

Grey Noise, Dubai

PRESS RELEASE

We are what we eat
Basir Mahmood

October 09 - November 07, 2013

Grey Noise is pleased to announce multidisciplinary artist Basir Mahmood's third solo show at the gallery. Working with faux documentary-like imagery in unapologetically simple and banal situations, Mahmood presents a selection of videos and photographs that play on the line between fiction and reality, while chronicling the ordinary.

Mahmood presents 3 videos and 2 photographic works that look at everyday non-event happenings, that could easily be missed or forgotten over time. They are of no consequence, neither do they leave a lasting impact, but it is their inherent significance by just taking place that intrigues the artist – who sees much more in those moments that contribute in some way to making his own personal history.

The 22 minute long *Bismillah Driving Center* video is the staging of the first driving lesson of a simple layperson, one who is not even remotely familiar with the workings of a car's gears and pedals. Small nuances – such as the type of car, the instructor, and the location – all indicate towards a less than sophisticated setting, where the imparting and receiving of training are perceptibly substandard. The lesson, which is punctuated repetitively with the same instructions to press the accelerator and release the clutch pad, becomes comical in its apparent seriousness. The viewer, who is placed as a silent spectator in the backseat, is witness to a haphazard session, where the driver slowly gains more courage without actually increasing his control as well. The artist picks up in the irony that lies in the name of the school – *Bismillah* being an Arabic phrase, literally meaning 'In the name of God'. While the film nods towards the inexperience of the students, and the gullibility of a certain underprivileged segment of society, it also provides a satirical take on how life moves on in a country, which tries harder to find loopholes around systems, rather than employ them.

Produced during a residency in Japan with the support of the ARCUS Project, *In a Move to the Better Side* is inspired by a true event, where 21 hopeful illegal immigrants from Pakistan, enroute to Europe, suffocated to death in the container they were being smuggled in. Mahmood looks into the exhilaration and hope that is associated with travel to an international country in search for a better future. For decades, countless Pakistani's have been treading the same route in order to alleviate their poverty, or look for new opportunities. In his journey outside the country, and his first trip to Europe – in a bid to 'better' his experience and learning – the artist felt reminded of his situation in contrast to the desperation of those that resort to extreme measures. He recreated the event, working with three basic elements: weight, movement and repetition - weight as ideology, movement as hope to reach a better side and repetition as belief or ritual. The repetition represents the people's stubborn belief in the possibility of change and the efficacy of movement.

Thank You For Coming is a project that hinges on the basic premise that people behave in certain engineered ways when in social gatherings. Born into pre-defined family structures and roles, individuals continue to act out socially endorsed conducts throughout their lives – and never more pronounced as when they are collected together for social occasions. By collaborating with a layperson, and involving several of his relatives, friends and acquaintances, he simulates and dramatizes a simple celebration gathering. No indication is given to the nature of the occasion; neither does the actual subject of the occasion play a part in this narrative. The film focuses solely on the arrival, participation and departure of these *guests* in this unidentified celebration event. An unseen *director* instructs these guests to change seats, exchange fruit, eat the fruit and drop peels of it on the floor – all in very mechanical and choreographed movements. From the beginning, though, it is made unmistakably clear that this is a staged setting, with the participants instructed to behave in theatrically rehearsed motions.

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Their visible stiffness and an awareness of being filmed are also carefully premeditated elements and incorporated into the visual dynamics. With this short caricature of a seemingly important life event, Mahmood creates a metaphorical context of behavioural patterns within a social structure that he is familiar with. The unidentified and indefinite nature of the subject and content, and the unfamiliarity of the viewer with the people in the video, draws attention to the actions performed in a way that questions the social structure of human interaction. Ultimately, the way we view this video is subjective to our own frame of reference and identity.

We are what we eat is a body of work, which like the widely used idiom, points towards the building blocks that define the individual and the collective simultaneously. Every act, force of habit, menial job or routine adds up to a system; each person contributing something, and taking something from it equally – a constantly moving mechanism of the commonplace.

About The Artist

Basir Mahmood / b. 1985, Lahore, Pakistan / Lives and works in Lahore, Pakistan

Basir Mahmood graduated in 2010 with a BA in Fine Arts, holding a distinction from Beaconhouse National University Lahore, Pakistan and received a yearlong fellowship from Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2011. In order to engage with situations around him, he ponders upon embedded social and historical terrains of the ordinary, as well as his personal milieu. Using video, film and photography, Mahmood weaves distinctive threads of thoughts, findings and insights into poetic sequences and diversified forms of narratives.

Since 2011, his works have been widely shown, including: The Garden of Eden, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012; III Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Russia, 2012; Inaugural Show, Broad Museum, Michigan State University, 2012; Asia Pacific Triennial (APT 7) at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2012; Recontres Internationales at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France, 2012; Sharjah Biennial 11, 2013; LISTE 18, Basel, 2013; 180 Festival Internacional de Arte Contemporânea Sesc Videobrasil, São Paulo, 2013.

Besides being part of various private collections, Mahmood's video works were acquired by the Queensland Art Gallery collection in Brisbane, Australia. He will be starting his 3 months residency at GASWORKS, London in October 2013.

About The Gallery

Grey Noise is a contemporary art gallery representing a selection of artists, with a focus on work from South Asia, Middle East and Europe.

The gallery provides emerging and established artists with a platform for ambitious projects engaged in dialogue with the international art community. Through active partnership with curators, galleries, art fairs and museums worldwide, Grey Noise aims to promote new and often experimental streams of thought in art and culture.