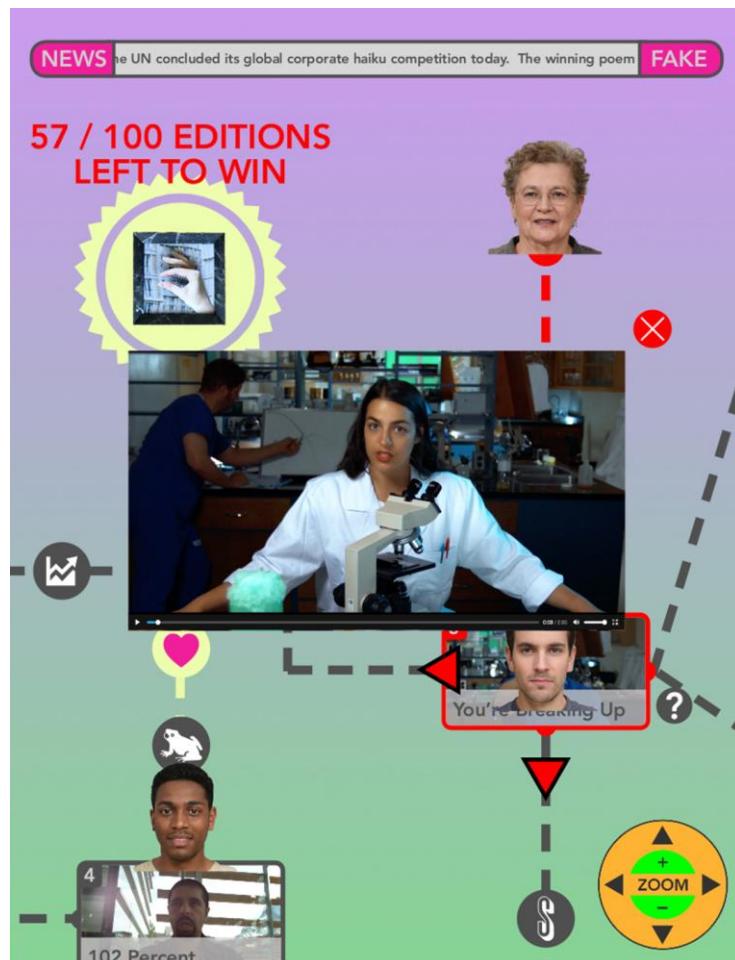


Neïl Beloufa

Digital Mourning

From 17 February to 18 July 2021



Neïl Beloufa, *Screen-Talk.com*, 2020-ongoing

Website with a mini-series, from video *Home is whenever I am with you*, 2014

Courtesy the artist, Bad Manner's, Paris/Miami/Ibiza, kamel mennour, Paris/London, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, Mendes Wood DM and ZERO..., Milan

From 17 February to 18 July 2021, Pirelli HangarBicocca presents Neïl Beloufa's solo exhibition. The French-Algerian artist is one of the leading voices of the past decade and a keen observer of our times, offering vivid representations of the world through films, videos, installations, and sculptures.

Avoiding direct judgements and forceful declarations, Beloufa successfully conveys a reality that, in its subtlety, is often awkward to behold, focusing on highly topical issues such as power relationships, the technological control, the perils of data collection, as well as on a possible collapse in the management of a pandemic.

The artist

Neïl Beloufa (b. 1985, Paris) is one the most powerful voices of the generation of artists born in the 1980s. His artistic research focuses on contemporary society and on how it is represented and mediated by digital interaction, often with the aim of exposing the control mechanisms that have become rooted in our daily lives. In his videos, feature films, sculptures, and technologically complex installations, Beloufa plays on the viewer's sensory experience, inviting them to reappraise their own beliefs and stereotypes. He addresses present-day issues that range from power relationships to digital surveillance, to data collection and nationalistic ideologies, to identity and a post-colonial understanding of the world.

Neïl Beloufa's work is strongly influenced by the world of the web, by videogames, by reality TV and political propaganda, using the vocabulary of the information age to lift the lid on the value system of a society permeated with digital technology, where everything, from food choices to human relationships is established on the basis of an algorithm. In this process, the artist refers to himself as an editor, an assembler, who puts together information that already exists only to break it down again and show us the outcome without making any moral judgment. His aim is to bring about a short-circuit within normal settings, to throw off track assumptions that are commonly accepted as true, and to restore the viewer's freedom to create new relationships and personal meanings. The viewers thus find themselves inside immersive installations that convey a fragmented vision of reality, a universe inhabited by pop-ups and live CCTV networks that are designed to reveal both the freedom of an apparently random system and the degree of control that underpins it.

