

# Through the Looking Glass

Lama Gargash

April 25 - May 30 2012

In her first solo exhibition, Emirati artist Lama Gargash presents a provocative new body of work that examines identity, perception and acceptance in modern day society.

Lama Gargash, representative of the inaugural UAE Pavilion during the 2009 Venice Biennale, unveils a new body of work that addresses societal notions of beauty, intimate perceptions of self and identity through a portrait series at The Third Line. Influenced by such artists as Cindy Sherman, the photographs aspire to raise challenging and important questions about self-reflection and criticism in relevance to media representation of body image and beauty standards in today's society.



Lama Gargash, *Maria* (2012), C Print 76 x 114 cm, Ed. of 2

*Through the Looking the Glass* investigates how we constantly view ourselves in comparison to an ever-elusive standard, prompted by the constant bombardment of media imagery dictating 'how we should look'. Minor defects become drastic, resulting in even more drastic measures undertaken to reach that ideal standard of beauty. Our self-perception, and subsequently our identity, becomes indistinct; as if viewing ourselves through a distorted looking glass.

The photographic series comprises of diptychs, with one panel depicting a portrait of the subject as seen by the world, and an opposing panel depicting the subject as seen through their mind's eye. The project which has

taken close to two years to complete, was facilitated by the use of artificial prosthetics; slight imperfections, which are accentuated and most times magnified, to a scale equivalent to that haunting mental image of self-judgment. The viewer is allowed into the photographed subject's subconscious, sharing their most confidential vulnerabilities and insecurities.

The quest for physical perfection is an age old endeavour, and continues to be our primary concern today - *Through the Looking Glass*, according to Gargash is "an extension of constant self-critique and perpetual state of anxiousness over attaining perfection". The works reveal the classic social paradox of seeking ideal beauty: we are all troubled by it, yet still constantly judge each other. As such, Gargash chose everyday people as her photographed models to evoke a collective and humanitarian sentiment; an invitation to raise awareness and accept ourselves, and each other, the way we are.

This project was possible thanks to the generous funding by Emirates Foundation. Their continued support of arts and culture has helped promote and nurture creativity, particularly among young women and men from the UAE who strive to create a dynamic platform for the arts in the region.

## About Lamya Gargash

Concerned with the extensive study of self, identity and perception, Lamya Gargash documents the forgotten spaces in public and private realms in Emirati society, and more recently has begun investigating the fragility of human nature from a psychological angle. Throughout her career Gargash has won a number of awards for her work in film and photography. Gargash participated in the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009) as the featured artist of the UAE's first ever national pavilion. Presenting her new series *Familial*, Gargash exhibited photographs taken across the UAE that visually play with the notion of hospitality and the politics of interior design. In 2004, Gargash received first prize in the Emirates Film Festival, as well as Ibdaa Special Jury Award for her movie titled, *Wet Tiles*. Gargash's first artist book entitled *Presence* is a photographic series, which documents recently vacated houses and structures in the United Arab Emirates that have been abandoned or left for demolition. Gargash received her Masters of Arts in Communication Design from Saint Martins in the UK in 2007 after graduating from the American University of Sharjah in 2004. She has participated in group exhibitions in Canada, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Japan, and France as well as within the UAE. Gargash currently lives and works in Dubai.

## About The Third Line

The Third Line is an art gallery that represents contemporary Middle Eastern artists locally, regionally and internationally, with a gallery space in Dubai. In addition to on-going exhibitions, The Third Line hosts non-profit, alternative programs to increase interest and debate in the region.

The Third Line also publishes books by associated artists from the region. Books published to date include *Presence* by Emirati photographer Lamya Gargash (2008), and *In Absentia* by Palestinian-Kuwaiti Tarek Al-Ghoussein (2009), *Cosmic Geometry*, an extensive monograph on Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmanian, edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Karen Marta (2011), and most recently the self-titled treatise *Huda Lutfi* about the artist's Cairo based practice.

Represented artists include: Abbas Akhavan, Ala Ebtekar, Amir H. Fallah, Babak Golkar, Ebtisam Abdulaziz, Farhad Moshiri, Fouad Elkoury, Golnaz Fathi, Hassan Hajjaj, Hayv Kahraman, Huda Lutfi, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Lamya Gargash, Laleh Khorramian, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmanian, Poursan Jinchi, Rana Begum, Sherin Guirgus, Shirin Aliabadi, Slavs and Tatars, Susan Hefuna, Tarek Al- Ghoussein and Youssef Nabil.

## About Emirates Foundation

The Emirates Foundation is an independent, philanthropic organization set up by the Government of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi to facilitate new public-private funded initiatives to improve the welfare of all people across the UAE. The Foundation assists people, institutions and community organizations that contribute to the nation's long-term progress and sustainability. It is supported by donations from the private sector, the government and private individuals interested in philanthropy. Specific initiatives related to these themes are developed within five core programmes: Social Development, Education, Arts & Culture, Science & Technology, and Environment. Its mission is consistent with the ideals of the nation's founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

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