



## Mano Animation Makes History with 'The Glassworker,' Pakistan's First 2D Feature

Karachi-based director Usman Riaz talks about his hand-drawn film that tells the story of a young man and his father, a glass blower, whose relationship is tested after war breaks out and an army colonel and his violinist daughter arrive in their town; film screens in Anney's Contrechamp on June 10.

By **Victoria Davis** | Friday, June 7, 2024 at 2:26pm

In 2D, CG, Event, Festival, Films, People | [ANIMATIONWorld](#) | Special Events: [Anney](#) | Geographic Region: All



'The Glassworker.' All images courtesy of Mano Animation Studios.

After waiting 24 years for a 2D animation studio to come along in Pakistan, artist and musician Usman Riaz decided it was time to roll up his sleeves and create one himself.

And name it after his cat, Mano.

"I just liked how it sounded," admitted Riaz. "But what we found out later, which is totally coincidental, is how 'Mano' also means 'Hand' in Spanish. It was very poetic. And the Latin translation 'My hand' fits perfectly, since I prefer to draw everything."

Founded in 2015 and based in Riaz's hometown of Karachi, Pakistan, **Mano Animation Studios** is making history this year with its **Anney International Animation Film Festival** debut of *The Glassworker*, the first 2D animated feature film ever produced in Pakistan. It's one of 11 feature films – like *Sunburnt Unicorn* by Nick Johnson, *Gill* by Ahn Jae-huun, and *Pelikan Blue* by László Csáki, to name a few – competing in the Contrechamp category.

The story, set in a place loosely based on Pakistan, follows the young Vincent and his father Thomas, the owner of a fine glass workshop. When a war breaks out and an army colonel arrives in their town with his violinist daughter Alliz, the relationship between the father and son is tested.

The project features the voice talents of Art Malik (*Man Like Mobeen*), Sacha Dhawan (*Wolf*), Anjali Mohindra (*The Lazarus Project*), and Tony Jayawardena (*Ackley Bridge*). Riaz produces through his Mano Animation Studios alongside Khizer Riaz and Manuel Cristobal, with Apoorva Bakshi executive producing through Awedacious Originals. In addition to its premier screening at Anney, taking place June 10 at 4:30 p.m. at the Cinema Pathe 1, the film also screens June 11, 12, and 15 at the festival. *The Glassworker* releases in Pakistani theaters Friday, July 26.



Get AWN delivered to your inbox! Never miss an important article again!

### Latest AWN Must Reads

- » Bringing 'Dog Man' to Life: A Conversation with Peter Hastings and Karen Foster
- » Crafting the Bittersweet Stop-Motion in Adam Elliot's 'Memoir of a Snail'
- » Blocking Out the Laughs for 'LEGO Star Wars: Rebuild the Galaxy'
- » Jef Kaminsky Talks 'Eva the Owlet' Season 2
- » Anime's Robot Titans: Weighing 'Gundam' and

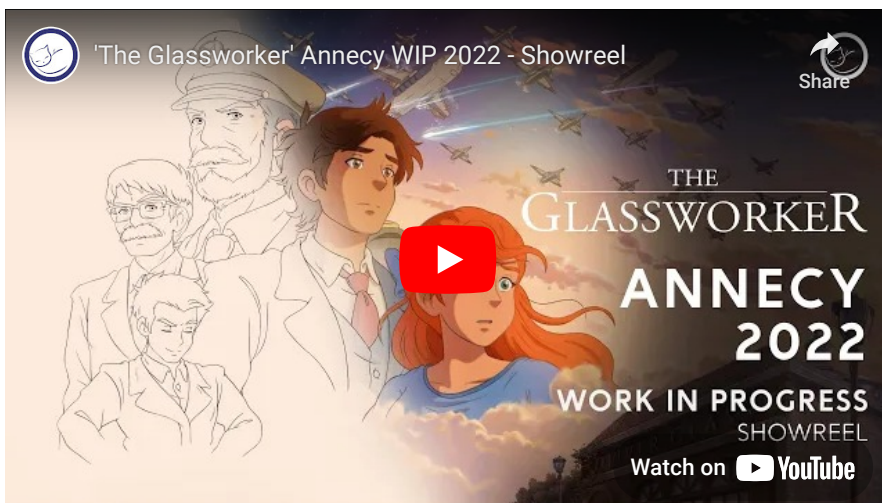
Here's the trailer:



And, true to his word, Riaz drew the entire film, which consisted of 1,477 shots and over 2,500 individual drawings.