The great present-day relevance of Neïl Beloufa's work is evident in his production process as much as in the scenarios he creates. His works are entirely realized in his studio, with the aim of creating an alternative model of economic sustainability based on a sharing of skills. This collective powerhouse creates works that closely reflect the contemporary world and, in some cases, even anticipate it, often addressing its most pressing and problematic issues. This is the case of **Screen Talk** (2020), an experimental project that transforms a video, *Home Is Whenever I'm With You* (2014), into a web series. In the video, the artist imagined a global pandemic and the race between competing medical laboratories to find a cure. This scenario, which he made up in 2014 as pure fiction, has taken on a completely new meaning today, being now enriched with references to how human relationships and communications have been transferred almost entirely into digital form.

The exhibition

Digital Mourning, curated by Roberta Tenconi, is the first major solo exhibition devoted to Neïl Beloufa in an Italian institution, and it stems from a reflection on the current times and on the concept of life in our digital world. Right from the title, the exhibition alludes to one of the most striking paradoxes of contemporary society, which is the existence in a technological world and its parallel disappearance. The association of the two words—"digital" and "mourning"—comes about in the encounter between an artificial world and the absence of life, in a dimension in which life itself is simulated by means of models specially created to understand its true essence.

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Playing on a combination and intermingling of genres, **Digital Mourning** is a complex new multimedia installation conceived specifically for the space of the Shed at Pirelli HangarBicocca, presenting, at the same time, a retrospective of Neil Beloufa's video works. The exhibition consists of a wide selection of films and video works that retrace the artist's career from his debut (with *Kempinski*, 2007) through to his most recent productions, few of which are projected inside multimedia installations originally designed for them by the artist. Together, these form part of a computerised activation and re-editing system that abolishes any hierarchy between the different types of information.

Resembling the scenario of an "amusement" park, the space embraces a large selection of works, including the artist's most relevant installations and walk-through sculptures. However, mimicking the current state of affairs, it is forbidden to use the "attractions" and the exhibition appears to come alive only through a series of narrative voices. In presenting the works and explaining the viewers what to see in each area, the narrators introduce and discuss different positions, from utopian aspirations to the opinions of the youngest generation. While making a new total artwork out of former works, the exhibition is as well adapting the way we consume culture these days, for example by playing with the flux of information and the attention span standard viewers have or by providing links to watch films directly at home.

Right from his first work, **Kempinski** (2007), Neil Beloufa has called conventions into question. Shot in Bamako, Mali, the video consists of a series of brief interviews in which the artist subtly breaks the stylistic rules of the genre. While maintaining the spirit of authenticity that is typical of documentaries, the dialogues between the participants describe a world totally devoid of any of the stereotypical ideas about the African continent. Instead, he creates fantastical, surreal scenarios simply by using the present tense to talk about a hypothetical future. This allegory of the contemporary world and its fragility can also be seen in the kinetic installation **People's Passion, transparency, mobility, all surrounded by water** (2018), which includes the homonymous video. The work is based on a series of interviews by the artist with the inhabitants of a new residential complex in North America, revealing all the artificiality inherent in the perception of lifestyle and wellbeing of the Western world. Equally powerful is the idea of the highly rhetorical reality presented in **World Domination** (2015), in which Neil Beloufa uses non-professional actors and role-playing to defend positions that are arbitrarily attributed. Projected onto the irregular surface of a motorised wall that moves on a track, the video shows five diplomatic tables and scenes where international issues such as obesity and financial investments are discussed, often ending in clear contradictions and calls for war. Lastly, the show presents a new expanded version of **La morale de l'histoire** (2019), made especially for this occasion. The immersive installation is conceived as a technological fairy-tale that tells the story of a camel and some fennecs who built a stone wall in the desert to shelter from the sun at the expense of a colony of ants. The work, which deliberately uses the narrative form of children's stories to create a metaphor of the capitalist economy, closes the exhibition and truly acts as a conclusion or summary for all the other stories and works.

