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“[Ga] delves into memory, myth, language and history, in the Montaignian sense of essayer—to try, to explore.” —FRIEZE

ELLIE GA: SQUARE OCTAGON CIRCLE

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Over two thousand stone remnants of the fabled Pharos Lighthouse lie in the murky waters of the Mediterranean. Built in the 3rd century B.C.E and likely destroyed in a series of earthquakes in the 14th century A.D., the Pharos Lighthouse was, according to the underwater archaeologists who have meticulously mapped its remains, a rectangular tower rising into an octagonal shaft capped with a cylindrical beacon. But this ancient wonder will never be reconstructed: the Lighthouse can only be inferred from its fragments. Above the surface, in the post-revolutionary Egyptian city of Alexandria, images of the Lighthouse are everywhere, populating the public imagination, though they bear little resemblance to the ruins at the bottom of the sea.

In a richly layered narrative of image and text, artist Ellie Ga embarks on a labyrinthine inquiry into the Lighthouse, navigating the spaces between history, memory and mythology, translation and mistranslation, the uncovered and the overlooked. Ga takes the reader with her on dive boats and into the water, behind the walls of hidden museums, through city streets pasted with political graffiti, into the offices of archaeologists and the homes of Alexandrians.

Using a lightbox and transparencies of photographs, video stills, and an array of archival materials, Ga arranges and rearranges fragments, accumulating and subtracting them to illuminate correspondences and contradictions. Above and below the surface, into the past and the present, *Square Octagon Circle* not only pursues seeming tangents, elusive truths and near-discoveries, but also maps the impossible desire to reconstruct this ancient wonder of the world.

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Square Octagon Circle has its unexpected origins in an expedition Ga took to Arctic Circle which lead her to Alexandria in 2012 to study marine archaeology just as the first post-revolution presidential elections were taking place.

From the artist's note:

My obsession with the Lighthouse of Alexandria began on the night of January 19, 2008. I was on the deck of the Tara, a boat that was built specially to withstand the pressure of the Arctic pack ice and drift among the ice floes. From the moment we began our journey, we did not know how long we would drift or when we would get back home. When the ice finally released us, we hadn't seen the sun in many months. We sailed south, and the first light came from a lighthouse off the coast of the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. At that moment, a lighthouse blinking in the distance became a symbol for our anxieties about the future: it marked our return to civilization.

The Tara was a French expedition, and while on the deck of the boat that night, my crewmates called out *le phare*, the French word for “lighthouse.” I was curious to know why *le phare* was so similar to the word *il faro* in Italian and *el faro* in Spanish. Later, as I traced the etymology, my questions led me to the Lighthouse of Alexandria. I became obsessed with touching the remains of this ancient wonder that, although no longer standing, has left its trace in language.

Translating her investigations of the Pharos Lighthouse into book form, Ga draws from earlier works in various media (including the performance *Eureka, A Lighthouse Play*, and video installations *Four Thousand Blocks, Measuring the Circle*, and *Sayed*, among other works) to create “the most complete capsule of her time in Alexandria,” (*BOMB*, editor's choice review, 2018). *Square Octagon Circle* is not only a culmination, but a gorgeously constructed palimpsest, not only an artist's book but a thought-provoking essay; it is, above all, an unusual and intimate synthesis of Ga's wide-ranging inquiries.

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Advance praise for SQUARE OCTAGON CIRCLE:

Emmy Catedral, BOMB: “Ga doesn’t just present a Keatsian capability of ‘being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts.’ She seeks out answers in her process, which meanders like waves or ice cracks, with a democratic openness to an aggregate of voices and perspectives. ‘Triangulation’ is not quite the word for how she connects her physical movement through a place to points of references in history, mythology, science, and her own memory and conversations. If I could assign her associative procedure a geometry, it would be that of the Stomachions she discovers in her consideration of Archimedes: a puzzle of fourteen pieces that can form a square, in hundreds of distinct arrangements.”

Select reviews of related performances, installations and exhibitions:

Max Feldman, ARTFORUM: Ga’s magnificent single-channel video split across two screens, *Measuring the Circle*, 2013–14, reconstructs the history of a lost ancient wonder: the Great Lighthouse of Alexandria, destroyed by an earthquake in the Middle Ages. Sifting through a labyrinthine array of sources, from shaky footage of the contemporary Egyptian city, antiquarian illustrations, and handmade transparent puzzles of archival documents, the artist searches for what the lighthouse once looked like. With each book, diagram, or story, the ever-receding horizon of truth eludes Ga’s grasp; like a relentless time-traveling detective, she scrambles through the rubble of Greek, Roman, and Ottoman Empires, the video a palimpsest etched on absent originals.

Jen Kabat, FRIEZE: The essay is having a moment. Not just in writing but in art too, and a writer could be jealous of how artists have taken to the form. Ellie Ga’s essays—which manifest as performances and installations – guide you on expeditions to the Arctic or through Egypt searching for the first lighthouse. She delves into memory, myth, language and history, in the Montaignian sense of essayer—to try, to explore. With each project Ga generates research, notes, reports, performances and video pieces plumbing her ideas. For the series *Square Octagon Circle* (2012–14) she created *Eureka, A Lighthouse Play* (2014) and the three-channel video installation *Four Thousand Blocks* (2013–14), following her search for the Pharos lighthouse in Alexandria through to Thoth, the Egyptian god of calendars, numbers and writing. The Greeks fused Thoth with Hermes, and this hybrid god gave birth to alchemy. Ga discovers that alchemists prefer to pass on knowledge orally. “If you want to remember something,” Ga says, “don’t write it down.”

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ELLIE GA is a New York-born artist whose immersive, wide-ranging investigations include the classification of stains on city sidewalks to the charting of the quotidian in the frozen reaches of the Arctic Ocean. In performances, video-essays and installations, Ga’s braided narratives intertwine extensive research with first-hand experiences that often follow uncertain leads and take unexpected turns.

Her most recent exhibitions include *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change* at Storm King Art Center, currently on view through November 11, 2018 and a solo two-channel video work *Strophe* at Bureau Gallery in New York City in 2017 about which the *New Yorker* wrote: “It’s a loosely gathered bundle of meditations on distance, dislocation, and identity, as thought-provoking as it is discomfiting.” Ugy Duckling Presse will release *North Was Here*—based on three booklets she made while drifting at the North Pole—in November 2018.

Ga has performed and exhibited internationally at the New Museum, The Kitchen and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Albright-Knox Museum in Buffalo, The Power Plant in Toronto, the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, M-Museum in Leuven, Belgium, and La Fondation Cartier pour L’Art Contemporain and Galerie du Jour in Paris, among many others. She currently lives in Stockholm.

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In 2018 Siglio is celebrating its tenth year of fiercely independent publishing, driven by its feminist ethos and its commitment to artists and writers who obey no boundaries, pay no fealty to trends and invite readers to see the world anew by reading word and image in provocative, unfamiliar ways. Since its inception, Siglio has seen publishing itself as an act of resistance to the literal, the authoritarian and the facile, publishing cross-disciplinary, hybrid and often unwieldy works. **We continue this mission in 2018 with a rigorously eclectic list by Mirtha Dermisache, Ellie Ga, Karen Green and Dick Higgins**, artists and writers who resist categorical distinctions, envisioning image, language and the space of the book in expansive and utterly imaginative ways.

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