"Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili", Lillian Davies, *Artforum*, Summer Edition 2019

ARTFORUM

Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili, *how are you from I love you,* **2019,** print on organic cotton and wooden frames, 8' 1/2" × 12' 9" × 4' 4".

Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili

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Ketuta Alexi-Meskhishvili is after "the sensation of losing boundaries." This feeling emerges, she explains, in the experience of being a new mother: "when you have a newborn and are breastfeeding and your outlines become unstable and it is hard to say where you end and where the world begins." This state also informs Alexi-Meskhishvili's relationship to photography. She has, for instance, devised a process in which the limits between photographic media fade: She begins with 4 x 5" negatives and ends with sharp, color-rich, digitally manipulated archival prints. Likewise, her work dissolves distinctions among her own production, studio, and exhibition spaces: She engages photography and sculptural elements to stage a complete environment; her all-encompassing compositions, bathed in light, often incorporate views of the walls, floors, and flotsam of her studio. For example, two pieces here, *How are you from* and *how are you from I love you* (all works 2019), were photographic diptychs transformed into delicate curtains. She had printed her photographs on large swaths of organic cotton and hung this fabric from a pair of wooden frames painted black like the edges of her prints. These screens delineated the space and created dramatic views of the surrounding two-dimensional works. Meanwhile, light filled the delicate, transparent fabric, causing the prints' jewel tones to glow.

Light, essential to photography, is a key subject for Alexi-Meskhishvili. *K.C.*, made by the artist in collaboration with Christine Roland, featured a lightbulb nested in green ceramic

attached to the ceiling of the gallery. A sheet of organic cotton, printed with a moss-green-saturated photograph, wrapped around the fixture and extended down toward the floor. The resulting form was evocative of a beam of stage light. In the photograph that lent the exhibition as a whole its oddly punctuated title, *mother ,feelings ,cognac*, Alexi—Meskhishvili captures six long-stemmed flowers—five blue roses and a pale-pink calla lily—propped up against her studio wall next to a white-plastic stackable chair. The silhouette of a raised hand reveals itself in the rectangle of sunlight that falls through a window over the scene.

Alexi-Meskhishvili also draws on the symbols of her native Georgia, a country that "often speaks" in the color blue, according to the writer Elene Abashidze, a colleague of the artists. Abashidze has traced the hue through Georgian history, from the blue canvases that covered the buildings of Abashidze's childhood in Tbilisi—most of them destroyed in the civil war of 1991 or abandoned after the conflict of 1992—back through the Symbolist literature of the Georgian avant-garde of the 1910s to the lapis lazuli of thirteenth-century Georgian Orthodox icons. Likewise, the roses that Alexi-Meskhishvili pictures in several works here echo the blossoms held aloft by thousands of peaceful protesters during Georgia's Rose Revolution.

Hung at the heart of the exhibition, *Ani (M.N.)* is a striking portrait of a woman with blue eyes and a reddish bob. She wears hot-pink lipstick and holds down her ear as she pulls back the hair from her face. A golden light glows behind her; and in her navy-blue hoodie, she is like a modern Madonna, or the thirteenth-century Angel of Kintsvisi mentioned in Abashidze's blue history of Georgia. As is her habit, Alexi-Meskhishvili has darkened all of the branded lettering on the border of this Kodak archive print except her initials, K.A. More than a signature, this gesture shows that the artist is no longer distinct from the photograph but has merged with its very surface.

— *Lillian Davies*