

WHITNEY

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MEDIA ALERT



Sophia Al-Maria (b. 1983), still from *Black Friday*, 2016. Digital video, color, sound. Collection of the artist; courtesy The Third Line, Dubai

Sophia Al-Maria: *Black Friday* Opens at the Whitney on July 26

NEW YORK, June 21, 2016—Featuring a new video and installation, *Sophia Al-Maria: Black Friday* debuts at the Whitney Museum of American Art on July 26, 2016. The work, made on the occasion of the exhibition, will be shown in the first-floor John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation Gallery, which is accessible to the public free-of-charge. On view through October 31, 2016, *Black Friday* is Sophia Al-Maria's first solo show in the United States.

For nearly a decade, Al-Maria has been finding ways to describe twenty-first-century life in the Gulf Arab nations through art, writing, and filmmaking. She coined the term “Gulf Futurism” to explain the stunning urban and economic development of the Gulf Arab nations over the last decades, as well as the environmental damage, religious conservatism, and historical amnesia that have accompanied it. Her exhibition at the Whitney continues this examination by focusing on the Gulf's embrace of the shopping mall.

In Al-Maria's view, the mall in both the Gulf and the United States—along with its attendant consumerism—occupies “a weirdly neutral shared zone between cultures that are otherwise engaged in a sort of war of information and image,” waged through both traditional and social media. The proliferation of malls in the Gulf in the late 1990s and early 2000s is something Al-Maria witnessed firsthand, having been raised between Washington State and Qatar. Her new video, *Black Friday*, is a rumination on shopping malls everywhere as secular temples of capitalism. Beneath the projected video lies *The Litany*, an installation of flickering electronic devices displaying short, glitchy loops—a heap of old screens that acts as a coded history of consumption, conflict, and desire.

An online essay on Sophia Al-Maria's work will be available at whitney.org.

The exhibition is organized by associate curator Christopher Y. Lew and is part of the Whitney's ongoing series of exhibitions by emerging artists.

About the Artist

Sophia Al-Maria (b. 1983) studied comparative literature at the American University in Cairo, and aural and visual cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her first solo exhibition, *Virgin with a Memory*, was presented at HOME, Manchester in 2014. Al-Maria has also 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 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 currently lives and works in London.

Exhibition Support

Major support for Sophia Al-Maria is provided by the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

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