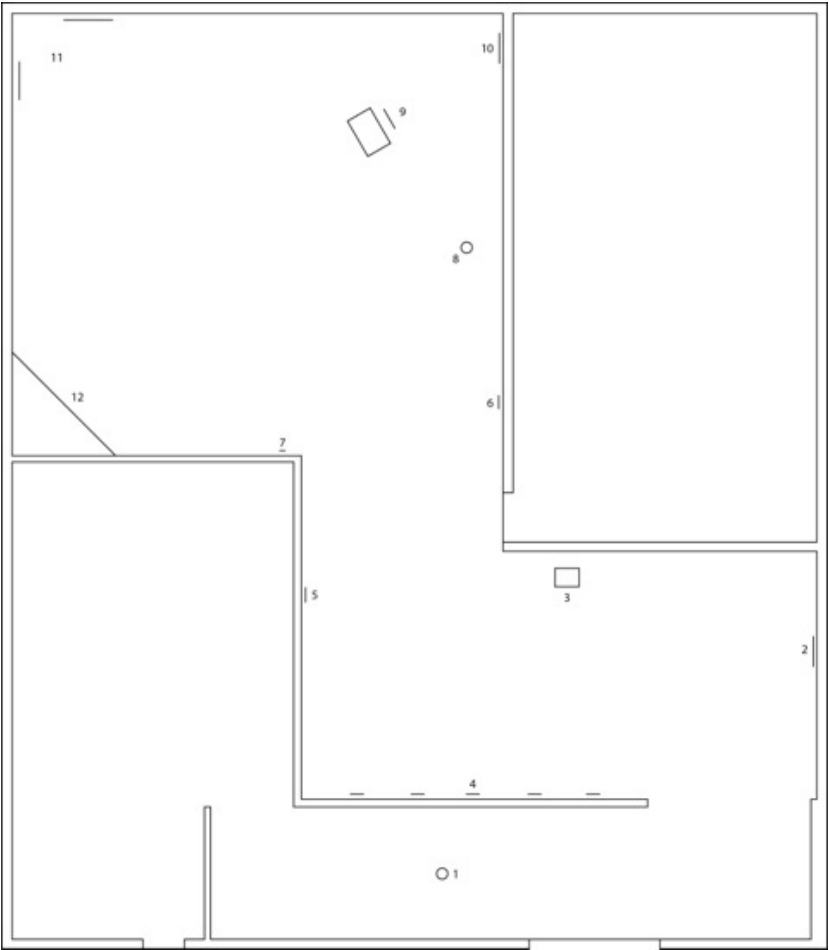


*The Shape of Distance*

Stéphanie Saadé







Stephanie Saatchi  
*The Shape of Distance*

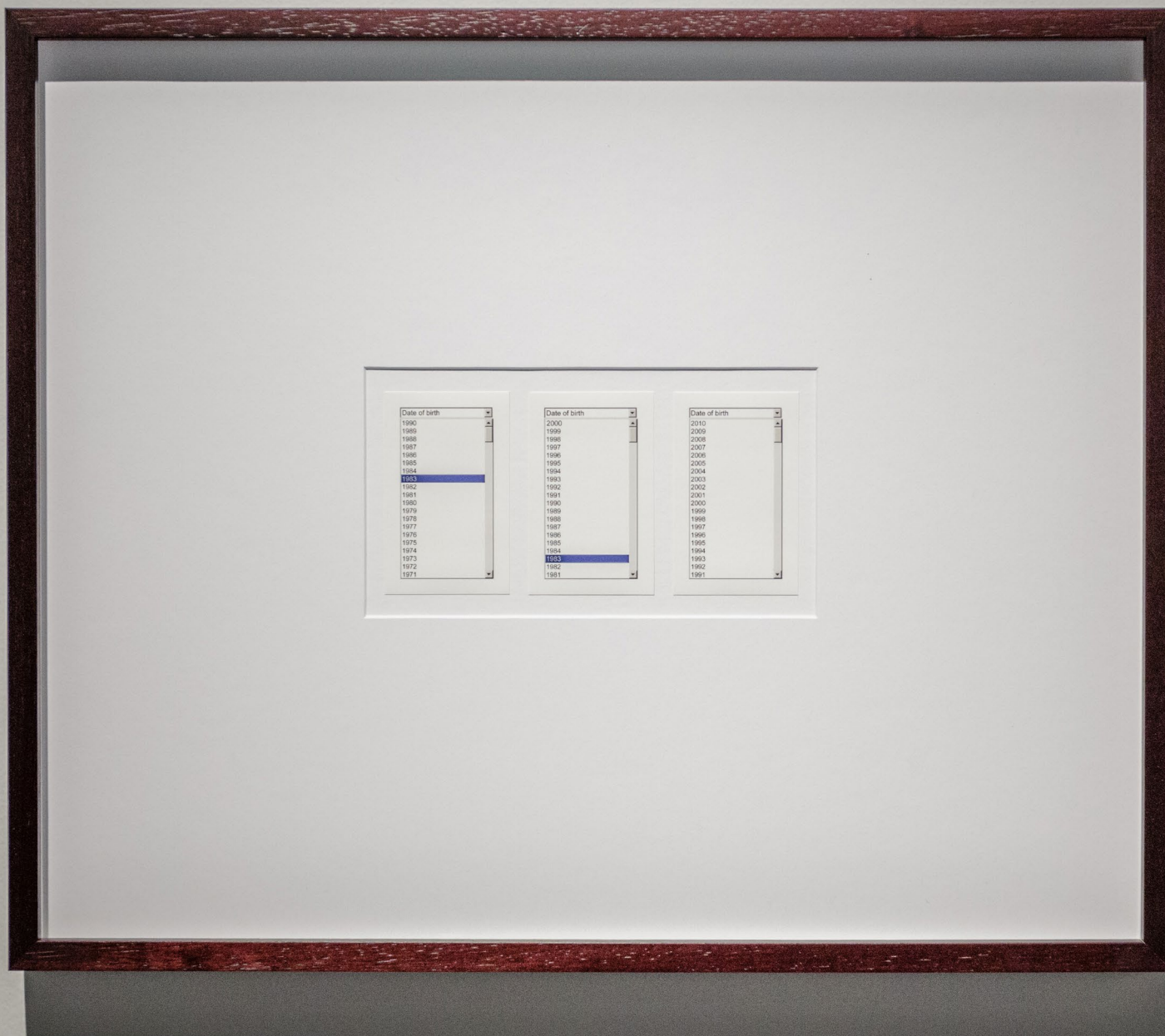






