



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## ARABIC-SPEAKING CYBORG ASKS THE AUDIENCE TO PARTICIPATE

Be a part of this historic art event as we bring in the audience to participate in the live VJ storytelling, tracking the crowd's emotions via real-time imagery. The audience gets to decide how the story is told in this interactive live cinema performance on Feb. 25th. In this 30- minute performance, VJ Um Amel (Arabic for 'Mother of Hope'), an animated cyborg who is also a mother, invites the audience to get present with our post- 911 world. According to her, she believes that "a shared procedural literacy in new media productions might provide a key to 21st century democratic practices." Um Amel, along with her robot companions, Femme Bot and Shashi, move in and out of media from 1950s Egyptian cinema to present day video games, full-length films, and the Internet in search of Um Amel's child. As if at the turn of the 21st century, all that is left in Pandora's box is hope: what does 'hope' look like in the 21st century?

### **WHAT: CALL 2 PRESENCE an Interactive Live Cinema Performance**

**WHEN: Thursday, February 25, 2010**

- **Doors open at 7:30 pm**
- **Live Cinema starts at 8:00 pm**
- **Live music by v:k and more live visuals from 9:00 pm – 11:00 pm**

**WHERE: The Fridge DC art gallery**

- **Rear Alley, 516 8<sup>th</sup> Street, SE, DC 20003**
- <http://www.TheFridgeDC.com>

**Limited number of ticket (\$10) [available online](#).**

**URL: <http://lailashereen.com/call2presence/call2p.php>**

### **How It Works**

There are two projections going on simultaneously. The main projection will be the cinematic story of VJ Um Amel. As the story progresses, the audience will be asked to choose a, b, or c to determine how the story ends. They will be able to participate by texting their answers by phone. (The audience is also welcome to sit back and watch). On the second projection, there will be a continuous moving visual display of images being called from Flickr. The audience will be given a phone number to text any key words that describe their reactions and emotions in real-time. Those key words will be received on an SMS server that then go into a customized Flickr API. This web application will automatically generate images based on the key words the crowd upload using their cell phones. The technology we customize enabling this interaction is made open source. Our business model is designed to allow us to share and collaboratively produce culture. We



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hope others will be able to use this model to bring together crowds to a call to presence over other issues such as energy, conservation, the environment, immigration, and social issues of all kinds.

<http://lailashereen.com/call2presence/cell.php>

### **The Cyborgs**

VJ Um Amel is an Arabic and English speaking cyborg who is also a mother. She is looking for her child in this story. Her heart and liver are human, and she has red blood, but all of her extensions (arms, legs, fingers, toes, and some of her head) are all cybernetic and artificial. She is a mother first and foremost. She is charmed by Shashi's flow and keen sonic abilities and by Femme Bot's femininity. Femme Bot is a hot bot with a thigh sash, who is also an Arabic and English speaker. Femme Bot has long, curvaceous legs and charming smile. She has striking eyebrows, and a distinct Arabic look about her. She is tall and has more power than she knows. She is extremely logical and follows computer protocol to the letter. Her movements are precise. She was an orphan as a child, and that is one of the secrets she keeps. Shashi is a feminist's dream. He is everything a strong woman wants in a man. He reached an immaterial spiritual level before he became a bot. He also speaks Arabic, and was a Muslim before he became cybernetic. In his previous life, he had a 14-year old daughter from a failed marriage. He met his ex-wife, an American woman, at the resort hotel in the Red Sea where he worked as a scuba diving instructor. Shashi has sonic powers like that of our canine friends. Like Femme Bot, Shashi is tall and attractive. He is lanky rather than buff, and his sexy qualities come through his flow rather than his physical traits.

<http://lailashereen.com/call2presence/cyborg.php>

### **About the Artist**

VJ Um Amel is a poet, activist, and digital artist. Her work critically examines the nature of digital information and cyber existence in a post-9/11 world. Previously, she has co-founded media and art collectives in Washington, DC including the Guerrilla Poetry Insurgency and Word of Mouth. She was awarded the 2009 Jack Shaheen Media Scholarship by the American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee (ADC). Her work has been exhibited and performed in international festivals, galleries, and museums – including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. Presently, she is lecturer and research associate at UC Santa Cruz.

<http://lailashereen.com>

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