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MCA SCREEN: AKRAM ZAATARI

September 29, 2012 - January 6, 2013

One of the foremost artists working in the Middle East today, Akram Zaatari is featured in the next MCA Screen series at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago. Interested in how large historic events shape the lives of individuals, Zaatari uses video and photography to record small, private moments that may cumulatively compose histories. Recently acquired by the MCA, his video Tomorrow everything will be alright is the first acquisition of Zaatari’s work by a museum in the United States, and forms the centerpiece of this exhibition, accompanied by several of his photographic works. Organized by MCA Curator Naomi Beckwith, MCA Screen: Akram Zaatari opens on September 29, 2012 and runs through January 6, 2013.

Zaatari uses the world around him as an ongoing resource, excavating hidden objects with historical relevance -- photographs, personal documents, and diaries -- and weaving biographical elements into his narrative videos. Tomorrow everything will be alright, which was featured in the 2011 Istanbul Biennial, centers on the hesitant reunion of two former lovers. For most of the twelve-minute film, the camera is fixed on a typewriter which carries out a conversation between the two characters, as if delivering instant
text messages back and forth. After ten minutes it becomes evident that both characters are men. Eventually they agree to meet at sunset, as it is revealed they did ten years prior.

The video cuts to footage of a car driving at twilight, which Zaatari shot in the late 1990s during a time of uncertainty in Lebanon. In homage to French director Éric Rohmer's film *Le Rayon vert* (1986), the characters are hoping to see the “green ray,” an elusive flash that appears just as the sun sinks below the horizon. Both the typewriter and the sunset become rich metaphors for desire, a theme Zaatari often revisits in his work. A new photo installation by Zaatari featuring images of couples from the Studio Shehrazade archive accompanies the video.

**About the Artist**

Akram Zaatari (born 1966) lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon. He has made over 30 videos and installations exploring issues about the postwar condition of Lebanon. His documentary *All is Well on the Border* (1997) dealt with the logic of religious and national resistance; while his feature length videos *This Day* (2003) and *In This House* (2005) addressed images in the context of the geographical division of the Middle East. Zaatari has been exploring representations of male sexuality in *crazy of you* (1997), and *How I love you* (2001). He has a BA in architecture from the American University of Beirut and a MA in media studies from the New School University in New York City. In 1997, Zaatari cofounded the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, which collects and preserves the photographic history of the Middle East, including the archives of Lebanese photographer Hashem El Madani.

He has had international solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle München, Germany (2009); the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2009); Portikus Frankfurt, Germany (2004); and the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt (2000). His work has been included in presentations at Documenta, Kassel (2012); the Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2011); Venice Biennale, Italy (2007); and the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2006). He has participated in group shows at the Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands (2010); and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2008). His photographs and videos are in the collections of Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; MACBA: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Spain; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; and Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

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