Stéphanie Saadé  
*The Shape of Distance*





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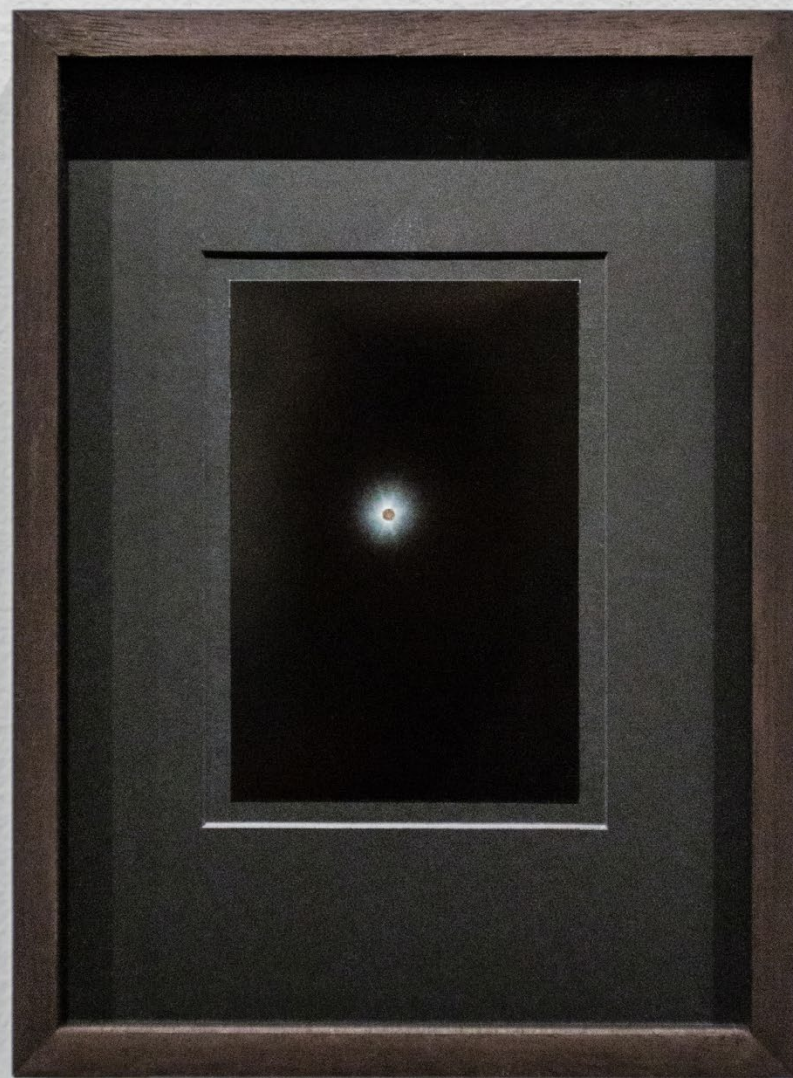






