"I knew exactly what I wanted it to look like and I drew in great detail, but that was really the easy part," says Riaz. "The hard part was getting people to buy into what we were doing and pull this studio together. No one has ever done anything like this in this country. It was very, very tough. But we somehow did it. Is it exactly the way I wanted it to look? No, of course not. But it's the beginning. And I'm very happy that, with the limited resources we had, we were able to achieve something like this. And if this does well, then, obviously, I want to keep improving and keep building. That's the exciting part."

Take a look at the film's 2022 Anecy WIP reel:



Mano Animation started out with Riaz, his wife Mariam Riaz Paracha (assistant and art director on *The Glassworker*) and his cousin Khizer Riaz (CEO of Mano and film producer). The trio grew the studio and *The Glassworker* simultaneously, inspired and shaped by their lives in a post-9/11 Pakistan. Riot drills, bomb threats, curfews, and checkpoints became an everyday part of their world in Karachi.

"I didn't want to set the film in Pakistan exactly, because then I wouldn't be able to talk about the broader issues because it would have been so geopolitical," shares Riaz, whose movie is still filled with the flavors of Pakistan, from the colonial architecture, what the characters wear and eat, as well as the local legends surrounding spiritual beings called 'jinns.' "So, I wanted to take a fantastical setting and use it to tackle the things that I grew up facing in Pakistan as well as the conflict happening in the world around us and encourage people to find reasons to keep living and keep moving forward."

In the film, Vincent and Alliz's fathers are on two opposing sides of a territory conflict, though Vincent's father is actively against the war altogether. At one point, the character says, "The Great Ravine is disputed territory. We claim it, so do they. So, we go to war. Idiocy."



'Macross'

- » Re-VIEW: 'Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl' – Celebrating The Human Touch
- » Unveiling 'Arcane': A Conversation with Pascal Charrue and Alexis Wanneroy
- » Crafting Magic: Simon Otto Talks 'That Christmas'

[See More »](#)

## Top Headline News

- » George R.R. Martin Praises 'GoT' Prequel 'A Knight Of The Seven Kingdoms'
- » PBS KIDS Unveils 'Phoebe & Jay' Animated Series
- » Animation, CMNIX Team to Bring 'Beardy Bodo' to South Korea
- » Anime Tokyo Station Announces 'Oshi No Ko' Anime Series Exhibition
- » Comedians The Sklar Brothers to Host 23rd Annual VES Awards
- » Nelvana's 'Millie Magnificent' Animated Series Goes International
- » Warner Bros. Animation Sets 'Oh, The Places You'll Go!' Release Date
- » FX Drops New 'Alien: Earth' Teaser Trailer and Key Art

