



**EXHIBITION: EATING GRASS**

**ON VIEW: AUGUST 7, 2012–JULY 28, 2013**

**LOCATION: AHMANSON BUILDING, FOURTH FLOOR**

## **LACMA PRESENTS WEST COAST DEBUT OF EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKER ALIA SYED**



(IMAGE CREDIT ON PAGE 3)

(Los Angeles, August 7, 2012)—Experimental filmmaker Alia Syed makes her West Coast debut at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) with an installation of her film *Eating Grass* (2003), on view from August 11, 2012–July 28, 2013. Filmed in Karachi, Lahore, and London, *Eating Grass* comprises five overlapping narratives, each representing different emotional states experienced throughout the day that are marked by the Muslim tradition of the five daily prayers. The film's title references a remark made by Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1974 amid the nuclear arms race with India, who said his people would have their own nuclear weapon even if it meant "eating grass."

While the title evokes a particular moment in Pakistan's history, the film itself captures the ebb and flow of urban dwellers as they move through bustling streets and marketplaces and quiet interior spaces from morning

to night. Syed questions traditional notions of storytelling and language in her work to explore issues of identity, representation, and intercultural communication. Syed's process is labor-intensive, shooting first in 16mm film and then reshooting each frame with an optical printer. Objects in the same scene appear to be moving at different speeds. Colors and figures flash in and out of focus like fragmented memories. A layered soundtrack mixed with passages of Syed's prose – recited in English and Urdu – plays over this landscape, adding yet another narrative dimension to the work.

### **Public Programming**

In conjunction with the exhibition *Eating Grass* at LACMA, Alia Syed presents a selection of her works in their original 16mm format in the Bing Theater on Saturday, September 29 at 2:00pm. This program includes a conversation with the artist led by Elvis Mitchell, Curator of Film Independent at LACMA. This is a rare opportunity to view Syed's works in their original 16mm format in a cinema setting.

Syed will show five of her films including *Priya* (2008-2011), an extended aerial shot of a Kathak dancer in motion wherein the skin of the film becomes the body of the dancer, fracturing time into a darkly evocative, psychological space. *A Story Told* (2006-2008), a woman's tale of a doomed love affair combines 16mm film, DVD projection and monitors a multi-channel piece will be restaged in the Bing Theater. *Fatima's Letter* (1994) depicts a woman who recounts in a letter to a friend memories of an event she previously witnessed in Pakistan that are evoked by the faces she sees while riding the London Underground. Two of Syed's earlier black and white works, *Watershed* (1994)– a film about the pain of speaking – and *Swan* (1989) – an abstract piece that captures the silent power of this graceful animal preparing to take flight – will also be featured in the program. Tickets to the screening are free. More information is available at [www.lacma.org](http://www.lacma.org)

### **About Alia Syed**

Alia Syed (Wales, b. 1964) lives and works in London. She completed her Bachelor's in Fine Arts from University of East London in 1987 and Postgraduate work in Mixed Media from Slade School in 1992. While pursuing experimental filmmaking over the last two decades, Syed has also taught

and lectured at Central St. Martins, and is currently teaching at Chelsea School of Art. Syed's work has been screened at film festivals and museums worldwide, including Tate Modern, London (2000, 2003), the XVth Sidney Biennale (2006), and most recently in the exhibition, *On Line* (2010), at the Museum of Modern Art, NY. In 2002, Syed was the subject of a retrospective, *Jigar*, organized by the Institute of International Visual Artists (inIVA), that traveled to the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (GOMA), Scotland, the New Art Gallery in Walsall, and the Turnpike Gallery in Manchester, UK.

### **Credit**

This installation is organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The film screening on September 29, 2012 is sponsored by the LACMA Southern Asian Art Council.

### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography-and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing Transformation project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

**Location and Contact:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

**Hours:** Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: 11 am-5 pm; Friday: 11 am-8 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 10 am-7 pm; closed Wednesday

**General Admission:** Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10

**Free General Admission:** Members; children 17 and under; after 3 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

**Image:** Alia Syed, Still from *Eating Grass*, 2003, 16mm film, sound; 22:56 min. Photo courtesy of the artist and Talwar Gallery, New York/New Delhi.

**Press Contact:** For additional information, contact LACMA Communications at press@lacma.org or 323 857-6522.

# # #