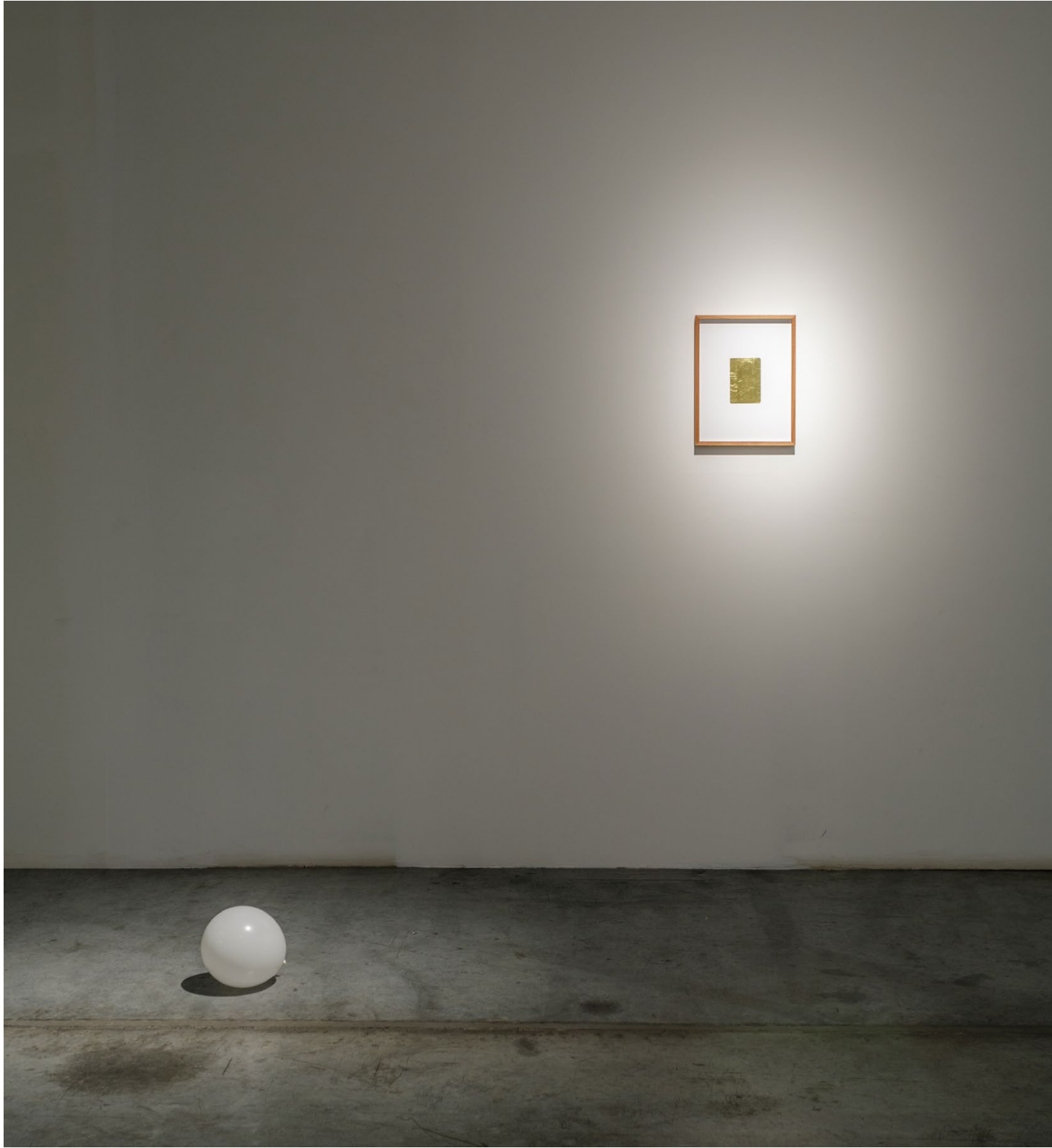






































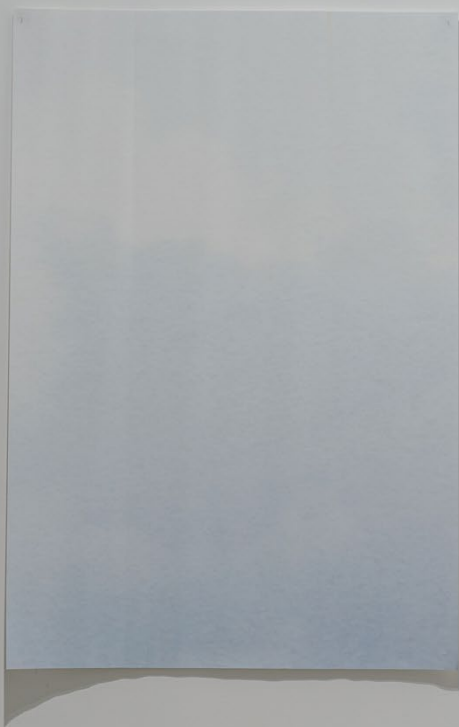
















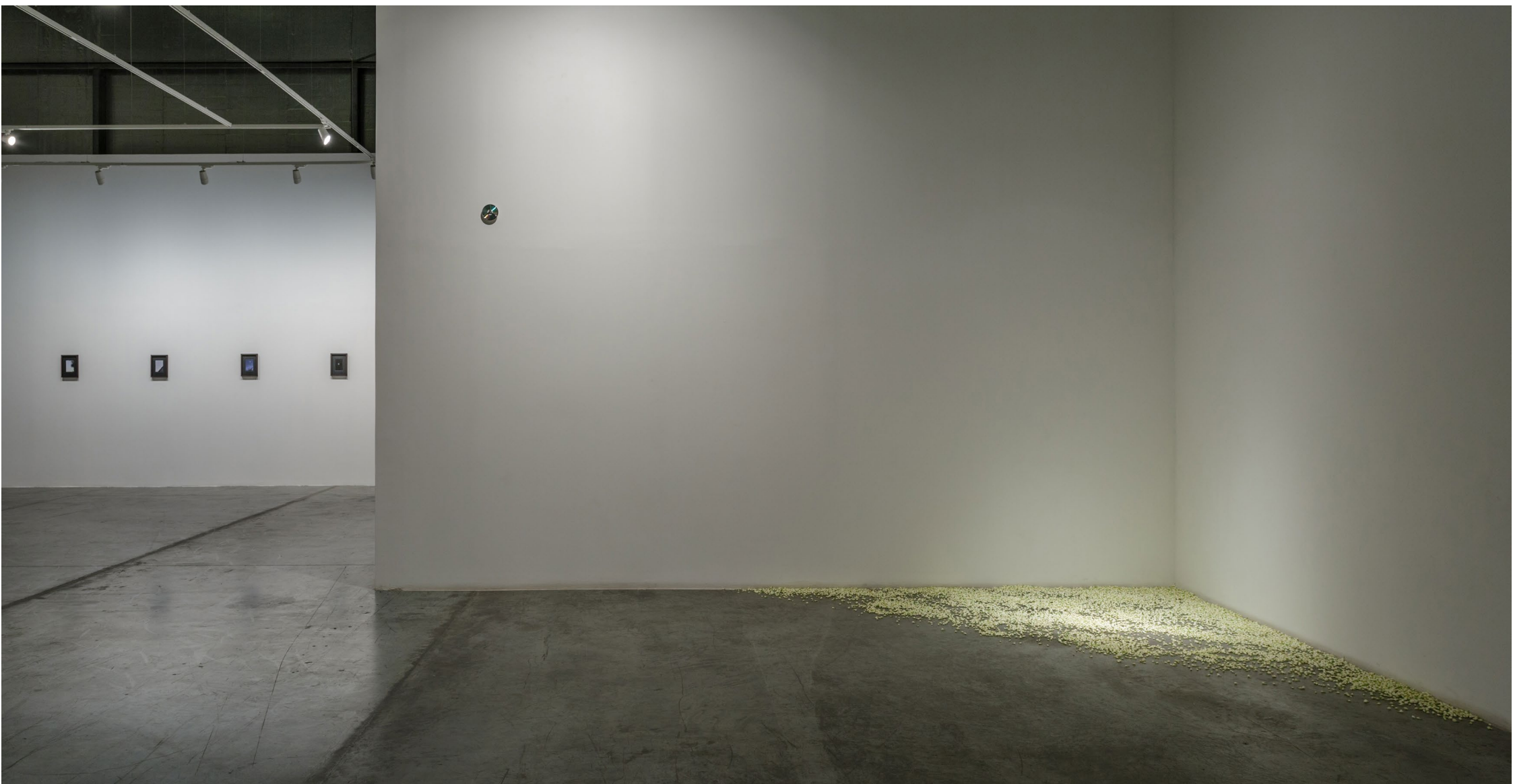


















## ***List of works***

1. *Artificial Nostalgia*, 2016, key, sand from Dubai, diameter: 25 cm, height: 10 cm / The key of the artist's house as a child is stuck in a small pile of sand from Dubai.
2. *Down to Earth*, 2016, prints on paper, frame: 40 x 50 cm / The artist looks for her birthdate in three drop-down menus, at ten years intervals. In thirty years, the date has aged, and doesn't appear anymore.
3. *Moon Pills*, 2015, 1 pack of 28 contraceptive pills, watercolour, diameter: 15 cm (table: 47 x 46 x 32 cm) / A cycle of the moon is painted on contraceptive pills.
4. *Moongold*, 2016, photograph, Moon Gold leaf, 15 x 10 cm (each) / On random photographs taken by the artist, the moon, appearing very small, is gilded with Moon Gold leaf.