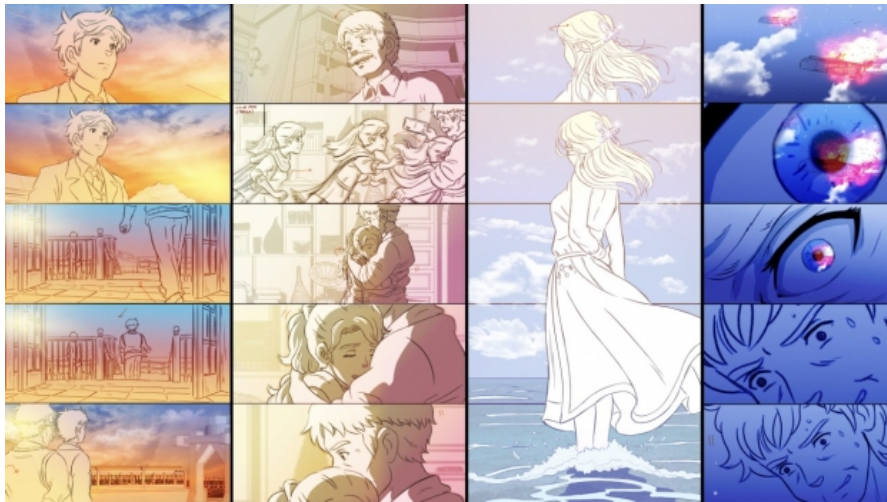
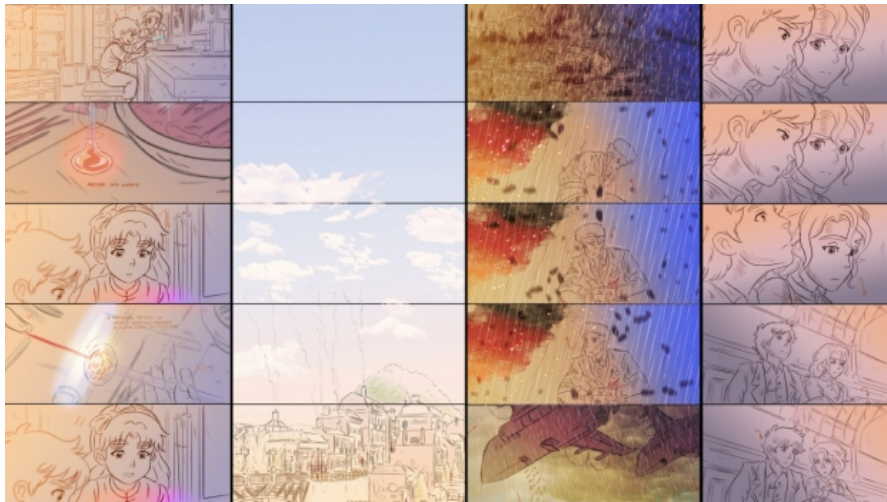
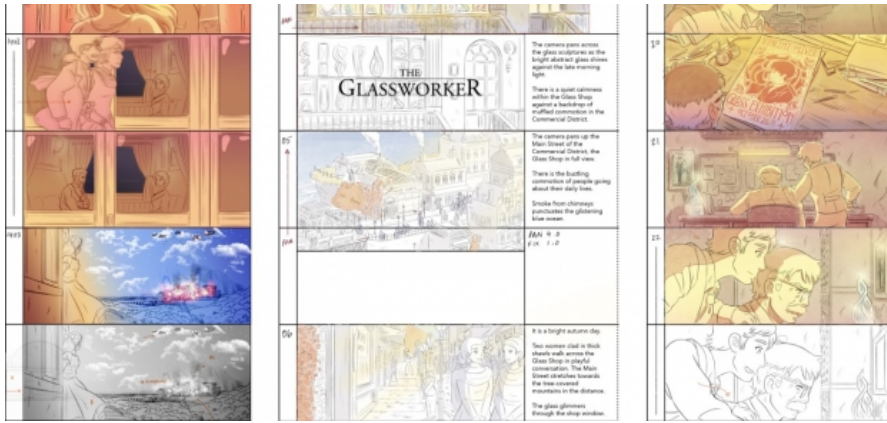
[See More »](#)

**Only on ANIMATIONWorld:**  
Magnets, Lube and an R-Rating:  
Adam Elliot Discusses  
Memoir of a Snail at SAVFF



## Career Connections

- » Motion Design and Animation (Assistant)



And Riaz is not shy about sharing that *The Glassworker* is “an anti-war film,” not unlike many of the Miyazaki stories that inspired him as a child. When Riaz presented his idea to start a hand-drawn animation studio in Pakistan, he got the chance to present his art and music at TEDx Tokyo and was invited to one of the greatest animation studios in country, Studio Ghibli.



“I was watching movies like *Kiki’s Delivery Service* well before I even knew about Studio Ghibli,” remembers Riaz. “I was just a kid. I didn’t know anything about who’d made it. I just knew I was drawn to it. As I got older, *Princess Mononoke* came out and *The Wind Rises*. The themes of war and finding reasons to keep on living are so prevalent in all of Miyazaki’s movies, and that was hugely inspirational for me as a kid. So, when it came time to make my own film, I

Professor/Assistant Professor in-Residence)  
University of Connecticut Digital Media & Design  
Department

»Graphic Designer (hybrid)  
Swiss Re

»Art Director, (Sports & Entertainment Motion  
Design) - CW Network - Burbank, CA  
Nexstar Media Group

