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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Farah Al Qasimi installs her largest museum installation to date on CAM's Project Wall, filling the space with vibrant, maximalized colors



Farah Al Qasimi, *Aviary*, 2019. Archival inkjet print, 45 x 60 inches. Courtesy the artist; Helena Anrather, New York; and The Third Line, Dubai.

May 5, 2021 (St. Louis, MO) - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) devotes its 60-foot-long Project Wall to *Everywhere there is splendor*, a site-specific photo-based installation by Farah Al Qasimi, on view as part of the Fall/Winter exhibitions, September 3, 2021 through February 20, 2022. Through the media of photography, video, and performance, Al Qasimi explores notions of culture, domesticity, escapism, and labor. *Everywhere there is splendor* features recently created images that provoke empathy, connection, and subjectivity. This will be Al Qasimi's largest museum installation to date.

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.

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 animes 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. Her work ranges in its approach to photographic seeing, moving fluidly between street photography, staged studio photographs, and layered compositions of

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inanimate objects. These constructed images 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



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Although Al Qasimi has long explored notions of style and taste as they relate to interior domestic spaces, the exhibition at CAM focuses on her personal family history through a lens of intimacy and interiority. Al Qasimi looks to her family's archive of photographs for inspiration, exploring their emigration from Lebanon into the US and expanding on notions of cultural hybridity—of assimilation, preservation, and the splintering of family. During her time in quarantine after traveling to the United Arab Emirates in early 2021, she photographed in and around her family home, referencing an old family album documenting their Westward migration. Al Qasimi re-examined the significance of a personal archive, using the ubiquitous floral tablecloths, garments, wallpaper, and interior decor of her childhood and what they represent. Several new works in the exhibition picture family photographs, remakes of furniture textile patterns, and various food items—symbols that point to social customs, notions of labor, and means of production in relation to her family history. Reflecting on the past year and the uncertainty of the future, Al Qasimi found it ever more urgent to deepen her connection with her family's past through these works. Referencing the way a timeline might be presented, the artist sees CAM's Project Wall as a way to explore her own chronology in the context of our current moment.

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

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.

About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis works to enrich lives and inspire curiosity, creativity, and learning through experiences with contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, the Museum reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape while engaging thousands of visitors through a wide array of public programs. CAM nurtures the creative minds of our city's youth through free, in-depth art education, making a long-lasting impact on the community. We are a site for discovery, a welcoming space, free and open to all.

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