

**film review**

**MAJELLA MUNRO**

*Side Effects: Portrait of a Young Artist in Lahore*

Mashhood Ahmed Sheikh

2009 University of Tromsø, 34 mins.

This profile of Pakistan-based arts student Omar Daraz offers an intriguing insight into arts education in one of the most dynamic emergent arts centers in the world. Sheikh's candid, pared-down documentary style, coupled with his choice of a fun, likeable subject, makes this short commentary simultaneously exotic and quotidian.

Daraz, a student at the University of Punjab College of Art and Design, appears to be eminently typical of his cohort. He experiences problems and tribulations which are faced by art students all across the world: he has to work long hours in a part-time job to fund his studies; teachers, presumably with artistic temperaments, fail to materialise for class; and a well-known desktop publishing suite fails to function on the eve of a deadline. Together, these easily-relatable experiences render familiar the character of Daraz, presented against the specific context of Pakistan, established through long sequences showing the bustling city of Lahore and photographs taken by Daraz and his friends of the breath-taking mountainous landscape.



The slow pace of the film, and the quotidian content, cleverly give the viewer plenty of space in which to consider the implications of the film and the questions which it raises. In one scene, Daraz and his colleagues are seen discussing printmaking processes. The students fail to be engaged by the material; they're more interested in checking their text messages. One suspects that the problem is not student apathy or disinterest; rather, there seems to be a disjunct

between what they are being encouraged to learn and the skills which they actually need in the modern workplace. Many are already employed as competent web designers and photographers, revealing that the traditional skills which they are being taught are simply not relevant to their roles as internet-age practitioners. This concern is made explicit when one student complains “we ask them to teach us the latest technology, but instead these bastards give us ancient history.” And while Daraz is an ambitious and outgoing character, and fully aware that his “hard work and skill have a value”, when asked by Sheikh where he sees himself in five years time, he has to conclude that “God only knows”.

