Sophia Al Maria received her BA from the American University in Cairo and her MFA from Goldsmiths, University of London. Throughout her career she has been presented in numerous group exhibitions in museums, galleries and centers across the US, Europe and the Middle East, including Kendall Square (2017), Biennale of Young Images, Mumbai (2017), CSO, Basel, New York (2017), WJK Empower Research Foundation, Bahrain (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2017); Japan Museum, Tokyo (2016); MoMA, New York (2016); and Documenta, Kassel, Germany (2015). She has participated in numerous group exhibitions in museums, galleries and centers across the US, Europe and the Middle East, including Kendall Square (2017), Biennale of Young Images, Mumbai (2017), CSO, Basel, New York (2017), WJK Empower Research Foundation, Bahrain (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2017); Japan Museum, Tokyo (2016); MoMA, New York (2016); and Documenta, Kassel, Germany (2015). Sophia Al Maria’s art is the subject of the recent monograph published by the Third Line, Dubai, written by Roopika Rao. Al Maria’s research has centered on post-colonialism, transnationalism, and museological practices in the Global South. Lately, her art historical research has centered on post-colonialism, transnationalism, and museological practices in the Global South. Al Maria’s work is represented by The Third Line, Dubai.

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The exhibition at Mercer Union brings together two works: the digital video projection, The Future was Desert, and the two-part video, Desert of the Unreal. The former, an experimental work of filmic art inspired by the theory of the Death Valley, Victor Gruen, an American architect best known as the ‘father of the modern shopping mall,’ designed the American mall in response to the dearth in urban planning in North American suburbs. Furthermore, Gruen wanted to give a public space, other than home and the car, as a place for community. According to the Gruen Transfer, the dazzling and disorienting effects of the labyrinthine architecture within shopping malls render customers susceptible to the seductive effects of consumption and the dangers of debt. The Future was Desert study shows how consumerism has airborne in the Gulf, from the boom of the 1990s to the present. “Over the course of this nightmare sermon we are taken on a vertiginous ride, through nightmarish deserts of the unreal, lifestyles and their architectures. All we are left with as the simulation we’ve been duped into is dying out as we turn towards the edge of the future. ‘It’s here the most incandescently clear visions about desert development in the Gulf are being talked about, natural and social systems, the space of the most demonstrably successful lack of colonisation.’ As the artist explains, ‘The result is a sort of two-tone place that exists outside natural bioclimates and cultural ecosystems.”

The Future was Desert is part of a project, ‘a perfect human condition, where the environmental effects of constant consumption and destruction are prevailing over the beneficiaries of consumption, in the back an expansive view of beyond. The Future was Desert depicts the mall as a ‘sort of non-place that exists outside national boundaries and cultural mores.’ As the artist explains, ‘The mall is a sort of non-place that exists outside national boundaries and cultural mores.’

The Future was Desert is a project that emerged from the artist’s research on the desert as a space of the future, particularly in the Gulf region. The exhibition, which takes place at Mercer Union, brings together two works: the digital video projection, The Future was Desert, and the two-part video, Desert of the Unreal. The former, an experimental work of filmic art inspired by the theory of the Death Valley, Victor Gruen, an American architect best known as the ‘father of the modern shopping mall,’ designed the American mall in response to the dearth in urban planning in North American suburbs. Furthermore, Gruen wanted to give a public space, other than home and the car, as a place for community. According to the Gruen Transfer, the dazzling and disorienting effects of the labyrinthine architecture within shopping malls render customers susceptible to the seductive effects of consumption and the dangers of debt. The Future was Desert study shows how consumerism has airborne in the Gulf, from the boom of the 1990s to the present. “Over the course of this nightmare sermon we are taken on a vertiginous ride, through nightmarish deserts of the unreal, lifestyles and their architectures. All we are left with as the simulation we’ve been duped into is dying out as we turn towards the edge of the future. ‘It’s here the most incandescently clear visions about desert development in the Gulf are being talked about, natural and social systems, the space of the most demonstrably successful lack of colonisation.’ As the artist explains, ‘The result is a sort of two-tone place that exists outside natural bioclimates and cultural ecosystems.”

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