

**SAN LUIS OBISPO MUSEUM OF ART TO PRESENT *LIMINAL SPACE*  
A SOLO EXHIBITION BY ANILA AGHA**

**Friday, July 7, 2023 (San Luis Obispo, CA)** – The San Luis Obispo Museum of Art is pleased to announce *Liminal Space*, a solo exhibition by Pakistani-American artist Anila Agha. On view July 15 – October 29, the exhibition will explore the expansiveness of Agha's multidisciplinary practice, bringing together immersive sculptures and intricate works on paper.

Agha creates large-scale sculptural works, wall mounted installations, and works on paper that are strikingly beautiful, while also reflecting on complex themes of global politics, social and gender roles, and mass media. Agha grew up in Lahore, Pakistan where women were prevented from participating in most art forms, with the exception of sewing. Inspired by her mother's sewing, as a student in the US Agha began to incorporate sewing and the use of patterns into her practice, showing the way these art forms can be elevated beyond conventional ideas of craft and 'women's work.' While studying fine art she was often told that as a woman of color and an immigrant, she would never advance as an artist if she incorporated craft or visual elements unique to Islamic culture into her work. Agha disregarded the advice and developed a singular practice that bridges the aesthetic of her childhood and personal history with a distinctly contemporary vision.

*Liminal Space* will be divided between two galleries, with one gallery dedicated to the large-scale sculpture *Shimmering Mirage*. The work features a large steel cube, intricately cut with floral and geometric patterns inspired by Islamic architecture, textiles, and miniature paintings, which also alludes to the richly ornamented public spaces such as mosques that Agha was excluded from as a female growing up in Lahore. The hanging cube is illuminated by a single light source, which fills the room with ornate patterns created by light and shadow. Blanketing the room with its stunning patterns, *Shimmering Mirage* offers a quiet, meditative, and welcoming space for visitors.

In the second gallery visitors will encounter more intimate works by Agha, including a small-scale sculpture and a series of works on paper, offering a look at another aspect of her practice. In pieces like *Walk with me My Beloved 6* and *Be Still My Heart*, Agha's steady and dedicated hand is evident in the small sewn beads throughout the surface of the work. Formally trained in textiles, these works capture Agha's intimate and laborious methodology of practice, while also asserting her vision of elevating craft into the contemporary. Through these delicate and intricate works, Agha asserts her commitment to feminism, reflecting on women's rights, equality, and her cultural identity.

Much of Agha's works contain dualities, and though the finished form is often strikingly beautiful, the work is grounded in more complex ideas than first meet the eye. Her work plays with the division between masculine and feminine, public and private, religious and secular, space and refuge, and the inclusive spaces she creates through her work allow visitors to reflect on these oppositions. Agha has said of her work that by exploring these dualities, or polarities she is able "to delve into controversial topics that reflect upon topical themes of cultural identity, global and environmental politics, mass media and social/gender roles."

Inherent in all of Agha's work is the desire for the work to be accessible to everyone - to create an environment where audiences from any community and any walk of life can experience Agha's work. Agha's work in public sculpture, at rural Museums all over the world, and at major global institutions, exemplifies her intention to create access around her work in order to contribute to the healing and transformation of our divided world. SLOMA is committed to advancing and supporting the work of contemporary artists, and to elevating their vision. In advance of Agha's exhibition at the museum, a large-scale sculpture by Agha was installed in a public round-about in San Luis Obispo this past December, and received a public works award. The sculpture, *The Greys in Between*, is one of many major public artworks to be installed in San Luis Obispo as a collaboration between the museum and the City.

This exhibition is presented by California Polytechnic State University and Pacific Western Bank with additional support from Hotel San Luis Obispo, KSBY, and Presqu'ile Winery.

Liminal Space, July 15 – October 29, 2023

Member Preview: Friday, July 14 from 6–8 PM

Artist's Talk with Anila Quayyum Agha: Saturday, July 15 at 11 AM

### **About Anila Agha**

Anila Quayyum Agha (b. Lahore, Pakistan) received her BFA from the National College of Arts, Lahore and an MFA from the University of North Texas. Major solo shows include the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, TX; Columbia Art Museum in South Carolina; Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA, National Sculpture Museum in Valladolid, Spain, The Dallas Contemporary Art Museum, Cincinnati Art Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Jacksonville, FL. Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, North Carolina Art Museum in Raleigh, and the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio.

For the 2019 Venice Biennial, Agha was included in a collateral event, *She Persists*, with 22 contemporary feminist artists. Agha has received the Efroymsen Art Fellowship, Cincinnati Art Museum's 2017 Schiele Prize, the DeHaan Artist of Distinction Award twice (2018 & 2021) and the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors award in 2019. Agha's 2014 ArtPrize entry, titled "Intersections", earned the Public Vote Grand Prize and split the Juried Grand Prize in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is the recipient of numerous grants from Indiana University like the New Frontiers Exploratory grant. For her creative research, Agha, was awarded the highest research honor by Indiana University in 2016 titled Glenn W. Irwin Research Scholar Award. In 2020, Agha received an Endowed Chair position titled Morris Eminent Scholar in Art at Augusta University in Georgia, as well as the prestigious Smithsonian Fellowship in the arts for 2021 and worked with both SAAM and AAA in Washington DC in May 2022. Her work has been collected by both institutions and private collectors; nationally and internationally.

### **About the San Luis Obispo Museum of Art**

The San Luis Obispo Museum of Art (SLOMA) is an innovative and accessible museum located on California's Central Coast. The museum presents an outstanding exhibitions program that features artists from California and around the world, as well as an ongoing

series of dynamic events that engage visitors of all ages. SLOMA is located in downtown San Luis Obispo on the west end of Mission Plaza, at the heart of the city's cultural corridor. A destination for art lovers, and those just beginning to experience art alike, the museum provides a welcoming space and offers free admission to all. More information can be found at [www.sloma.org](http://www.sloma.org).