

## Solo Exhibition Exploring Light and Loss in 2020 Debuts Immersive Works by Anila Quayyum Agha at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

*Unveiling luminous new site-specific installation, Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair harnesses ornate iconography of Agha's cultural heritage to create space of meditation at intersection of East and West*



Fort Worth, TX, April 8, 2021— Introducing a dozen new ornate works by the multidisciplinary artist, *Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair* will open this fall at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (the Carter). The exhibition debuts the latest evolution of Agha's luminous lantern-like sculptures—two site-specific installation pieces commissioned by the Carter—alongside a corresponding series of drawings that elevate practices traditionally assigned as female handiwork, such as embroidery. Responding to the historic events of 2020 and early 2021, Agha employs patterns, materials, and symbols from her Pakistani heritage to create meditative environments for reflection on feelings of loss from the past year that have transcended cultural and geographic boundaries. *Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair* will be on view September 25, 2021, through January 9, 2022.

Agha's signature hanging metal armatures encase a single light source with geometric and curvilinear designs informed by Islamic art and architecture, producing contemplative spaces filled with entrancing patterns and spatial relationships. Consistent with the artist's prior work, the exhibition's cube-shaped title piece, *A Beautiful Despair* (2021), transforms the Carter's special exhibition gallery into an immersive container of light and shadow. Operating at the intersection of individualism and tradition, Islam and Christianity, Pakistani and American life, Agha's illuminated sanctuaries invite viewers into an inclusive space between worlds where the cultural divisions that inhibit authentic conversations melt away.

Addressing the layered trauma of the pandemic and civil unrest in America, Agha evolves her model with *Liminal Space* (2021), the artist's first diamond-shaped hanging relief sculpture. Supported by the symbolic textures and colors of the installation's corresponding drawings, the novel diamond structure is a gesture of mourning and hope. Extending the dual sense of alienation and belonging that has defined her migrant experience, a recurring theme in her work, Agha identifies beauty in the universality of the despair brought by recent events.

“Continuing the Carter’s celebration of the complex stories and diverse voices that define American creativity, *Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair* shares the unique insight of a transnational artist,” said Andrew J. Walker, Executive Director. “While pushing the physical boundaries of her medium, Agha provides contemporary audiences with a vehicle for processing their lived experiences and documents this pivotal chapter in American history for future generations. This timely presentation illustrates the importance of the Carter’s ongoing work to showcase and propel conversations in American art today.”

Bridging both modern and traditional materials, and historic and contemporary narratives, the new works on paper featured in *Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair* incorporate textile treatments including wax, dyes, and embroidery to reposition the laborious intricacy of women’s handiwork as a fine-art prompt for focused introspection. These drawings echo the installation, with marble-like patterns and a palette of red, gold, and white alluding to sacred spaces and practices surrounding death.

“The Carter has always been at the forefront of recognizing the potential of the paper arts and identifying strengths of artists working on paper,” said Shirley Reece-Hughes, Curator of Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper at the Carter. “In line with this tradition, Agha has refined a sculptural methodology that coaxes out density and dimension from a material otherwise defined by its two-dimensionality. Inhabiting paper as a spatial medium, her intricately patterned drawings work in concert with her visionary sculptures to inspire long periods of looking that manifest an interactive experience for the viewer. In reinventing traditional modes of works on paper, Agha realizes new domains for her havens of tranquility.”

A limited-edition studio book will accompany the exhibition and feature each of the intimate works on display. Agha will have an active hand in the design of the book, and each signed copy will include a special component conceptualized by the artist.

*Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair* is organized by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. Support for the exhibition is provided by Entrada of Texas and the Ann L. & Carol Green Rhodes Charitable Trust, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee. Exemplifying the Carter’s mission to tell new and important stories of American art, *Anila Quayyum Agha: A Beautiful Despair* is part of a year-long exhibition program celebrating the museum’s 60th year of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting the finest examples of American creativity.

Images [left to right]: Anila Quayyum Agha (b. 1965), *Flowers (Green Triangle)*, 2018, mixed media on paper, image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery, © Anila Agha; Anila Quayyum Agha (b. 1965), *Intersections*, 2018, lacquered steel, image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery, © Anila Agha; Anila Quayyum Agha (b. 1965), *This Old Shade 1*, 2020, mixed media on paper (graphite, encaustic, embroidery, Mylar), image courtesy of the artist and Talley Dunn Gallery, © Anila Agha

## **Anila Quayyum Agha**

Anila Quayyum Agha (b. 1965) uses of a variety of media, from large sculptural installations to embroidered drawings, to explore the deeply entwined political relationships between gender, culture, religion, labor, and social codes. Her experiences in her native country of Pakistan and as an immigrant in the United States are woven into her work of redefining and rewriting women’s handiwork as a poignant form of creative expression. She holds numerous internationally recognized awards and distinctions and has been featured in solo shows at the 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; and the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. Recently, Agha received an Endowed Chair position titled Professor – Morris Eminent Scholar in Art at Augusta University in Georgia, as well as the prestigious Smithsonian Fellowship in the arts for 2021. She will be working with both the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Archives of American Art in Washington, DC, in May 2021.

Agha received her BFA from the National College of Arts, Lahore, and an MFA from the University of North Texas. Her work is currently held in both institutional and private collections around the globe.

### **About the Amon Carter Museum of American Art**

Located in the heart of Fort Worth's Cultural District, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (the Carter) is a dynamic cultural resource that provides unique access and insight into the history and future of American creativity through its expansive exhibitions and programming. The Carter's preeminent collection includes masterworks by legendary American artists such as Ruth Asawa, Alexander Calder, Frederic Church, Stuart Davis, Robert Duncanson, Thomas Eakins, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jacob Lawrence, and John Singer Sargent, as well as one of the country's foremost repositories of American photography. In addition to its innovative exhibition program and engagement with artists working today, the museum's premier primary research collection and leading conservation program make it a must-see destination for art lovers and scholars of all ages nationwide. Admission is always free. To learn more about the Carter, visit [cartermuseum.org](http://cartermuseum.org).

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