

Farah Al Qasimi (b. 1991, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; lives and works in Brooklyn and Dubai) works in photography, video, and performance. Her recent commission with Public Art Fund, Back and Forth Disco, was on view at 100 bus shelters in New York City in 2019–20, and was named one of the best artworks of the year by *The New Yorker*. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai; San Francisco Arts Commission; CCS Bard Galleries at the Hessel Museum of Art, New York; Helena Anrather, New York; The Third Line, Dubai; The List Visual Arts Center at MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto; and the Houston Center for Photography. She has participated in residencies at the Delfina Foundation, London; Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine; and is a recipient of the New York NADA Artadia Prize; Aaron Siskind Individual Photographer's Fellowship; and this year's Capricious Photo Award. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Tate Modern, London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge; and Huis Marseille, Museum for Photography, Amsterdam. Al Qasimi received her MFA from the Yale School of Art.

Farah Al Qasimi: Everywhere there is splendor is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.

The exhibition is generously supported by Alexis Cossé and Erik Karanik, and The Strive Fund. Special thanks to Helena Anrather.

Related Programs

Artist Talk: Farah Al Qasimi
Wednesday, November 10, 6:00 pm

Film Screening: Where is the Friend's House?

List of works on the Project Wall:

Majlis Goat, 2021
Six Different Screams, 2021
White Soap in Pink Bathroom, 2018
Kimball Hotel, Springfield, 2021

All works:
Archival inkjet prints
Courtesy the artist; Helena Anrather, New York;
and The Third Line, Dubai



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Museum St. Louis**
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Artist's Suggested Reading and Listening List

Selected by Farah Al Qasimi to share insights into her art and ideas.

Reading:

/ The Arab Apocalypse, Etel Adnan, (poetry), The Post-Apollo Press, 2007
/ Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair, Sarah Schulman, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016
/ Diving Into The Wreck: Poems 1971-1972, Adrienne Rich, W.W. Norton and Company, 1994 (reissue, paperback)
/ "Eating the other: Desire and resistance," in Black Looks: Race and Representation, bell hooks, South End Press, 1992
The Girl Who Fell to Earth: A Memoir, Sophia Al-Maria, Harper Perennial, 2012
/ LaToya Ruby Frazier: The Notion of Family, Dawoud Bey, interview; Laura Wexler and Dennis C. Dickerson, text; Aperture, 2014
/ The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula K. Le Guin, Ace Books, 1987
/ Poetics of Relation, Édouard Glissant, University of Michigan Press, 1997

Music:

/ "Shayef Al Bahar," Fairuz, 1988
/ Watering a Flower, Haruomi Hosono, 1984
/ Ya Nour Ouyouni, Mohammed Abdo, 1977

Viewing:

/ Atlantique, Mati Diop, director, 2019
/ Lady Lady!!, Toei Animation Company, producers, (anime series), 1987–88
/ "Mummenschanz on the Muppet Show," YouTube, 1976
/ Tongues Untied. Marlon Riggs, director, (documentary), 1989

Gallery Guide
Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

September 3, 2021–
February 27, 2022



Farah Al Qasimi Everywhere there is splendor



Farah Al Qasimi works in photography, video, and performance, addressing questions of culture, domesticity, identity, labor, and escapism. Occupying a space of celebration and critique, joy and sadness, her photographs explore the ways in which people see themselves reflected in popular culture and ask how ideas about beauty—from the global to the local, the commercial to the traditional—inflect the environments of everyday life.

Everywhere there is splendor is a new site-specific installation focusing on Al Qasimi's personal family history through a lens of intimacy and interiority. Mining her family photo albums for inspiration, she

Farah Al Qasimi, *Majlis Goat*, 2021. Archival inkjet print, 30 × 40 inches.
Courtesy the artist; Helena Anrather, New York; and The Third Line, Dubai.



Audio Tour

Visit camstl.org/audio on a mobile device to hear directly from the artist and curator on the audio tour.