5. *Graceful Degradation*, 2013, welded iron, stainless steel and brass, 270 x 40 x 4 cm / A ladder is made of three different metals, incarnating the idea of ascension.
6. *Golden Memories*, 2016, old photograph, gold leaf, 15 x 10 cm / A photograph from the artist's childhood is covered with gold leaf. The past memory is no longer accessible, but now mirrors the present reality.
7. *Re-Enactment LB/ Taxi*, 2013, metallic Mercedes sign, sanded CD, diameter: 11.5 cm / A *dispositif* invented by taxi drivers in Lebanon to ornate their cars is reproduced.
8. *Souffles d'Artistes* (work by Stéphanie Saadé and Charbel-joseph H. Boutros), 2016, inflated balloon, breaths of two artists in love / A balloon is inflated with the breaths of the artist and her companion.
9. *The Shape of Distance*, 2016, pupil table and chair, welded brass, table: 77 x 40 x 55 cm, chair: 80 x 45 x 36 cm / Brass extensions are welded onto the feet of a pupil's table and chair, making them as high as a professor's table and chair.
10. *The Day in Order*, 2015, plastic ruler, acrylic paint, 3.4 x 51 cm / A sky is painted at the back of a plastic ruler. The rational tool is subjected to the whim of a reverie.
11. *The Sky is a Village*, 2016, printed photographs left outside, 115 x 78 cm and 115 x 95 cm / Pieces of sky taken from childhood photographs are scanned and enlarged to the size of the artist's studio's windows. The marks left by the rain, wind and air reactivate them today.
12. *Re-Enactment LB/ Jasmine*, 2016, fresh jasmine flowers, size of installation: 300 x 300 x 425 cm / A pile of jasmine flowers seen drying in a house in Beirut is reproduced.
- 13\*. *The Smell of Distance*, 2016, jasmine perfume. / Jasmine perfume will be worn by the artist for the entire duration of the exhibition.



