



Elisabeth Subrin, *The Listening Takes* / *Manal Issa*, 2024

November 17, 2024 - January 19, 2025

Opening reception, Sunday, November 17, 5-7pm

New location

116 Elizabeth Street, floor one

NY NY 10013

bottom buzzer for entry

Hours

Wednesday-Sunday, noon-7pm

From November 17, 2024 - January 19, 2025, PARTICIPANT INC presents Elisabeth Subrin, *The Listening Takes* / *Manal Issa*, 2024. The exhibition includes a new iteration of Subrin's immersive multi-channel video and sound installation, *The Listening Takes*, and the premiere of *Manal Issa*, 2024, shot in Beirut this September.

The Listening Takes expands on Subrin's 2022 cinematic recreation of a controversial 1983 television interview with the late French actress Maria Schneider in which actors **Manal Issa**, **Aïssa Maïga**, and **Isabel Sandoval** play Schneider in three distinct reenactments, reinterpreted to highlight Schneider's prescient confrontation with the patriarchal structure of the film industry. The three-channel installation, suspended in time and space, deploys new film footage and sonic strategies to produce a collective, cross-historical, intersectional portrait of actresses reckoning with consent, representation, and trauma. In the adjacent new video, *Manal Issa*, 2024, Subrin adds an affective, fourth reenactment culled from hours of subsequent conversations between Elisabeth in the U.S. and Manal in Lebanon, which intimately considers the role of the actor during the unfolding global conflict.

As an artist and a filmmaker, Subrin approached the recreation of Schneider's 1983 televised interview, produced by Anne Andreu and Raoul Sangla for *Cinéma cinémas*, from multiple perspectives, filming discreet works for both theatrical screening (*Maria Schneider*, 1983, 2022) and for the multi-channel presentation, *The Listening Takes*. While most biographical accounts assert that Schneider (1952-2011) is best-known for the sexual misconduct she experienced on the set of Bernardo Bertolucci's 1972 *Last Tango in Paris*, she emphasized her work in Michelangelo Antonioni's 1975 *The Passenger*, a film involving characters who disappear. Despite the trauma of *Tango*, Schneider continued to act throughout her life, while resisting any roles that objectified her. Now a queer icon, Schneider's bold perspectives on acting and representation, which she addressed in interviews starting in the 1970s, anticipated contemporary conversations and activism around actresses breaking silence about discrimination and sexual abuse in the film industry.

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The first version of *The Listening Takes*, at The Bell at Brown University in 2023, utilized architectural screens with mirrors on the reverse, which writer Jessica Shearer described in her review, “Reclaiming Agency Over Trauma,” in *Hyperallergic*:

“[On the first screen], Lebanese French actress Manal Issa is sitting in a brasserie, recreating a 1983 interview with the late actress Maria Schneider. Every pause, flinch, and cigarette flick is the same, including the pained reaction to a question about *Last Tango in Paris*, the movie that inflicted a surprise rape scene on Schneider when she was 19 years old. When Issa finishes, Aïssa Maïga and Isabel Sandoval each replicate this interview on their own screens, modifying the script slightly to account for their experiences as a Black woman and a trans woman, respectively. Through this repetitive reinterpretation, Subrin forces viewers to witness how cavalierly the assault is addressed – “Can’t you separate your experience from the force of the film?” – and how the media’s, and by extension the audience’s, desire to indulge in the details of the event perpetuates a subtler violence.”

In the space of the three staggered screens of this installation, while an individual actress speaks, the other two appear to be listening. Filmed in Akermanian long takes, each successive rendering exhibits a formal shift in color and sound, mirroring the actresses’ movement toward a critical reckoning. In the final section of the thirty-minute loop, the actresses speak collectively, producing the effect of a sonic chamber of voice and reception. Traversing the gallery physically reveals corresponding reflections on the reverse of the first two dual-sided screens, producing a sense of histories layering upon themselves, folding forward and backward. In its first presentation at The Bell, the mirrored glass reflections provided crystalline doublings, at Participant those images appear more elusive, floating on reflective dark surfaces, each enacting Subrin’s belief that the biographical subject is not singular, “but is produced through multiple, shifting interpretations and perceptions.” The artist further noted, “I believe a biographical subject is not temporally or cohesively written, but a collective, cross-historical experience that moves through the bodies of both those who write it, and those who receive it. Maria is a multiplicity. My hope is audiences will travel with the Marias across time, immersing themselves in their shifting inner lives as they move toward self-possession, witnessing their vulnerabilities and strengths through different subjectivities and interpretations.”

Starting in the 1990s, Subrin began resuscitating complex, misunderstood biographical subjects in her early films and videos. Reflecting on her early practice of speculative biography in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* interview, “Minor Archives,” Subrin told archivist and Executive Director, Hauser & Wirth Institute, Lisa Darms: “The only way to fill in the spaces where subjects have been repressed, erased, forbidden, misread, or controlled is to assert them, to imagine them, to bring them into consciousness.” Such gestures of willful impossibility, artistic leaps of faith, perhaps began most recognizably with Subrin’s 1997 film *Shulie*, in which she re-created a student documentary film, just once. A “performative re-manufacturing” with no explicit editorializing (aside from an anachronistic Starbucks cup) elicits the experience of collapsed time. Or, maybe more accurately, these resonances highlight the current moment in which our generation is experiencing cycles of return – one uprising into another, one pandemic into another, one genocide into another. An evolving shift in dialogue in *The Listening Takes* is influenced by the personal identities of the three actors, a translation prompted by the question Subrin asked: “What are the fewest words you would need to change in Maria’s dialogue to make it true to your own experience in the film industry?” There are actually very few.