»Teaching Assistant Professor -  
Animation/Interactive Design  
East Carolina University

»[Deep Learning Div.] Deep Learning Game  
Adaptation Project Manager (3년 이상)  
KRAFTON

»Senior Game Production Project Manager/  
Producer  
Tencent

»Graphic Design Intern  
Leidos

»CreativeMarketingAnalyst-Web&GraphicDesigner  
JPMorgan Chase

[See More »](#)

## Recent Comments

**haha** Oh, because black kids can't read and have the lowest literacy rate of any ethnicity. Got it.  
[PBS KIDS Unveils 'Phoebe & Jay' Animated Series](#)

I don't know if they're releasing it in the UK. You'd have to check with whoever is the distributor for Warner in the region.  
['Regular Show: The Complete Series' Coming to DVD February 4](#)

**Adam** would it be available in the uk?  
['Regular Show: The Complete Series' Coming to DVD February 4](#)

You can probably get it at most retailers that sell DVDs, Amazon and Walmart would probably be your best bet.  
['Regular Show: The Complete Series' Coming to DVD February 4](#)

What a spit in the face of J.R.R Tolkien.  
['The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim': A Tokyo Take](#)

**Nobody** Daffy and Porky are not Chuck Jones' characters.  
[Unpacking the Extraterrestrial Antics of 'The Day the Earth Blew Up: A Looney Tunes Movie'](#)

## Most Popular

['Regular Show: The Complete Series' Coming to DVD February 4](#)  
4 comments · 1 week ago

['The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim': A Tokyo Take](#)  
1 comment · 3 weeks ago

[Unpacking the Extraterrestrial Antics of 'The Day the Earth Blew Up: A Looney Tunes Movie'](#)  
1 comment · 3 weeks ago



(From L-R): Mano Partners Khizer Riaz (CEO/Producer), Usman Riaz (Co-founder/ Director), and Mariam Paracha (Co-founder/ Art Director).

drew heavily from those experiences.”

Riaz also drew from the experiences of his mother. Much of the emotions and turmoil the film’s character Alliz deals with as the daughter of an Army Colonel is derived from Riaz’s own mother, whose father was a Colonel in the Pakistani Army. The soldiers in the film are not made out to be villains or monsters, but family members, trying to do right by those they love. In Riaz’s words, “Ultimately, all the people caught in the conflict suffer,

regardless of whoever the victor is.”

Wanting to depict Alliz and Vincent’s as gentle characters despite being brought up in a warring world gave Riaz the idea to make Vincent a glass blower and Alliz a violinist. Riaz’s own relationship with music as a classically trained pianist and composer inspired Alliz’s musical inclinations. In fact, Riaz pursued music before animation and received his bachelor’s in Music Theory and Composition from Berklee College of Music. In 2012, he was selected to showcase his music, art, and short films at TED. At 21, he was one of the youngest TED fellows ever selected.

“This story takes place in a time when patriarchy and social standing are considered more important than free thought and artistic pursuits,” says Riaz. “It was only when I began writing my own music and orchestral scores as a child that I realized I had a voice. Exploring that with the conflict happening around me as a kid, and then exploring that again with these characters was quite introspective.”

Vincent’s world of glass blowing, meanwhile, was inspired by a trip Riaz took at a teenager to Venice, where he saw the Murano Island glass blowers.

“I was intrigued by the process of glass blowing because the process is as beautiful and interesting as the end result, and I always wondered why nobody made an animation about something this lovely,” says Riaz. “In 2007, a movie called *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* came out, I was like, ‘So we have a movie about how perfume is made, but we don’t have a movie about glass blowing?’ I just kept thinking about it. And then, when the time came to make my own film, that was the first idea that came out of my head. I also love the metaphor that there’s this glass shop, with all these beautiful and fragile artworks, surrounded by harsh war and conflict. It was a beautiful juxtaposition.”