## ***Text by Chiara Ianeselli***

*“There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.”*

David Eagleman, *Forty Tales from the Afterlives*, Vintage Books, 2010.

In his book *Forty Tales from the Afterlives* the neuroscientist David Eagleman describes the scenario that people experience while waiting for their names to be pronounced for the last time: a passageway where you can hear the persistent steps going back and forth. Suddenly you hear a name and that man leaves the waiting room; he died. We are *callers*; in the moment when we pronounce the name of someone for the last time we allow or condemn her / him to die. But Stéphanie Saadé is not: she acts in a more subtle way, as she doesn't emit a single sound; her mouth keeps safely closed. Nevertheless, she is able to name without naming, to touch without touching, to remember without remembering. She holds tight many substances and traces, identities not yet disappeared, because she doesn't allow anything to leave her. The materials she generously shares with us in the gallery hardly make steps, they perhaps float, sometimes swim and mostly sail. We could argue that *Twelve Tales from the Afterlives* are presented in Stéphanie Saadé's exhibition *The Shape of Distance*.

In her work *Golden Memories*, she doesn't pronounce the name of a person, but addresses herself. We can read in her carefully written notes that accompany the exhibited artworks: “A photograph from the artist's childhood is covered with gold leaf. The past memory is no longer accessible, but now mirrors the present reality”. A relation is established with childhood, this golden period in life, whose end cannot be determined by universal factors: it varies indeed, according to countries and cultures. In the case of the artist, her childhood ended at the same time as the Lebanese Civil war. Her earliest memories are closely associated with this political event, and are inseparable from it. Strangely in the title, they have been tinted with more sweetness, but nevertheless remain invisible to us, who become visionaries by the mirroring golden veil.

Modern science proves today that our body constantly renews itself, except for the cerebral cortex cells, the inner lens cells of the eye and perhaps the muscle cells of the heart. These components constitute the “present reality” - the continuum Saadé is addressing in her sentence: an on-going part of the human being that stays unaltered. But if that part is not subjected to metamorphosis we understand that even a date can age, as is clearly visible in *Down to Earth*: “The artist looks for her birthdate in three drop-down menus, at ten years intervals. In thirty years, the date has aged, and doesn't appear anymore”. How can we face these issues? By building extensions on pupils' chairs and tables, as in *The Shape of Distance*? Or by representing time in circles instead of linear ways as in *Moon Pills*, considering how time cycles function in other planets or eras?

As said, the *Twelve tales* presented are not written in words, they rather constitute signals that a cosmonaut could easily grab and convey in the darkest space, to imagine distances among interstellar particles:

*This world, as it is, is not bearable. So I need the moon, or happiness, or immortality, something that would sound insane maybe, but that is not of this world.*

Albert Camus, Caligula, 1944.

In the exhibition, Saadé suggests the existence of other scales, showing the unexploited potentials of human geometry. In *The Day in Order* a ruler conveys

visions and not centimetres or millimetres: wherever it points the land will merge with the horizon.

According to her vision, and that of Georges Schehadé, “the sky is a village”<sup>1</sup>; densely populated. Why?

The sky, which constituted the background for many portraits of the artist’s childhood, had mostly served as a backing, as useless atmosphere. Still, it contains so much. Therefore Saadé decided to bring it to the foreground: she reframed the pictures in a way that the sky would become the protagonist, and printed them at the size of her actual studio’s windows, then exposing the prints to the weather elements. Can a printed particle meet its own twin that has been floating in the air or is it, as Saadé proposes, that: “The blue sky doesn’t betray all that it has witnessed?” We are left to make up our own minds.

