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**SOPHIA AL-MARIA – BITCH OMEGA**

8 MARCH – 19 JULY 2020



Sophia Al-Maria, *Beast Type Song*, 2019, Video, 38'03", color, sound. Video still. Courtesy of the artist and Project Native Informant, London.

**BITCH OMEGA**, **Sophia Al-Maria's** first solo exhibition in Germany, brings together a selection of moving-image works concerning the writing and imaging of history and myth via our relationship to the camera and the screen. In her work, the Qatari-American artist explores forms of redress and revision, engaging with writing and drawing as a way of rejecting speechlessness and acknowledging untold histories and lives that have been suppressed, silenced, or have gone unwritten. Delving into the murky terrain of post-colonial identity, representation, and desire, the works featured in the exhibition reflect and resist the deeply ingrained forms of violence perpetuated by



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the imposition of narratives, the gaze or the camera, and the circulation of images in both a public and interior sphere.

BITCH OMEGA includes a new diaristic video essay (2020) of the same name, which takes the downcast gaze of the omega wolf as a poetic position of hyper-subjectivity. For Al-Maria, the omega wolf—the lowest ranked member of a pack—is an observer of history at the “omega point”—the idea that everything in the universe is spiraling toward a final unification. The film explores point of view and the difference between being a witness and a participant in historical events at a time of extreme cultural, political, and environmental change. Conceptualized as an evolving film of fragments, the work is fundamentally collaborative, featuring voiceovers by individuals from Al-Maria's community; only at the end will the whole work be available in the space. *Bitch Omega* will be comprised of voice notes, written text, phone footage, found images, and childhood videos.

The exhibition also presents *Beast Type Song* (2019), Al-Maria's most ambitious film to date, featuring performances by the artist boychild and actors Yumna Marwan and Elizabeth Peace. First shown at Tate Britain in September 2019, the film is set in a post-apocalyptic future during a time of solar war and is inspired by Etel Adnan's 1989 book *The Arab Apocalypse*. Other references include Caliban and Sycorax from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the writings of Michelle Cliff and Mohamed Choukri, among others. *Beast Type Song* is a film-within-a-film that lays bare the production of its own making: as it unfolds, one of the narrators, played by the artist herself, discloses the various devices and plot structures used to construct the storyline. Together with the cast, Al-Maria reflects on the physical and psychological consequences of colonialism, on what it means to not be in charge of one's own narrative, to be defined as “Other” from an outside position.

Also featured in the show are two works from 2018, *Major Motions* and *White Man's Bible* (Revenge Porn), both featuring Chinese actress Bai Ling. In the single-channel video loop *Major Motions* she impersonates the Torch Lady from the logo of Columbia Pictures, a Grecian style white woman holding up a shining torch as a symbol of enlightenment modeled after the early female personification of America known as Columbia. Al-Maria substitutes the torch with a vibrator and places Bai in front of an ever-rising moon accompanied by a distorted and vertiginous soundtrack. In doing so, the artist turns one of cinema's most iconic logos into a playful symbol of female empowerment and desire. Bai is also the protagonist of the video installation *White Man's Bible* (Revenge Porn), which consists of 59 stacked copies of Playboy magazine, including Bai's cover issue and a video playing on an iPhone. In 2005, Bai became the first Asian woman to be featured on the cover of the magazine, which cost her a role in Star Wars, whose producers subsequently cut her scenes from the final edit of the movie. The installation includes an interview with the actress about this experience.

Drawing on Al-Maria's personal experiences from a time she lived in Cairo and worked as a screenwriter, the painting *Rape Gaze* (2014) and the videos *Torturous Journey* and *Class A* (both 2014) all relate to a film project titled *Beretta*, which Al-Maria never produced due to rights issues and censorship. The script for *Beretta* was inspired by rape-revenge movies and portrayed a young mute woman out to avenge her perpetrators. The remnants of this project highlight the on- and off-screen misogyny and racism that brought production to a halt, utilizing footage from auditions, interviews with the lead actress, and fragments of 1970s and 80s Egyptian movie posters depicting what Al-Maria calls “the rape gaze.”



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In BITCH OMEGA, the artist brings together various threads that have defined her practice for the past decade. Her ongoing engagement with writing and the imaging of history through broadcast television, print advertising, and social media challenges the perspective of the omniscient narrator, rattling at the foundations of Western ideologies and power. Instead, she turns inward—toward the hypersubjective—asking how the personal affects our understanding of the world. “In order to process the encounter with reality,” says Al-Maria, “our minds compress and distort events in the external environment into a comprehensible rendering—perception is an assemblage, a sliver of some platonic ideal of ‘the truth.’” The question remains: Whose truth?

