

# MAYA ISABELLA MACKRANDILAL

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## ARTIST STATEMENT

In my recent work on projects such as *How to be a Monster*, *Bedtime Stories of White Supremacy*, and *#NewGlobalMatriarchy*, I have harnessed my research interests (women of color feminist perspectives, black studies, post-colonialism, queer theory, etc.) to create work that infiltrates our cultural vernacular with radical imaginations of the future. The catalyst for this new work was *How to be a Monster*, where I performed as a series of Hindu goddesses who had become incarnated in our present culture. There is a long history of imagining the “other” as a monster, from medieval European accounts of South Asian art as “monstrous” up to Darren Wilson describing Michael Brown as looking like a “demon” in his grand jury testimony. Often, queer, female, and mixed-race bodies are viewed through the lens of monstrosity.

The goddesses inhabit this space of monstrosity (the realm of the outcast, the foreign, the abject), inhabiting the imagination of the dominant culture (capitalist, white supremacist, cis-hetero-patriarchal), but queering that imagination, using the fear as a place of power and agency, bringing that fear to the surface so that its power might be dismantled. The images produced are a collapse of history, where traditional South Asian painting styles collide with signifiers of race, class, and popular culture. Like the common and inexpensive prints of goddesses that these images reference, they are bright and immediately legible, but that immediacy quickly dissolves into a network of references and allusions that open up questions about power and identity.

The project continues with *Bedtime Stories of White Supremacy* where the goddess Lakshmi emerged from the images into real life, calling to mind the traditional practices where young girls “stand in” for the goddess during Hindu festivals. Here, rather than being a prepubescent child, the goddess is a grown-ass woman, unafraid to share her perspective on how she is perceived and the world she finds herself in. The women of color identified theater collective FEMelanin (of which I am a founding member) collaborated with me on devising this piece, bringing movement, songs, and their own texts to the frame.

For *#NewGlobalMatriarchy* I collaborated with the artist Stephanie Graham to further bring the goddesses out into the world, this time teaming up with the Nigerian goddess Oya. The work imagines friendship between two powerful women, an act that is deeply radical in a culture built on sexual scarcity and competition between women both professionally and in their personal lives. The goddesses are a product of the culture in which they become incarnated, inhabiting, but also troubling, an age of instagram celebrity and reality TV. They grapple with the issues that contemporary feminists do: sexual expression under the white male gaze, #whitefeminism, the collapse of real space and cyberspace, and how to decolonize the Euro-American empire and/or topple Western Civilization.