



Monira Al Qadiri
The End, 2017
Polystyrene model, sound,
levitation module, dimensions
variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph: Andy Keate

MONIRA AL QADIRI

The Craft

03.11.17 – 05.02.18



Felix Bonfils
Baalbek, Pierre du midi, Monolith, Circa 1867-76
Albumen print mounted on board in an album, 35 x 47 cm
The Fouad Debbas Collection / Sursock Museum

CLICK, CLICK

**The Repetition of Photographic Subject
Matter in the 19th Century**

A Selection of Images from the Fouad Debbas Collection

03.11.17 – 05.02.18

The Sursock Museum is pleased to present two new exhibitions: *The Craft*, Kuwaiti Monira Al Qadiri's first solo show in Lebanon, and *Click, Click*, an exhibition of photographs from the Fouad Debbas Collection, highlighting the repetition of photographic subject matter.

Both exhibitions open on Thursday 2 November 2017 from 18:00 to 21:00. They will be on view until 5 February 2018.

Monira Al Qadiri

The Craft

Co-commissioned by the Sursock Museum and Gasworks, London

Opening on Thursday 2 November 2017, 18:00 to 21:00

On view until 5 February 2018

Twin Galleries, GF

The Craft comprises works in sculpture, video, and sound that envisage international diplomacy as an alien conspiracy. Shown in two distinct environments – a mysterious, pitch-black room and an American diner – these semi-autobiographical pieces of science fiction unearth the unlikely stories lurking in the shadows of Monira Al Qadiri's childhood in Kuwait. Revisiting the fantasies that she and her sister elaborated during these early years, they depict the culture and rituals of diplomacy by which they were then surrounded as literally other-worldly to the current rise of nationalism and populist politics.

In the VHS video *The Craft* (2017), presented in the diner, the artist asks: "Were my parents conspiring with aliens behind my back?" Reality crumbles; paranoia and speculation take hold. Pop culture, futuristic architecture, junk food, dream readings, alien abductions, geopolitics, diplomacy, war, and peace: all of these once solid staples of modern life become tainted by a general sense of distrust. Like a ticking time bomb placed at the center of the nuclear family unit, suspicion reaches a crescendo when the protagonist discovers that the "American Century" has finally ended. Though the word "craft" is often reserved for manual skills that belong to a premodern world, Al Qadiri applies it to the intangible trade of international diplomacy to stress its anachronism. If diplomacy is the art of dealing with others in a sensitive and tactful manner, then it, too, will soon become a thing of the past – an ill prophecy gleaming from the diner's red neon sign, titled *Omen* (2017).

Leaving the diner, we encounter *The End* (2017), a dimly lit, levitating hamburger. Arguably the most iconic symbol of consumer capitalism, here the burger is associated with the Japanese Ukiyo-e: pictures of hedonistic, "floating worlds" that became popular amongst the merchant classes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japan. The crude mechanics of suspension reveal, however, the precariousness of American cultural hegemony – a point brought home by the accompanying sound piece: a pre-recorded,

voice-manipulated reading of an excerpt from *The Kuwait Urbanisation* (1964) by Saba George Shiber, a book about the modernization of Kuwait in the 1960s. This period was the high point of American cultural expansion in the region, which the artist notes "has now faded to the point of alien-ness."

LECTURE PERFORMANCE

Thursday 2 November, 19:00 to 19:30

Auditorium, Level -2

To mark the opening of *The Craft*, Monira Al Qadiri will give a lecture performance titled "American Century: The End." In this lecture performance, Monira Al Qadiri performs a eulogy for the death of the American popular imagination, using a single all-embracing motif: junk food.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Monira Al Qadiri

b. 1983, Dakar, Senegal – Lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands

Monira Al Qadiri is a Kuwaiti visual artist born in Senegal and educated in Japan. In 2010, she received a Ph.D. in inter-media art from Tokyo University of the Arts, where her research was focused on the aesthetics of sadness in the Middle East stemming from poetry, music, art, and religious practices. Her work explores unconventional gender identities, petrocultures and their possible futures, as well as the legacies of corruption. She is also part of the artist collective GCC.

Her work has been exhibited at Gasworks, London (2017), Stroom Den Haag, the Hague (2017), ACUD Macht Neu, Berlin (2017), ATHR Gallery, Jeddah (2017), the Sultan Gallery, Kuwait (2011, 2014), and Beirut Art Center, Lebanon (2013).



Monira Al Qadiri
Omen, 2017
Neon sign, dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph: Andy Keate

Click, Click

The Repetition of Photographic Subject Matter in the 19th Century A Selection of Images from the Fouad Debbas Collection

Opening on Thursday 2 November 2017, 18:00 to 21:00

On view until 5 February 2018

The Fouad Debbas Collection Gallery, Level 1

They all deal with the same subject matter! Félix and Adrien Bonfils, Tancrède Dumas, and Jean-Baptiste Charlier all share a more or less identical repertoire of images.

Like tourists checking off visited sites, photographers based in the Middle East in the 19th century roamed the land with the aim of sharing views from across the Orient with a Western audience. In this way, Baalbek, Palmyra, Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem became topoi, or commonplaces.

Prints of these sites – some inhabited, some desert – proliferated with each new visit, and met certain criteria aiming to evoke either a Bedouin Orient frozen in time, or on the contrary, a modernizing Orient. Whatever message these photographers intended

to convey, they all copied each other, contributing thereby to the creation of a common imaginary.

About The Fouad Debbas Collection

The Fouad Debbas Collection is a photographic collection comprising over 30,000 images from the Middle East – namely Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey – from 1830 till the 1960s. It was built over the course of two decades by Fouad César Debbas (1930-2001), who was an ardent believer in the importance of collecting and preserving images as a means of safeguarding cultural heritage.

Housed in the Sursock Museum, the Collection consists of photographs, postcards, and stereoscopic views, in addition to loose albumen prints, etchings, and books, all of which relate to the region. The collection, Orientalist in character and replete with commercial clichés, forms an important part of the Sursock Museum's collection, highlighting photography's key role in the development of modern art in Lebanon.



James Graham
Baalbeck, columns of the Temple of the Sun, Circa 1856-57
Albumen print mounted on board, 30 x 23 cm
The Fouad Debbas Collection / Sursock Museum

ABOUT THE SURSOCK MUSEUM

Mission

Through our collection, archives, exhibitions, and public programs, we aim to produce knowledge on art practices in the region and explore work that reflects on our contemporary moment. Our goal is

to support local art production, to provide a platform for encounter and experimentation with art and ideas, and to inform and challenge different audiences in new and unexpected ways.

Opening Hours

Open daily from 10:00 to 18:00

Late opening on Thursdays from 12:00 to 21:00

Closed on Tuesdays

Admission to the Sursock Museum is free of charge.

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The Sursock Museum by night
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