was at its source and the truths of the universe were expressed elementally.

Like the clapping of hands at the end of a performance, *zaghareet*'s trills can have a euphoric, commemorative connotation; like the playing of trumpets at a burial, the arresting wails can signal a community in mourning. From Rome to Istanbul and Jerusalem to Fez, women's *zaghareet* have pierced the air through the centuries for birth, love, and death, a primordial expression of group emotion. However, many western societies remain unaware of this multicultural cry and its symbolism and significance.

In Niroobakhsh's interactive, multi-channel video installation, eight women artists – Niroobakhsh alongside seven of her female colleagues, all of whom, like herself, are negotiating hybrid identities – perform regional and personal variations of the distinctive cry. Triggered by surrounding movement, the performers' videos start individually, responding to a visitor's route through the space, looping and overlapping in unique combinations. In this way Niroobakhsh invites visitors to be part of the chorus, to contribute to this act of speaking-beyond-language, and in doing so to consider the cultural importance and contemporary evolution of this cry.

This installation is part of Niroobakhsh's ongoing exploration of globalizing femininities through her engagement with contemporary cultural practices in Iran and the Arab Middle East, and their intersection with social, political and archetypal arenas.

Curated by Mahmoud Obaidi

Iranian-born artist Sara Niroobakhsh is internationally recognized for her performative and visual concepts that engage the globalizing feminine psyche. Working in video, photography, painting, and with found objects, Niroobakhsh evokes the feminine realm as she draws from the personal, mythological, and cultural. She explores themes of beauty, isolation, and fertility. Recent exhibitions of the artist's work have been held at the Czech China Contemporary Museum in Beijing, La Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, and South Korea's CICA Museum.

Mahmoud Obaidi is an Iraqi-Canadian artist and curator. After leaving Iraq in 1991, he obtained his Master of Fine Arts at the University of Guelph and went on to complete diplomas in new media and film at institutions in Toronto and Los Angeles. Obaidi's work may be found in many private and public collections and has been exhibited in museums and galleries globally, including the National Museum of Bahrain, Musée de l'Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, and the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul in Quebec. Through his curatorial work, Obaidi explores the hyphenated experiences of the next generation of global Middle Eastern artists.