



Sophia Al-Maria *Pidge*

02 November - 10 December 2022

Pidge, Sophia Al-Maria's second solo exhibition at Project Native Informant, marks a return to the concerns which catalysed her writing around Gulf Futurism: the alienating effects of technology on the body and the displacement experienced psychologically and spiritually when life is mediated by screens. *Pidge* takes a new perspective on these subjects over ten years later, in seeking liberation through communication beyond words.

--

Pigeon fanciers in London clubs say birds (like bees) are getting lost with increasing frequency. They believe cell phone radiation confuses their internal navigation systems. Between the soul-delay which occurs with long-distance jet-travel and the profound isolation I feel to be an ever-rising tide due to the omnipresence of these reflective screens, I cannot help but feel unmoored and unhomed from the world, from my home, from myself. 'Unhomed' is the translation of 'unheimlich', and I feel the definitive definition of 'the uncanny' for me is associated with encountering an almost spooky doubling: the feeling of *deja-vu* or an object mistaken for an animal or the recognition of one's self in another.

Pigeons are among the only animals to match our level of self-awareness in the mirror self-recognition test. They can even recognize themselves on video played back fifteen seconds later, which is more than I can say for myself when I experience that uncanny feeling a filter gives in a 15 second story. That *unheimlich* feeling of 'me-but-not-me' and home-but-not-home is central to *Pidge*. The works are all rendered with downcast gazes and obscured views.

The works, which comprise the larger long-term project of *Pidge*, use tropes of real apotropaic magic alongside pop-cultural renderings of magic and slight-of-hand 'tricks' such as the dove pan in *unpleasant feeling* or the sarcophagus queen (*diva slash fic*) الأطلال .

Previously, collage had been a private and cathartic practice for me, used as an escape from writing and a way of wish-making for the future without literally spelling it out. However, during the pandemic, making physical work became a way to ward off pain, grief and bad luck. The works presented form a larger body of gathered work coming from a period of isolation and reflection on past video works, writing on Gulf Futurism, as well as my book *Sad Sack* (Bookworks), which in many ways has served as a touch stone to ground these works.

Throughout *Pidge* you will see symbols of evil eye, reflective surfaces, grotesques, scribbled charms and other bad luck deterrents as well as actual pigeon deterrent. All of these can be seen as framing devices.

In *hostile environment*, the fairy godmother's wand protrudes from the shadowed lap of a model in a 1970s pornographic magazine. A glittering phallus is summoned out of the ether of these doubled sexual and maternal figures while Cinderella gently weeps into their wide laps. No ball for her.

These figures echo many others in the show, whose gaze is almost always downcast in despair, shame, inebriation or occasionally love. Eyes and faces are obscured to protect from predatory eyes. If you don't look, they can't see you. Other references to children's films abound such as the replica of Cho Chang's wand from Harry Potter affixed to a tamper-proof pigeon racing clock and aimed at a scare-crow intended to frighten pests in *telephone to heaven*. In (*more than grace*) حنين , a drawing of an escaped and bandaged lab dog from the dystopian and not-at-all child-appropriate animated film *Plague Dogs* swings its head upwards towards another Al-Ma'ari poem, this time "a dove turns its head in flight and sadly sees its nest destroyed". At the center, a photograph taken in Saudi of my cousin. Bird poop delivered at an angle gives the piece a boomeranging movement between the past and the future.

In *prophylactic device*, Yumna Marwan who appears in several of my films takes selfies on the set of the television show *Little Birds*, which stars Yumna and written by myself. Laced over her in an intricate acrylic pattern, another flood of guano, referencing both the fortuitous luck of being shat on by a bird and the schadenfreude felt when an influencer is tripped up by their own selfie-stick.

remains, leaving, indefinitely, references the violence of the British home office. Three selfies, taken in bathroom stall mirrors, are presented together against monolithic columns which have come to represent European civilization. Narcissism and abjection shine through the Corinthian façade of strength over the words of the blind Syrian poet Al-Ma'ari's lines written during the Crusades: "I have come to this house of destruction, now I have settled I want to leave."

All of the works spring from a place which is both personal and political. They reflect on previous works via artifacts from phones, found objects, packing paper and other treasured items I have carried on my migratory journey around the world over the past 20 years. I hope you enjoy the contents of these feathered nests.

--

Al-Maria's video, *Mothership*, 2017, will be available to view alongside the exhibition at Project Native Informant: Online.

Special thanks to those who helped make this exhibition possible including but not limited to:
Al Bendari Al-Marri, Christopher Eperjesi, James Early, Kelsey Lu,
Ruoru Mou, Saleh Al-Marri, Sara Naim, Yumna Marwan

Al-Ma'ari, Abu Alaa. *Birds Through a Ceiling of Alabaster: Three Abbasid Poets*. Penguin Classics. 1975

Cliff, Michelle. *No Telephone to Heaven*. Dutton Adult. 1987

Hildyard, Daisy. *The Second Body*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017

Skinner, B.F. "*Superstition in the Pigeon*", University of Indiana, 1948

Project Native Informant

Dressage Court, 48 Three Colts Lane, London E2 6GP
+44 (0) 20 8133 8887 | write@projectnativeinformant.com
projectnativeinformant.com



List of Works

Clockwise from door:

unpleasant feeling, 2022

Diptych c-type print, acrylic on acetate, found material, acrylic, bubble wrap, pigeon deterrent spikes, aluminium frame

Each: 59 x 32.5 x 9 cm (23 1/4 x 12 3/4 x 3 1/2 in)

prophylactic device, 2022

Diptych c-type print, found lithograph, acrylic on glass, aluminium frame

Each: 69 x 38 x 3.5 cm (27 1/8 x 15 x 1 3/8 in)

hostile environment, 2022

Diptych c-type print, packing paper, found pages, found postcards, bird poop stickers, pigeon deterrent spikes, aluminium frame

Each: 59 x 32.5 x 9 cm (23 1/4 x 12 3/4 x 3 1/2 in)

(more than grace) حنين, 2022

Blue back poster, aluminium stretcher bars, graphite on wall, fake bird poop, acrylic and c-type print, aluminium frame

253 x 235 x 6 cm (99 5/8 x 92 1/2 x 2 3/8 in)

(diva slash fic) الأطلال, 2022

Xerox print, pages from *America Deserta*, acrylic on acetate, magic trick figure, pigeon deterrent spikes, aluminium frame

67 x 82 x 9 cm (26 3/8 x 32 1/4 x 3 1/2 in)

remains, leaving, indefinitely, 2022

Triptych c-type print, found lithograph print, found screenprint, printed poem from *Birds Through a Ceiling of Alabaster: Three Abbasid Poets* by Al-Ma'arri, found decal, oil stick, acrylic pen on glass, aluminium frame

Each: 69 x 38 x 3.5 cm (27 1/8 x 15 x 1 3/8 in)

Floor:

telephone to heaven, 2022

Tamper-proof pigeon racing clock, steel globe stand, wooden replica Cho Chang wand, plastic pigeon deterrent hanging eyes, metal pigeon predator replica and broken iPhone screen

156 x 30 x 46 cm (61 3/8 x 11 3/4 x 18 1/8 in)

Office:

pidges petit déjeuner, 2022

C-type print on metallic paper, aluminium frame

62.5 x 50 x 3 cm (24 5/8 x 19 3/4 x 1 1/8 in)

Project Native Informant

Dressage Court, 48 Three Colts Lane, London E2 6GP
+44 (0) 20 8133 8887 | write@projectnativeinformant.com
projectnativeinformant.com