Processes of change, metamorphosis, are also witnessed in the work *Graceful Degradation*, where a ladder is constituted by iron, stainless steel and brass. The material’s value - according to human standards - increases with the height.

But, as has been whispered, we should commit to the memory of the Allegory of Alchemy sculpted on the middle pillar of the portal of Notre-Dame in Paris - same is the number of rungs of Saadé’s ladder: 9; Lady Alchemy reminds us that metals can be transformed. *Graceful Degradation* can perhaps take us closer to the sky to better see the moon.

Isn’t it that the artist used both alchemy and the ladder for *Moongold* where the moon is gilded with Moon Gold leaf?

She is showing us many possible directions coexisting in the gallery space: “On an intricate map, arrows are pointing towards the East or the West, the Right or the Left, while others indicate the North or the South, the bottom or the top”.

The intersection of all these references points allows the visitor to experience the layering of the artist’s exquisite visionary worlds: a process of synaesthesia might arise in the moment when we are hypnotized by the rainbows of *Re-Enactment LB/ Taxi* and we smell *Re-Enactment LB/ Jasmine* where “A pile of jasmine flowers drying seen in a house in Beirut is reproduced”. In a conversation, Stéphanie told me more about the flowers:

*They have 5 petals, so they are referred to as star-shaped flowers. Re-Enactment LB/ Jasmine will be a triangle of fallen stars on the floor. Stars which would have stayed, after falling, at the tiny size they have when they are at a distance from us in the sky.*

*The fragrance of the flowers is localized on the internal side of the flowers petals.*

*They exhale their most delicious perfume at night.*

*Re-Enactment LB/ Jasmine* might be seen, like *Artificial Nostalgia*, as a monument to her private memory: the key opens the door to the house in which she grew up as a child, in Lebanon, although the sand is from Dubai; the flowers, seen in a state officer bureau in Beirut, might have disappeared by now or they might still be there, in the position that is now visible in the gallery. The artist is showing modest, unpretentious memorials, where visitors are apparently invited to be part of her most intimate life. But her *Artificial Nostalgia* reveals us a deeper sense of the diaspora, where citizens, no matter where they are, regularly become foreigners, in an on-going alienation. Perhaps the only solution is to keep breathing close to each other, inflating the same balloon that has flown for thousands of miles landing there, in the gallery Grey Noise<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Georges Schehadé, *Monsieur Bob’le*, 1951

<sup>2</sup> *Souffles d’Artistes* - work by Stéphanie Saadé and Charbel-joseph H. Boutros, 2016, inflated balloon, breaths of two artists in love.



## ***Texts by Stéphanie Saadé***

“There come children with their worlds  
Light as flower bones”

Georges Schehadé, *Si tu Rencontres un Ramier*, 1951.

On an intricate map, arrows are pointing towards the East or the West, the Right or the Left,  
while others indicate the North or the South, the bottom or the top. They intersect.

Some travels are made following horizontal paths. They are measured in geographical or historical distances.

Other travels are made following vertical paths. They are measured in dreams.

What is the distance between dreams?

Gazing at the sky, it appears far.  
But it is inside my eyes.  
And the moon is inside my dream; there, it is of gold.

Stars rise from the earth and settle in the real sky.

Under the sun, the games of childhood take place.  
And dreams are for the night.  
Under the moon, the adult’s melancholic games are played.  
His dreams are of blue sky.

In *The Shape of Distance*, an intricate map is superposed to the map of the exhibition space. Horizontal distances are explored, which go back and forth in time and geography, as well as vertical distances, which go back and forth between above and below. The works measure, cancel, enhance or materialise these distances. Functioning sometimes by analogy, they become real where both directions meet.

A balloon, usually festive and light, is kept on the ground by the weight of the two breaths it contains. A pile of flowers dry, exhaling their perfume in the air. A car ornament rises and becomes a floating star. The moon is attracted by the charm of gold. Captured, it can be admired, like a small and precious jewel. A piece of sky from a childhood photograph is left outside. The blue sky doesn’t betray all that it has witnessed. Will the fragile image resist this new exposure?