

Nour Mobarak: Dafne Phono

For her first museum exhibition in New York City, multimedia and performance artist Nour Mobarak revisits the earliest known opera, *Dafne*. Staged by composer Jacopo Peri and librettist Ottavio Rinuccini in Florence in 1598, it was inspired by Ovid's myth, in which the nymph Daphne transforms into a laurel tree to evade Apollo's advances. The opera's music is lost to time, but its libretto survives. In Mobarak's reimagining of *Dafne*, fifteen singing sculptures crafted from mycelium—the root form of the mushroom—recount the tale, which the artist had translated into some of the world's most phonetically complex languages. The resonant objects, which Mobarak created by implanting speakers within simple geometric forms, create an immersive sound composition that ricochets across the Studio to the rhythm of a corresponding video libretto.

Drawing on histories of avant-garde sound, Mobarak's composition transforms the source material into a polyphonic chorus, experimenting with how speech can be broken down and reassembled to generate new meaning. The installation draws analogies between linguistic structure and mycelium's biological processes, exploring how both are governed by repetition, decomposition, and regeneration.

Dafne Phono also considers “how communication and sense-perception shift as our spoken phonetic palette narrows through the homogenizing and hegemonic forces of monolingualism, assimilation, and globalization,” Mobarak explains. Bringing new perspectives to a story of conquest and unrequited love, *Dafne Phono* reflects on the voice's ability to endure cycles of life and death, bridging histories both ancient and present.

Organized by Sophie Cavoulacos, Associate Curator, Department of Film, with May Makki, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance.

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For related content and programs, visit moma.org/nourmobarak.

Copies of the accompanying publication *Dafne Phono* (Wendy's Subway, 2024), which features libretti of both the original opera and *Dafne Phono*, are available for reading in the gallery.