The various installations turn **Digital Mourning** into an immersive environment, in which the impulses created by the images, sounds and lights are synchronised in a complex sequence that guides the viewer's movements. The switching on and off of one or more works at the same time creates a one of a kind choreography, in which some works come to life while others lie in frozen sleep. The rhythm of the narrative is set by the narrating voices, the so-called "Hosts" or "Ghosts," in which the audio channels are programmed to

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give the viewer “orders.” This means that, as the artist puts it, the public is “*in a free but uncomfortable position that should lead to thinking about what is shown instead of believing it*”. In creating this control system, Neïl Beloufa brings into question permeable concepts such as truth and fiction and shows how they interweave in the contemporary world, explaining their mechanisms as clearly as if he was describing the devices and wiring at the heart of his works.

What’s more, in the spring Neïl Beloufa will present his exhibition ***The Moral of the Story*** in the city center. The project is promoted by Fondazione Henraux and will comprise four previously unseen installations by the artist, on display in the amphitheater of the Apple Store in Piazza Liberty. The works, produced by Henraux in marble, will be on show both during the day and into the evening.

The catalogue

On the occasion of the ***Digital Mourning*** exhibition, Pirelli HangarBicocca is working as a partner for the first monographic catalogue ever published on the artist. The book, published by After 8 Books in Paris and designed by Olivier Lebrun, retraces Neïl Beloufa’s artistic career in over three hundred pages, describing his production methods as well as the work life in his studio. With a very rich array of illustrations and texts, including essays by Yilmaz Dziewior, Ruba Katrib, Jesse McKee, Guillaume Desanges, and Negar Azimi, the bilingual catalogue (English and French), will be published during the course of the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca.

The Exhibition Program

The exhibition forms part of the artistic program devised by the artistic director Vicente Todolí. Alongside it is on view at Pirelli HangarBicocca the exhibition “Short-circuits” dedicated to the artist Chen Zhen, that has been extended until 6 June 2021.

Neïl Beloufa

Neïl Beloufa is a French-Algerian artist born in 1985 in Paris, where he lives and works. He received an interdisciplinary training, combining visual arts, design, and cinema. As well as studying in Paris at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA) (2007) and at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (2009), he attended the Cooper Union in New York (2007) and the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, Los Angeles (2008), and studied film at the Le Fresnoy-National Contemporary Art Studio, Tourcoing, France (2009).

The institutions that have put on solo exhibitions of his works include the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2018), the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018 and 2012), the Pejman Foundation, Tehran (2017), the K11 Art Foundation, Shanghai, and MoMA Museum of Modern Art, New York (2016), the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2015), the Banff Centre, Canada, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and Fondation Ricard, Paris (2014), the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2013), and the New Museum, New York (2011).

His works have been shown at major group shows, including the Busan Biennale (2020), Venice Biennale (2019 and 2013), Biennale de l’Image en Mouvement, Centre d’Art Contemporain, Geneva (2018 and 2007), Taipei Biennial and Shanghai Biennale (2014), Biennale de Lyon, and Manifesta 8, Murcia (2010), and Prague International Triennial of Contemporary Art (2008).

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His films and videos have been exhibited at various international film festivals, including the Toronto International Film Festival, the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the London Film Festival and the Oberhausen Kurzfilmtage.

Among the finalists at the Artes Mundi and Nam June Paik awards (2016), and the Prix Marcel Duchamp (2015), Neil Beloufa has been awarded the Meurice Prize for Contemporary Art (2013), the Audi Talent Award (2011), the Agnès B. Studio Collector Award (2010), and the Grand Prize, the Prize of the Jury and the Arte Prize at the 57th and 54th Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (2011 and 2008).

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Pirelli HangarBicocca is a not-for-profit institution devoted to the promotion and production of contemporary art, reflecting Pirelli's corporate culture and its commitment to research, innovation, and the dissemination of contemporary art forms. Pirelli HangarBicocca puts on a rich programme of solo exhibitions by the most important international artists who have made their mark through research and experimentation, as well as a programme of cultural events and in-depth analyses, offering visitors free admission to the space.

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Info Sheet

Institution	Pirelli HangarBicocca
Artist	Neïl Beloufa
Title	“Digital Mourning”
Curated by	Roberta Tenconi
Press visits	16 February 2021
Opening	17 February 2021
Exhibition dates	17 February 2021 – 18 July 2021
Location	Via Chiese 2, Milano, Italy
Opening hours	Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10.30 AM – 8.30 PM
Admission	Free
Catalogue	After 8 Books
Workshop	Further information on the digital courses: https://pirellihangarbiccoca.org/en/kids/
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