

NEWS RELEASE

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Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences

‘Altar’ by Smriti Keshari to Open at NAS

WASHINGTON – Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences and the Academy’s Science & Entertainment Exchange announce “Altar,” an installation by Indian American artist and filmmaker Smriti Keshari. The installation opens on Sept. 15, 2022, at the National Academy of Sciences and will remain on view through Sept. 15, 2023.

With “Altar” (2019) Keshari intends to provide a visual and emotional understanding of the age of artificial intelligence (AI). The sculpture enshrines the infamous Python code AlphaGo, marking the first moment when some experts believe artificial intelligence surpassed human potential by displaying creativity.

For millennia, spoken and written language has served as the vehicle for ideas that drive human progress. But today, due to mammoth amounts of data and computing power, an invisible and intangible AI is beginning to shape our species. And unlike any other language, modern computer code operates in the background without a body or form, wielding both a liberating and controlling power over the future of humanity.

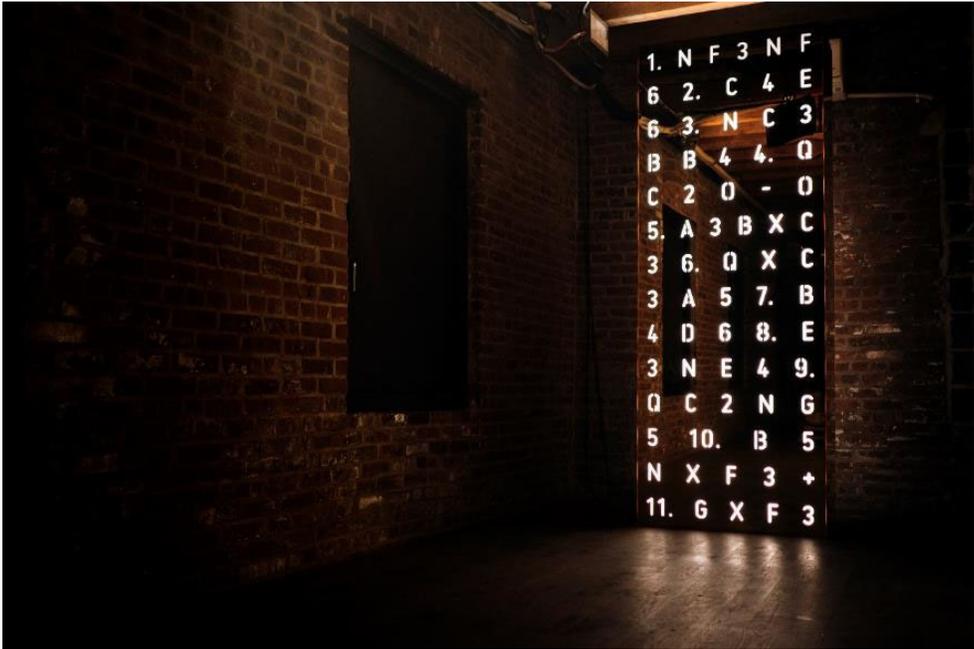
According to the artist, the artwork “juxtaposes our collective desire for forward progress against our fear of AI’s capability to shape a society beyond our control. To live in harmony or chaos in the age of AI is an illusion if we don’t look at the power behind these forces. Behind the code is an entire system that it runs on, composed of planetary resources, human labor, and data that have social implications and planetary effects.”

Smriti Keshari is an Indian American artist and film director who works in a range of media, from films, live shows, to art installations. She creates bold, visceral, and thought-provoking works. Keshari is known for her acclaimed multimedia installation, *the bomb*, which was heralded as “a stunning avant-garde approach to a plea for nuclear disarmament.” She is an artist-in-residence with the National Theatre in London, and Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) and Pioneer Works in New York City. Her work has been supported by the MacArthur Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, and others. She has spoken about art and social change at the United Nations, BBC, SXSW, Bloomberg Philanthropy, and TED. She was a TED Prize finalist and Foreign Policy’s 2016 Global Creative Thinker. Most recently, Keshari’s DIS|INTEGRATION premiered at BAM.

“Altar” is on exhibit at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. The building is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays, and closed weekends and holidays. A photo ID and proof of up-to-date vaccination against COVID-19 is required. For details about our operating status and vaccination policy, visit <https://www.nationalacademies.org/about/operating-status>. For more information about our exhibitions, visit www.cpnas.org.

Cultural Programs of the NAS sponsors exhibitions, salons, theatrical readings, and other events that explore relationships among the arts and sciences. **The Science & Entertainment Exchange** is a program of the NAS which connects the entertainment industry with experts in science, technology, and medicine in order to enhance the portrayal of science and scientists in film, television, and new media, and to make science more accessible and inspiring for all audiences. The NAS is a private, nonprofit institution that recognizes achievement in science by election to membership, and — with the National Academy of Engineering and the National Academy of Medicine — provides science, technology, and health policy advice to the federal government and other organizations. **(Continues on page 2)**

Press Images of Altar



Installation photos of Smriti Keshari's *Altar*, 2019, gold acrylic, LED light tube, 36 x 18 x 96 inches.
Photo credit: Nick Korompilas.

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