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# تصرفات عامة

## GENERAL BEHAVIOUR

Farah Al Qasimi فرح القاسمي

20.09.2022



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## GENERAL BEHAVIOUR

Farah Al Qasimi

فرح القاسمي

**Farah Al Qasimi: General Behaviour**

Presented by Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation,  
Department of Culture and Tourism.

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The Third Line, Dubai

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*General Behaviour* presents US-based Emirati artist Farah Al Qasimi's photographic and video-based works from 2012 to 2021. Showcased in a chronological sequence, the show explores the layers of multi-culturalism and consumer culture in the UAE, while challenging our perception of reality and navigating the intimacy of public and personal spaces.

Al Qasimi's career is presented within four main sections: *The World Is Sinking*; *Bodies and Spectre*; *May's Blue Eye* and *Trompe L'oeil* as well as screening Al Qasimi's video works: *Alone in a Crowd* and *Dream Soup*. These selected works invoke a sense of illusion and suspense demonstrated through her critically satirical lens that layers imagery and camouflages her subject matter. The artist has expertly used the method of layering in her images to stand for the makeup of culture and how it permeates.

The exhibition showcases Al Qasimi's practice, which is adorned with moments that convey a sense of aspiration and escape as seen in a "home-scape" or "city-scape." Be it large-plastered ads, a scenic landscape wallpaper in a butcher shop, a mural of outer space, a Victorian-style girl's bedroom, or perfume labels like *Macho Man* and *Extreme Happiness*; a striking parallelism in consumer culture is drawn out that reveals the invisible boundaries between space, body and object, gendered norms, and fiction and non-fiction.

Al Qasimi grew up in Abu Dhabi in the early 1990s, pursued her undergraduate studies in photography and music at Yale University in 2012 and received her MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2017.

**THE WORLD IS SINKING**



*Sunset Wallpaper*, 2012  
Vinyl wallpaper

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Gaith at Home*, 2016  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of a private collection

In this section, Al Qasimi responds to the changing private and public spaces of her environment. Bewildered by the rapid hyper-development evident in the multicultural facets of her surroundings, she captures what she finds to be a comical yet critical outcome of this fusion of culture and growth. Utilizing an observer's perspective to process her feelings of alienation, she explores new spaces in a bid to make the unfamiliar familiar. In her first developed series *The World is Sinking*, Al Qasimi traces locations in and around Dubai, capturing the unnoticeable yet amusing results of the idealistic aspirations and cultural openness of the UAE as seen in *Old McDonald's* (2014) and *Sandcastles* (2014).

During her undergraduate studies in the United States, Al Qasimi navigated her homesickness, by purchasing a stock image of palm trees on a beach, *Sunset Wallpaper* (2012), which she then attempted to plaster on her wall. Struggling to pin it, she began to reflect on her persistent need to transport herself to an inaccessible dreamlike space. Her reflection on intimate spaces, allows her to notice the various displacements in objects, materials, and even gender expectations. The contrast of what she related to as culturally authentic and what was adopted into her surroundings due to convenience and mass production was



*Old McDonald's*, 2014  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

glaring. This inspection of her surroundings allowed her to identify with the individuals present in public and personal spaces.

Her later works in 2016 and 2017 reveal the multiple layers and cultural nuances of her environment, aiming to disrupt the perception of power, vulnerability, and gender as seen in the works *Gurdwara Nanak Darbar Sahib* (2017) and *Gaith at Home* (2016).



Sandcastles, 2014  
Archival Inkjet Print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Gurdwara Nanak Darbar Sahib (Kansas), 2017*  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

# BODY AND SPECTRE

In her new style of storytelling, Al Qasimi starts to incorporate horror and paranormal themes in her work. Derived from her own interest in the genre of domestic horror movies that turn everyday living spaces to scenes of suspense and crime. Al Qasimi is intrigued by how our homes, the safest places to most of us can become dangerous and how these movies are analogies for our daily anxieties and fears. Therefore, her fascination in researching local myths, abandoned locations, and misplaced fears evoke suspense, staging aspects of the uncanny in the familiar.



*Haunted Palace Mural*, 2019  
Vinyl wallpaper

Courtesy of the artist  
and *The Third Line*, Dubai

She often uses parts of the body in her work, which are camouflaged within a space and partially revealed, such as *Shower with Lux Soap* (2018) and *Lunch* (2018). This process of veiling and unveiling her subjects



*Wrestling With Spectres, 2019*  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Shower with Lux Soap, 2018*  
Inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

became Al Qasimi's language in addressing collective assumptions of what is natural and what is fabricated. Often placed within a flurry of vibrant colours, these eerie settings create an emotional misplacement for the audience, as they question what they are viewing.

