

GASWORKS

Monira Al Qadiri: *The Craft*

13 July – 10 September

Gasworks presents *The Craft*, the first UK solo exhibition by Monira Al Qadiri.

The exhibition comprises works in sculpture, video and sound that envisage international diplomacy as an alien conspiracy. Shown in two distinct environments – a mysterious, pitch-black anteroom and an American diner – these semi-autobiographical pieces of science fiction unearth the unlikely stories lurking in the shadows of the artist'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 centre 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 pre-modern 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* by Saba George Shiber, a book about the modernisation 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'.

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Related events

AMERICAN CENTURY: THE END

Thursday, July 13, 7pm

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.

List of works

The Craft, 2017. VHS video, colour with sound, 16 min.

The End, 2017. Polystyrene model, levitation module, sound.

Omen, 2017. Neon sign.

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