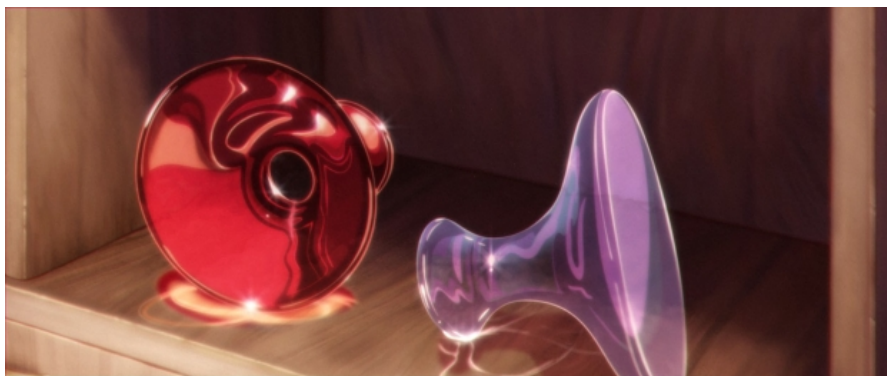
While animating Alliz’s delicate hand movements as she manipulates the strings of her violin was something familiar to Riaz, the process of glass blowing was completely foreign and it required a hefty amount of research, and a bit of travel.

“We visited Peter Layton’s glass studio in London and that was where our primary research was done,” explains Riaz. “They were very kind, letting us see everything from the inception of making something to the end result. And, with glass blowing, it’s very quick. You have to work with it really

quickly, because the glass cools down so rapidly. So, they were like wizards just moving around with it and playing with it and shaping it and then putting it in the oven where it cools down at a set temperature, so it doesn't crack. We tried to incorporate all that research into the film."

The crew also studied color coordination with glass and created color palettes showing what colors work well together.

"We actually planned a lot of the film around the colors and lighting of the glass and its pastel tones," notes Riaz. "In 2017, I met with Disney historian Charles Solomon, and he talked about the difference between hand-drawn animation and CG animation, and how CG tries to imitate reality whereas hand-drawn animation gives the impression of reality. Showing the craft and showing exactly how glass blowing is done was something that I really wanted to focus on, but we had a lot of liberty in what we could do for the glass' animation just because we weren't going for photorealism. We could romanticize and play around with it."



*The Glassworker* is about perseverance, examining innocence, war, loss, and those who choose to create something beautiful even as their home crumbles. It's a story that has lived in Riaz's heart long before *Mano*, and one that he couldn't tell as richly or tangibly working abroad.

"It's a huge privilege to work in places like Japan and the United States, but I didn't want to leave Karachi," says Riaz. "I want to show the people of Pakistan what's possible and what we can create."

The film also screened at Cannes Film Festival last month with favorable reviews from audiences.

"It was an honor to be presenting our journey at Cannes 2024 at the American Pavilion, where so many of my heroes have spoken," shares Riaz. "It's an honor for any filmmaker, but to have our first film receive so much wonderful support from our peers is truly special. I am very grateful to The Pakistan Crescent Collective and to Mo Naqvi. A lot of care went into making this movie. I hope it resonates with people. I hope they see the attention to detail and how we gave it our all."

He continues, "I hope the Pakistani people realize that if you if you pursue your passions, and you give it your all, that it is possible to achieve your dreams. I never thought that I would be like in the vicinity of Studio Ghibli ever. I was a kid from Pakistan and next thing I know I'm in Hayao Miyazaki's studio. I remember I busted out crying because I couldn't believe it. And Miyazaki was there, working on *Boro the Caterpillar*. I want *The Glassworker* to inspire people like Miyazaki's movies have inspired me. And maybe it's a fool's hope, but that's what we need this country, quite frankly. Hope."



Mano Animation Studios is continuing to release weekly behind-the-scenes episodes of *The Making of The Glassworker* on the studio's YouTube channel. There are currently three episodes,

with nine more on the way.

All 11 feature films competing in the Contrechamp category can be found [here](#) – all AWN's Anney coverage can be found [here](#).



Victoria Davis is a full-time, freelance journalist and part-time Otaku with an affinity for all things anime. She's reported on numerous stories from activist news to entertainment. Find more about her work at [victoriadavisdepiction.com](http://victoriadavisdepiction.com).