Farah Al Qasimi, *Arrival*, Installation view, The Third Line, Dubai, September 18–November 23, 2019. Courtesy the artist and The Third Line, Dubai.

explores her family's emigration from Lebanon to the US in the 1950s and expands on the experience of cultural hybridity—people living between and amidst multiple cultures. To make these works, Al Qasimi carefully constructs a physical collage by staging various materials and then photographing the scene. Included are found family photos, floral tablecloths, garments, wallpaper, postcards, food items, and recent photographs she made while quarantined with family. A project only truly possible because of her time quarantining, each image and symbol are woven together by Al Qasimi in an attempt to piece together collected memories.

In *Everywhere there is splendor*, a postcard from the Kimball Hotel in Springfield, Massachusetts—where Al Qasimi's grandmother worked—appears pinned onto a blue draped fabric. Combined with banquet tablecloths and buffet table skirts, the work alludes to the hotel's glamor and the guests' enjoyment—luxuries provided by immigrant workers, mostly from Lebanon. Creating a kind of assembled familial self-portrait, Al Qasimi explores intergenerational connections, social customs, and themes of labor and production in relation to her family's history. By reproducing the images at a scale the artist relates to Renaissance portraits and removing them from the vernacular context of a family album, Al Qasimi alters the formality of family photography and brings into question how photographs are made and understood in our culture today.

Cultural Hybridity

The artist often documents interstitial cultural spaces, whether they are immigrant communities in the United States or remainders of colonial influence in the Arab World. Interested in emblems of cultural exchange, Al Qasimi has photographed a range of places and events, including a fake "Amazon" department store in Dubai, a sparkling chandelier at a Yemeni-owned bodega in Queens, and a Muslim beauty pageant in Iowa. Related to her focus on cultural hybridity, and central to her practice, is an attention to artifice and surface. Through the act of photographing a subject, reality is warped and exaggerated, hinting at the humor of a world that constantly strives to transcend itself.

Aesthetic and Color

Al Qasimi has developed a distinct aesthetic as seen in her rhythms of color, pattern, and texture. Informed by her upbringing in the Emirates, spent watching Japanese anime and reading American children's books, her brightly saturated color palette leans toward pinks, blues, and yellows, made dazzling and caustic with the frequent use of flash. In *Everywhere there is splendor*, Al Qasimi leans toward the subdued pinks and mauves popular in domestic interiors during her childhood in the 1990s—an indication of shifting trends in cultural taste and style.

Photographic Approach

Al Qasimi's work ranges in its approach to photographic seeing, moving fluidly between street photography, staged studio photographs, and layered compositions of inanimate objects. These constructed images, such as *Kimball Hotel, Springfield* (2021) might even be mistaken for digitally-generated collages if not for the shadows that begin to reveal themselves, grounding the scenes in physical space. In these photographs, the artist plays with the legibility of the image and of the subject, asking for greater participation from the audience in identifying an underlying connection.

Public Art

In 2020 at the height of the pandemic and the shutdown of cultural venues, Al Qasimi was commissioned by Public Art Fund to present seventeen photographs in 100 bus shelters around New York's five boroughs. Images of a woman in a leopard print headscarf, two men in a barbershop run by Palestinians in Bay Ridge, "Coco" the cockatoo in a curtain store in Ridgewood—these are just some of the images that Al Qasimi presented that put a jubilant spin on living in between cultures. For this public project, the artist injected a sense of celebration of the subject matter, frequenting small businesses in her neighborhood run by immigrants, and attempting to echo New York back to its residents in a way that would make them feel properly represented.



(Top right) Farah Al Qasimi, *Kimball Hotel, Springfield*, 2021. Archival inkjet print, 70 × 50 inches.



(Bottom right) Farah Al Qasimi, *Bloody Palm*, 2019. Archival inkjet print, 11 × 8 inches.

Both courtesy the artist; Helena Anrather, New York; and The Third Line, Dubai.