Image material is available for download in our [press area](#).

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Artist, writer, and filmmaker **Sophia Al-Maria** (b. 1983 in Tacoma, USA, lives in London) studied comparative literature at the American University in Cairo, and aural and visual cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work has been exhibited at various institutions around the world including Tate, London; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthall Stavanger, Stavanger; Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; LUMA Westbau, Zurich; New Museum, New York; and Serpentine Gallery, London. In 2016, Al-Maria participated in the Biennale of Moving Images (BIM), organized by the centre d’art contemporain in Geneva. Her writing has appeared in Harper’s Magazine, Five Dials, Triple Canopy, and Bidoun. She is also the author of *Virgin With A Memory* and *The Girl Who Fell To Earth*. In 2018 she was a writer-in-residence at Whitechapel Gallery, London.

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### HORIZONTAL VERTIGO

31 March 2019 – 19 July 2020

horizontal vertigo is an ensemble of solo exhibitions, performances, screenings, and talks at the JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION in Düsseldorf and Berlin, striving to amplify the multiplicity of narratives and narrators at hand while acknowledging their difference.

Over the course of one year, horizontal vertigo brings together a diverse group of international and interdisciplinary artists who use film, video, installation, performance, poetry, virtual reality, and sound in inquiries and ruminations that embrace various modes storytelling and presentation to address marginalized histories and cultural hybrids, fractured identities, and the entanglement of the self in a world of systems and networks.

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### ABOUT THE JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION

The JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION is one of the world’s most comprehensive private collections of time-based art, dedicated to the public presentation, advancement, conservation, and scholarship of media and performance practices. With over 850 artworks by 255 artists from around the world, the collection’s contemporary focus is rooted in artists’ moving image experiments from the 1960s and ’70s. Works in the collection span video, film, single- and multi-channel



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moving image installation, multimedia environments, performance, sound, and virtual reality. Photography, sculpture, and painting supplement its time-based emphasis. Artworks from the collection have been presented in large-scale solo and group exhibitions at the JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION in Düsseldorf, Germany (JSC Düsseldorf) since 2007. In 2016, a second exhibition space opened in Berlin (JSC Berlin). A wide range of public programs, comprised of tours, performances, screenings, lectures, artist talks, and workshops invite visitors and scholars to engage with time-based art on multiple levels and from various perspectives.

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### GENERAL INFORMATION

#### PRESS PREVIEW

5 March 2020, 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

A press preview will take place at JSC Düsseldorf, Schanzenstraße 54, 40549 Düsseldorf. The artist and curator will be present. Registration is requested: [press@jsc.art](mailto:press@jsc.art)

#### OPENING

6 March 2020, 6:00–10:00 p.m.

#### EXHIBITION DURATION

8 March – 19 July 2020

#### OPENING HOURS

Sundays, 11:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.

#### ADMISSION

free

#### BARRIER-FREE ACCESS

JSC Düsseldorf is accessible for those with wheelchairs or prams. If you would like to use the lift to travel between the floors of the exhibition space, just ask our service staff and they will be happy to assist you.

#### PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS IN GERMAN

Public guided tours in German through the current exhibitions take place twice a month on Sundays, noon (duration: 90 minutes).

Cost: EUR 10.00 per person (entitles to admission to all exhibitions on the same day).

Free of charge for children and people under 18 years of age, as well as school children, students and trainees. Registration online through our [calendar](#).



## DÜSSELDORF

### **SPECIAL GUIDED TOURS**

Tours are also available outside opening hours.

Cost: EUR 20.00 per person for groups of 10–25 persons (entitles to admission to all exhibitions on the same day).

For enquiries and to register, please send an e-mail to [visit.duesseldorf@jsc.art](mailto:visit.duesseldorf@jsc.art)

Free of charge for groups of students from universities, colleges, schools and art academies

**FACEBOOK** /juliastoschekcollection

**INSTAGRAM** @juliastoschekcollection

#juliastoschekcollection #jsc #sophiaalmaria #bitchomega

### **PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION

JSC DÜSSELDORF | Schanzenstraße 54 | D 40549 Düsseldorf

Tel.: +49 (0) 211 / 58 58 84-0

JSC BERLIN | Leipziger Straße 60 | D 10117 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0) 30 / 921 062 460

[press@jsc.art](mailto:press@jsc.art)

[www.jsc.art](http://www.jsc.art)

LEO UND WOLF

Leonie Pfennig und Corinna Wolfien

Communication, Text and Editing

Corinna Wolfien: +49 (0) 1755676046

[hallo@leoundwolf.de](mailto:hallo@leoundwolf.de)