**Tags** [From Pakistan to Anney](#) [The Glassworker](#) [Anney International Animation Film Festival](#) [Anney 2024](#) [Cannes](#) [Anney Animation Festival](#) [Anney](#) [Festivals](#) [Feature Films](#) [feature film animation](#) [animated films](#) [Animated Movies](#) [Films](#) [2D](#) [2D animation](#) [Hand-Drawn](#) [Usman Riaz](#) [Mano Animation Studios](#) [Art Malik](#) [Sacha Dhawan](#) [Anjali Mohindra](#) [Tony Jayawardena](#) [Khizer Riaz](#) [Manuel Cristóbal](#) [Apoorva Bakshi](#) [Awedacious Originals](#) [Mariam Riaz Paracha](#)

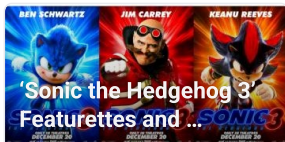
**More From ANIMATIONWorld:**

<a href="#">←</a>	Next Post <a href="#">Anney 2024 Feature Films in Official Competition Roundup</a>	Previous Post <a href="#">The Houghton Brothers Blast Off in 'Big City Greens the Movie: Spacecation'</a>	<a href="#">→</a>
-------------------	---	--	-------------------

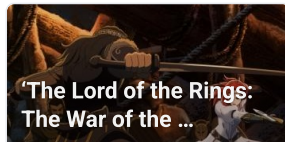
**Related Content**

- [Trailer Drops for Usman Riaz's 'The Glassworker'](#)
- [Miyu Productions Bringing 10 Films to Anney 2024](#)
- [11 NFB Films Heading to Anney 2024](#)
- [Anney 2024 Official Short Film Selections Revealed](#)
- [Anney 2024 Official Feature Film Selections Revealed](#)

**ALSO ON ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK**



2 months ago · 1 comment  
Keanu Reeves stars as 'Shadow the Hedgehog,' a mysterious villain that ...



a month ago · 1 comment  
Japan catches up with the Middle-Earth anime that most of the world has ...



2 months ago · 3 comments  
Vicky Jenson and Skydance Animation's new, original fairy tale take on a very ...

**1 Comment**

**Login** ▼



Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH



OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS [?](#)

By clicking submit, I authorize Disqus, Inc. and its affiliated companies to:

- Use, sell, and share my information to enable me to use its comment services and for marketing purposes, including cross-context behavioral advertising, as described in our [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

- Supplement the information that I provide with additional information lawfully obtained from other sources, like demographic data from public sources, interests inferred from web page views, or other data relevant to what might interest me, like past purchase or location data
- Contact me or enable others to contact me by email with offers for goods and services (from any category) at the email address provided
- Process any sensitive personal information that I submit in a comment for the purpose of displaying the comment
- Retain my information while I am engaging with marketing messages that I receive and for a reasonable amount of time thereafter. I understand I can opt out at any time through an email that I receive. Companies that we share data with are listed [here](#).

I'd rather post as a guest



♡ 1 • Share

Best Newest Oldest



**Shakeem**

8 months ago

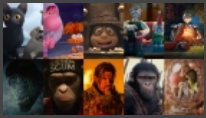
Really inspirational what these young people accomplished. Stories like this is why I continue to soldier on.

👍 0    💬 0    Reply

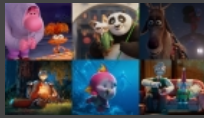
[Subscribe](#)    [Privacy](#)    [Do Not Sell My Data](#)

**DISQUS**

### Elsewhere on AWN



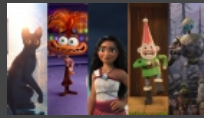
Nominations Announced for the 97th Academy Awards



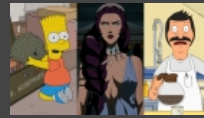
52nd Annual Annie Award Nominations Announced



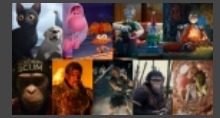
'Dune: Part Two,' 'The Wild Robot,' 'Shōgun' and 'The Penguin' Lead VES Award Nominations



2025 Producers Guild Awards Movie and TV Nominations Announced



'The Simpsons,' 'Bob's Burgers' Lead 2025 WGA Awards Nominations for Animation



Nominations Announced for 2025 BAFTA Awards

## Animation World Network

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Terms Of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Media Kit](#)

© 2023 AWN, Inc. AWN.com - Part of the Animation World Network - 13300 Victory Blvd, Suite 365 Van Nuys, CA 91401

