

# ARTFORUM

## Ellie Ga

BUREAU

178 Norfolk Street

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One of the four works in Ellie Ga's potent exhibition relays the story of Thoth, an Egyptian deity credited with the invention of dice, math, and also language. Letterpressed on a small piece of paper is the king of Egypt's response: WHAT YOU HAVE DISCOVERED IS . . . THE DRUG OF REMINDING. WITH YOUR INVENTION THEY WILL BE TAUGHT, BUT THEY WILL NOT BE WISE. The statement, though barely legible in its presentation, serves as a guiding theme for Ga's show, which takes up histories that swirl around the island of Pharos and its ancient, now destroyed, lighthouse. The structure becomes a portal through which to look at the way language at once describes objects and confuses them, like light shifting around and through water.



View of "Four Thousand Blocks," 2014.

The Lighthouse of Alexandria was built in the third century BC; until the 1300s, it was one of the Seven Wonders of the World and also the place where the Torah was translated. The exhibition opens with adjacent slide shows, one of images and one of text, that provide a history of the lighthouse through accounts such as medieval primary sources and fantastical myths, alongside photographs, diagrams, and ancient mosaics. Even through these instructional mediums, understanding is less objective than collaged, in flashes on the wall without impression. This highlighting of subjectivity reaches a pinnacle with the three-channel video *Four Thousand Blocks*, 2013–14: On the center screen, Ga narrates a dive she took in the sea that surrounds where the lighthouse once stood; the flanking screens illustrate artistic processes in a darkroom and the experience of creating letterpress. At one point, Ga retells Thoth's story, but instead of the reference to the "recipe for memory" and the "drug of reminding," here she calls it the gift of forgetting. The work underscores that the written word while stronger than our own memory serves to weaken it. A hazy black-and-white photograph, *Projection Harbor*, 2013, depicts the dice evoked in the story of Thoth—an image that then references back to the photographs developed in the video. As Ga's references shift through different media, they imitate how we develop language into legend.

— Ali Pechman