In *Manal Issa, 2024*, these same questions extend into the present moment and, much like Schneider’s refusal to allow her role in *Tango* to be centered in the interview, Manal refuses visibility in the frame, although her absence seems palpable. Similar to the sound design of the three-channel installation, which underscores the listener’s attention, with *Manal Issa, 2024*, Subrin directs us toward deeper listening by referencing the hypothetical interviewer’s questions through pauses in the voiceover, presenting only Manal’s answers. We don’t know who she’s speaking to; she is there, but not there.

While Issa (b. 1992) and Schneider have markedly different life experiences, they share an unwavering commitment to their principles, despite consequential sacrifices and public criticism. Displaced from Lebanon multiple times due to war, Issa's life has been shaped by politics. The reaction to her protests about Palestine on social media and on the red carpet (including at Cannes in 2018) led to her quit acting until there is a ceasefire. If *The Listening Takes* implicitly refuses to separate art from life, *Manal Issa, 2024*, pushes this further by refusing to separate life from politics.

Coinciding with the exhibition, Subrin's 2016 award-winning first feature narrative film, *A Woman, A Part*, which also investigates the psychological toll of women playing parts, is currently streaming on Metrograph.

Elisabeth Subrin is a New York-based filmmaker and artist whose cross-genre works blur the lines between documentary, narrative, and experimental filmmaking. Her critically acclaimed films, videos, and installations explore intersections between cultural history and subjectivity through a feminist lens. Known for her practice of documentary reenactment, Subrin's award-winning films have been presented widely, including solo shows at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Viennale, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Harvard Film Archives, The Wexner Center of the Arts, The National Gallery of Art, Lightbox Cinema, The San Francisco Cinematheque, The Institute of Contemporary Art, London, and Film at Lincoln Center. Her 2022 award-winning film, *Maria Schneider, 1983*, received the 2023 César Award (French Academy Awards) for Best Documentary Short. It had its world premiere at the 2022 Cannes International Film Festival in Director's Fortnight and the North American premiere at The 60th New York Film Festival and premiered in film festivals throughout Europe, North America, Asia, and South America.

A Guggenheim, Fulbright, Rockefeller, and Sundance Fellow, Subrin has presented her films in group shows internationally, including at The Whitney Biennial, The Walker Art Center, The Hessel Museum at Bard College, Center for Contemporary Art, Prague, and top film festivals including Cannes, Rotterdam, New York Film Festival, Sarajevo, Jeonju, Mar del Plata, IDFA, Kolkata, San Francisco, and many others. In 2012 and 2022, her film *Shulie* was included in the British Film Institute's *Sight & Sound* once-a-decade international critics' poll for "The Greatest Films of All Times." In 2016, Subrin premiered her award-winning first feature film, *A Woman, A Part*, at The Rotterdam International Film Festival in the Tiger Awards competition before presenting it in festivals worldwide. In 2010, Sue Scott Gallery in New York mounted a retrospective of her work, *Elisabeth Subrin: Her Compulsion To Repeat*. It included her 2010 video installation *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*, her 2008 two-channel film projection *Sweet Ruin*, as well as selected experimental films, videos, and large-scale photographic works. Parts of the exhibition traveled to MoMA/PS1's *Greater New York*, The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, La Musee D'Art Contemporain de Val De Marne, France, The Haggerty Museum, Milwaukee, and in solo exhibitions at The Jewish Museum, New York, and VOLTA, New York.

Subrin received a BFA in Film from the Massachusetts College of Art and a MFA in Video from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is a Professor of Film and Media Arts at Temple University. Subrin was a 2020 Fulbright Research Scholar in France at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy and is currently developing a feature-length biopic about the late French actress Maria Schneider.

Images:

Elisabeth Subrin, production still from live video feed on the set of *Manal Issa, 2024*. Cinematographer: Bassem Fayad [A color screen capture of a remote production view on Zoom. In the center of the frame, we see two hands clapping a film slate that says "Manal" in front of an empty chair sitting in front of a cafe table.]

Elisabeth Subrin, production still from *The Listening Takes, 2023*. Photo: Maya Zardi. [Actress Manal Issa speaking with Elisabeth Subrin on a film set with production crew reflected in cafe mirrors.]

The Listening Takes was first commissioned by The Bell / Brown Arts Institute at Brown University and on view February 9 - June 4, 2023.

It received generous support from France 3 Télévision, New York State Council on the Arts, UnionDocs Center for Documentary Art, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Temple University, and Fonds LIG/Lesbiennes d'Intérêt Général.

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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 116 Elizabeth Street, floor one, between Broome and Grand Streets. The closest trains are the J/Z (Bowery) and the B/D (Grand); the closest wheelchair accessible stop is the 6 (Canal). Entry is on grade and the gallery is barrier free throughout with an all gender, wheelchair accessible bathroom. Service animals are welcome.