

**PRESS RELEASE**



**MIT List Visual Arts Center announces *List Projects: Farah Al Qasimi***

**Farah Al Qasimi's first solo exhibition at a US institution includes the premiere of a new video *Um Al Naar (Mother of Fire)* (2019) as well as a selection of recent photographs.**

**Exhibition is on view: July 30 through October 20, 2019**

**Cambridge, MA, June 10, 2019**—The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to announce *List Projects: Farah Al Qasimi*, the artist's first solo exhibition at a US institution. Working in photography, video, and performance, Al Qasimi considers how images inscribe identity along the lines of gender, nationality, and class. Her photographs borrow conventions from sources as diverse as documentary photography and Renaissance painting, manipulating codified expectations of how images are constructed and understood between Euro-American and Middle Eastern cultural contexts. "We are delighted to work with Farah on this timely presentation. Her photographs and moving images are as visually lush as they're controlled, offering insight into complex historical and contemporary conditions that influence the formation of gender and cultural identity," says exhibition curator Henriette Huldisch.

With a near-editorial sensibility, Al Qasimi's distinct photographic language facilitates a range of subtle interventions through which the works confront national identity and its relationship to consumerism and taste. Often, her images offer covert critiques of the gender divide in the Gulf States and its colonial and religious origins.

Alongside a group of recent photographs, the List Center exhibition premieres *Um Al Naar (Mother of Fire)* (2019), a forty-minute video structured as a television documentary following a *jinn*, or ghost-like spiritual entity. Delivering a confessional, reality TV-style monologue, the *jinn* appears on camera beneath

a patterned sheet. At once playful and melancholic, the video interweaves her ruminations on centuries of Portuguese and British colonial meddling in what is now the emirate of Ras Al Khaimah, the reverberating influence of European encroachment on the region, and the adoption of euro-centric museological practices for the display of historical artefacts.

Like the disguised *jinn* in *Um Al Naar*, camouflage and concealment also play a central role in Al Qasimi's still photographs. In a recent series of portraits that include *Living Room Vape* (2017) and *A's Reflection* (2019), Al Qasimi obscures the faces of her subjects while capturing moments that feel intimate despite their staging. Various compositional strategies hide identifying features—behind plumes of smoke, sumptuously patterned textiles and drapery, or through the spectral image of a face reflected in glass—while accentuating the opulently decorated interiors her sitters inhabit. With her interest in artifice and the public presentation of taste, Al Qasimi's images of shopping arcades, domestic settings, or non-human subjects like dyed pastel birds and falcons, also speak to cultural constructions of identity, gender, and the ascription of value to consumer goods. As she embeds her work with double meanings, Al Qasimi's still and moving images are as seductive and visually lush as they are incisive in their criticality.

Farah Al Qasimi (b. 1991, United Arab Emirates) lives and works in New York and Dubai. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai; the San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco; the CCS Bard Galleries at the Hessel Museum of Art, New York; Helena Anrather, New York; and The Third Line, Dubai. Al Qasimi received her MFA from the Yale School of Art. She has participated in residencies at the Delfina Foundation, London; the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine; and is a recipient of the New York NADA Artadia Prize and the Aaron Siskind Individual Photographer's Fellowship.

*List Projects: Farah Al Qasimi* is organized by Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions & Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

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Image credit: *Living Room Vape*, 2017. Courtesy the artist; Helena Anrather, NY; and The Third Line, Dubai. © Farah Al Qasimi

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