Al Qasimi expresses the otherworldly and bizarre quality of spaces and objects of the modern world. This is conveyed in Al Qasimi's work *Haunted Palace Mural* (2019) which depicts the interior of a palace in Ras Al Khaimah built in 1991, that was deemed haunted by ghosts – now turned into a museum.

Al Qasimi attempts to challenge our relationships with spaces and the objects that fill them, urging the viewer to notice inconsistencies within what seems usual. This is further elaborated in her exploration of public spaces as she visits stores that sell imported objects, that have rapidly become part of the local aesthetic and taste.

The artist also utilizes the *trompe l'oeil* effect as seen in the backdrop image, *Mina Zayed* (2018) and the photograph, *Furniture Market, Stray Cat* (2018). Their placement results in a layering of her narratives allowing her to redirect and disrupt the viewer's expectations of their cultural surroundings.



*Mina Zayed, 2018*  
Vinyl wallpaper

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Furniture Market, Stray Cat, 2018*  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

# MAY'S BLUE EYE



*Khaleej Hair Dance, 2020*  
Archival inkjet

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

In the portrait *May's Blue Eye* (2020), Al Qasimi photographed her friend wearing a contact lens contrasted with her natural eye colour. This work reflects on the artificial displacement of beauty standards, in which unnatural blue eyes have become normalized. In her exploration of retail products, interior settings, and popular media she was exposed to growing up, Al Qasimi's works personifies the idea of what it means to be in-between cultures. She reflects on the idealized representations of culture, mannerisms and fashions.

Drawn to the imaginary narratives of anime, Al Qasimi's photographs play with the dramatic and fantastical quality in anime that she seeks to show



*Lady Lady*, 2019  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi



*My Dear*, 2018  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

the world. In *Lady Lady* (2019), Al Qasimi's friend holds up her phone as the two of them revisit the anime series in the same name, about a young Japanese girl wanting to be accepted into British culture.

She also captures the cultural relics and locations she grew up with in the 1990s, as seen in *Khaleej Hair Dance* (2020), photographed in Qasr Al Hosn, an integral site that played an important role in her early understanding of culture.

She further shares her encounters with familiar motifs to her generation, as seen in the intricately carved watermelon, in *My Dear* (2018), the goat peering through a Fisher Price playhouse in *Playhouse Goat* (2020), and the hanging Elmo in *Marwa Braiding Marah's Hair* (2019).



*May's Blue Eye*, 2020  
Inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Playhouse Goat*, 2020  
Inkjet print

Courtesy of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi

# TROMPE L'OEIL CAR SEAT

In her practice, Al Qasimi arranges her compositions in a way that distorts the viewer's perception of reality by highlighting the unusual and unimaginable quality of everyday life. Humorous yet evocative, these images tell partial stories of actual instances that she either stumbled across or spontaneously staged in one of her friends' and family's houses. An upholstered car seat appears disguised as an extravagant tufted sofa, a goat is seen perched on a lavish couch, a WhatsApp greeting graphic blends in harmony with a fleece blanket, resulting in a plethora of design and colour.



Goat Farm Majlis, 2021  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Trompe L'oeil Car Seat*, 2019  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

