

"I'm not really in reality." – Bai Ling

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."— Audre Lorde

Chinese-American actress Bai Ling (*The Crow*, *Sharknado 5: Global Swarming*, *Entourage*, *Wild Wild West*) is the protagonist of the new suite of works that make up *ilysm*. This show picks up where Al-Maria's first solo show *Virgin With a Memory*\* left off, taking a person's lived experience in the entertainment business as a starting point.

For Project Native Informant, Al-Maria sought to work with an actor who is a veteran and survivor of the misogyny industrial complex of Hollywood. Inspired by Bai's apparent indifference to the racism, homophobia and sexism of the violent gaze she is subjected to in social and tabloid media, the works in *ilysm* invite Bai to explore the boundaries of the in-screen matrix she occupies. The presentation seeks to free her public persona from the abjection projected onto her in the popular imagination of tabloids such as TMZ whose stock-in-trade is to troll.

A fan of Bai Ling's blog since the early 2000s, Al-Maria was curious about a recurring motif in Bai's posts referencing 'cookie'. For a long time Sophia assumed that this 'cookie' was a person, perhaps a secret lover. But in fact Bai was writing positive, loving self-affirmations. The installation *Mirror Cookie* (2018) takes a collection of Bai's 'cookies' and organizes them into a disjointed monologue referencing the self-help practice of 'mirror work'. This slowly becomes an impassioned improvisation delivered directly to camera, as if the fourth wall she is breaking is a reflection.

In 2005 Bai became the first Asian woman to be on the cover of Playboy. However this was allegedly the reason George Lucas cut her from his film *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*. The piece *White Man's Bible (Revenge Porn)* (2018) references this moment in Bai's career. *Major Motions* (2018) is a fictional studio ident preceding a film we will never see. Bai holds the torch of self-love (a Hitachi Magic Wand) as a prophylactic against shame. *And Not Really in Reality Reality TV* (2018) is a surreal interview with Bai cast as a 'love goddess' being interviewed on the subject of vengefulness.

*Major Motions*, *Mirror Cookie* and *Not Really in Reality Reality TV* are co-produced with Anna Lena Films.

\* In 2011 Sophia began work on a genre film derived from experiences of systemic sexual violence

endemic in Cairo. However the development process became an ironic reflection of the fictional narrative when the misogyny the feature was attacking ultimately destroyed the project. From the arrest, scapegoating and public shaming in the media of one of the actresses cast, to the producer secretly shooting a 'sexy trailer' for the film with the lead actress, Al-Maria finally abandoned the film after having upper class male 'revolutionaries' in the Egyptian film industry claim the story was not appropriate when 'real violence' was happening in the streets and white male screenwriters discouraged Al-Maria from using violence during a workshop at an American screenwriting lab. Ultimately this led to a period of doubt and disillusionment. The remnants of this failure composed the exhibition *Virgin with a Memory at Cornerhouse*, Manchester.

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