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Mysterious Inner Worlds

A solo exhibition featuring Anila Quayyum Agha

On view at the UNM Art Museum

February 18, 2022 – July 2, 2022

Curated by Mary Statzer, PhD, Curator of Prints & Photographs

For more information visit artmuseum.unm.edu/exhibition/mysterious-inner-worlds

Opening on February 18, 2022, the University of New Mexico Art Museum will host *Mysterious Inner Worlds*, the first solo exhibition in New Mexico featuring Anila Quayyum Agha. Highlights include the large-scale light installation titled *Intersections* (2014) and the debut of the sculpture *Steel Garden (Red)* (2021).

Agha combines forms from Islamic architecture with her own concepts about patterns of sacred and worldly spaces. Her work ranges in scale from monumental installations to intricate embroidered drawings. She is inspired by her personal experiences as a woman and an immigrant from Pakistan, arriving in the US just before September 2001, as well as her concerns about the environment. Agha's work engages more broadly with the dynamic and contradictory relationships among immigrant experiences as well as the intersectionality of gender, religion, labor, and social codes.

The centerpiece is the award-winning sculpture *Intersections*, a large steel cube pierced by geometric and floral patterns inspired by traditional Islamic architecture. Suspended from the ceiling and lit from within by a single light source, shadows are cast on the floor, ceiling and walls, as well as on the viewer, making every aspect of the UNM Art Museum's Main Gallery a part of the artwork. The effect is lush, peaceful, and immersive. Coming out of Agha's own experience in Pakistan where she was denied access to Islamic sacred spaces because of her gender, she has created a sanctuary that fosters feelings of belonging. The glowing light and ornate patterns are soothing, while the concepts behind the piece are challenging. With *Intersections*, Agha pushes against binaries of public versus private, religious versus secular, as well as inclusive versus exclusive. In 2014, *Intersections* won both the Public Vote and Juried Grand Prize at ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, MI.

Agha, who studied textile design, treats drawings like textiles by embroidering paper with thread and beads sourced from her native Pakistan. These works, inspired by the memory of her mother's quilting circles, reference women's labor and the skill of immigrants who have

traditionally been excluded from creative expression and undervalued in the artworld. These early experiences started Agha thinking about the plight of women and are the foundation of her feminism. The exhibition will feature seven of her mixed media drawings.

Anila Quayyum Agha was born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan. She received her BFA from the National College of Arts in Lahore and her MFA from the University of North Texas. She is Associate Professor of Drawing at the Herron School of Art and Design at Indiana University in Indianapolis and is currently the Morris Eminent Scholar in Art at Augusta University in Georgia. In 2021, she received the Smithsonian Fellowship in the Arts and will spend the summer of 2022 in Washington DC, conducting research for future projects. Agha's work is in many private and public collections, including the Cincinnati Art Museum in Ohio and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA.

Mysterious Inner Worlds will be on view in the UNM Art Museum's Main and Van Deren Coke Galleries from February 18, 2022 through July 2, 2022. Organized by the UNM Art Museum and curated by Mary Statzer, PhD, Curator of Prints and Photographs. Save the date for "A Conversation with Anila Quayyum Agha" on Thursday, March 24, 2022. The artist will discuss her life and work with curator Mary Statzer.

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