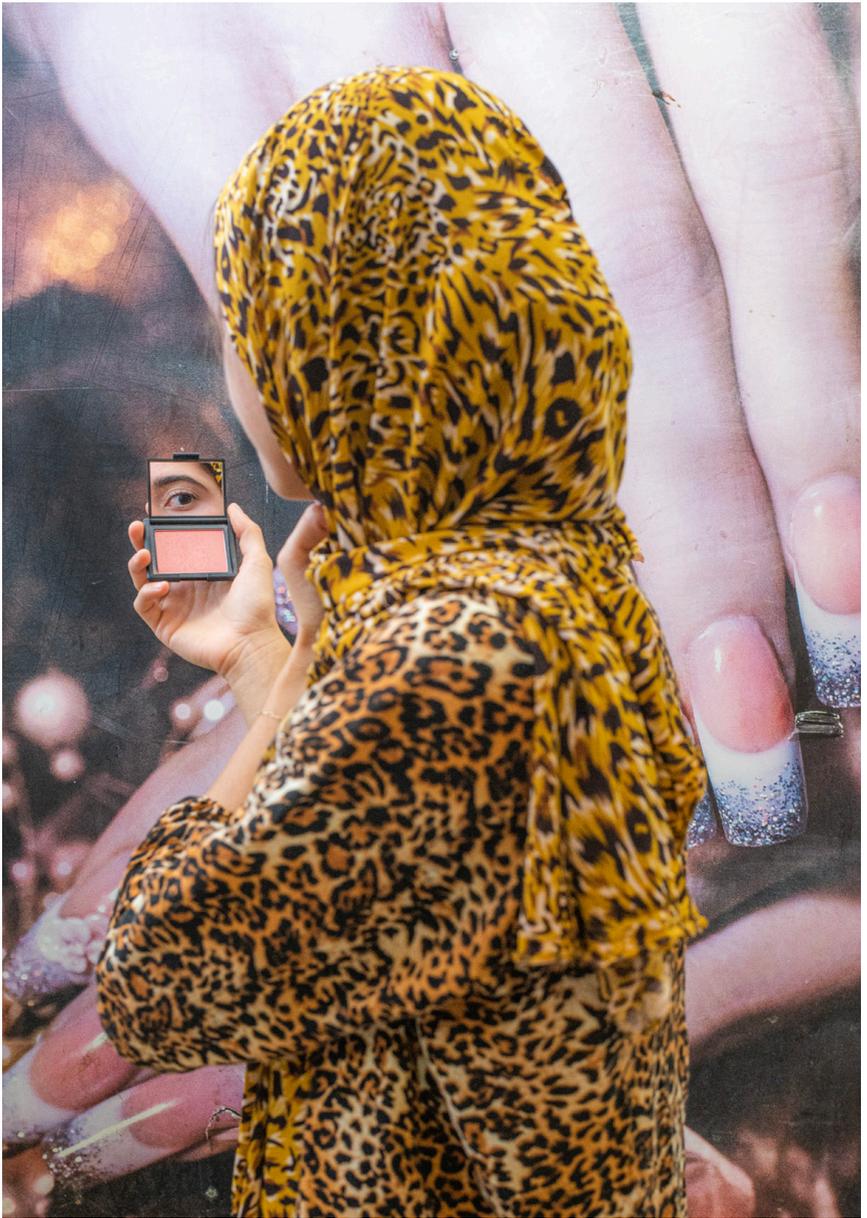
In these works, Qasimi further reflects on the state of our constructed surroundings, contemplating on the complexity of her consumer environment.

Throughout her photographs of local furniture stores and domestic interiors, we see brocade curtains, crystal chandeliers, ornate gilded furniture, and decorative wall plaster mouldings. Al Qasimi observes how the popularity of baroque style furniture has become an accessible commodity to the population in the UAE. Al Qasimi ponders on these interiors not in a form of distaste but rather how these Eurocentric styles have become translated over the years into settings that people have normalized and fondly embraced.



*WhatsApp Greeting*, 2021  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



*Woman in Leopard Print*, 2019  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai



Noora's Room, 2020  
Archival inkjet print

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

**ALONE IN A CROWD  
(KING OF JOY)**

*Alone In A Crowd (King of Joy)* is a ten-minute improvised piano performance, where Al Qasimi appears dressed in a clown costume that she had bought from Dragon Mart—, a Chinese mall in Dubai - known for selling fake products. In this performance, Al Qasimi reflected on the vast spectrum of human emotion and the idea of manufactured happiness. She often explores how clowns or comedians can perform an “alchemy of sadness” that transcends into humour. At the beginning of her improvised performance, Al Qasimi seeks to convey how to match her facial expressions and gestures with the rhythms of the music to bring an exaggerated sense of theatricality. There are moments in the video where Al Qasimi’s authentic expression emerges, allowing the viewers to try, carefully and meticulously, to discover both the moments that are mimed and the moments that are real.



*Alone In A Crowd (King of Joy)*, 2020  
HD Video, 10 minutes

Courtesy of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi

## DREAM SOUP

Commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation, *Dream Soup* is a short video piece on the perfume industry in the UAE. Al Qasimi documents various perfume retailers and the different stages of perfume manufacturing. Throughout the film, many of the labels' names that appear often appeal to gendered aspirations like 'Tender Feelings' and 'Manhood.' The superimposed shots of mesmerizing silk and the mixture of dyed scents leave the viewer in a trance as they perhaps contemplate their aspirations and desires. The work comes to full fruition as shoppers are seen testing the scents and finding their own 'Dream Soup'.



*Dream Soup*, 2019  
Video, 7 minutes, scent

Courtesy of the artist  
and The Third Line, Dubai

