

Alternative creation myths narrate a feminist past at Whitechapel Gallery

Sophia Al-Maria: BCE

12 January 2018 – 28 April 2019

Galleries 5&6, Free Entry

#BCE

15 November 2018 – Marking the culmination of a year-long collaboration as Whitechapel Gallery's Writer in Residence, this new project from artist, writer and filmmaker **Sophia Al-Maria** (b. 1983, US) draws on feminism and radical queer politics to consider themes of history and narrative. *BCE* presents two distinct creation myths side by side – one ancient, one new.

In an ongoing collaboration Al-Maria invites London-based artist, writer and performer **Victoria Sin** (b. 1991, Canada) to conceive of a new creation myth in a film work specially-commissioned for Whitechapel Gallery and on show for the first time. Sin performs the myth to camera, interrogating the patriarchal dimensions of sex, race, gender and fertility.

Displayed alongside, *Wayuu Creation Myth* (2018) explores the power of feminine rage to question colonial narratives. Footage shot on a hill of salt introduces a member of the Wayuu tribe in northern Colombia with whom Al-Maria collaborated, spontaneously retelling the story of Wolunca – the first Wayuu woman, who has a 'vagina dentata'.

Over the course of her residency, Al-Maria has taken inspiration from the late speculative fiction writer **Ursula K. Le Guin** (1929 – 2018, US), whose short essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* questions masculine heroic trajectories to suggest an alternative non-linear model of storytelling based on the process of collecting and gathering (as opposed to hunting). Asking urgent questions about survival in a hostile world, storytelling becomes a means to imagine different, more hopeful futures.

Sophia Al-Maria's work has been exhibited internationally. Her award-winning memoir, *The Girl Who Fell to Earth* (2012) charts the experience of navigating two different worlds in a childhood spent shuttling between the Pacific Northwest and the Gulf.

Press Release

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Notes to Editors

- The project is curated by Jane Scarth, Curator: Public Programmes at the Whitechapel Gallery
- The [texts written](#) by Al-Maria over the course of a year are available online. They reflect an ongoing series of performances and readings held at Whitechapel Gallery, spanning politics, science fiction and personal biography, realised in collaboration with Victoria Sin.
- Sophia Al-Maria's residency has been supported by the Barjeel Art Foundation

About Sophia Al-Maria

Sophia Al Maria (b. 1983, US) is a Qatari-American artist, writer, and filmmaker. Al-Maria has exhibited work at New Museum, New York, NY, USA (2015); Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea (2013); Waqif Art Centre, Doha, Qatar (2007); and Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt (2005), among other places. Al-Maria has also been invited to participate in the 2016 Biennale of Moving Images (BIM), organized by the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, Switzerland and is a root researcher in the 2016 Shanghai Project. In 2015 she guest edited issue 8 of *The Happy Hypocrite* entitled "Fresh Hell." Her first solo exhibition, *Virgin with a Memory*, was presented at HOME, Manchester in 2014. Her critically-acclaimed memoir, *The Girl Who Fell to Earth* (2012), was published by Harper Perennial. Her writing has also appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *Five Dials*, *Triple Canopy*, and *Bidoun*. She studied comparative literature at the American University in Cairo, and aural and visual cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.

About Victoria Sin

Victoria Sin (b. 1991, Canada) is an artist using speculative fiction within performance, moving image, writing, and print to interrupt normative processes of desire, identification and objectification. This includes Drag as a practice of purposeful embodiment questioning technologies of representation and systems of looking. Drawing from close personal encounters of looking and wanting, their work presents heavily constructed fantasy narratives on the often unsettling experience of the physical within the social body. Their long-term project Dream Babes explores strategies of queer resistance that reject pre-existing historical and social infrastructures. It has included science fiction porn screenings and talks, a programme of performance at Auto Italia South East (2016), a publication and a science fiction reading group for queer people of colour.

About Whitechapel Gallery

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world class artists from modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Frida Kahlo to contemporaries such as Sophie Calle, Lucian Freud, Gilbert & George and Mark Wallinger. With beautiful galleries, exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, dining room and bookshop, the Gallery is open all year round, so there is always something free to see. It is a touchstone for contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter.

Visitor Information

Admission: Free

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; Thursdays, 11am – 9pm

Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

Nearest London Underground Stations: Aldgate East, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR

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