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Sharing an Aotearoa-Indian perspective through Digital-Rangoli, experimental cultural experiences in contemporary New Zealand public

Amul / Abhi Topiwala, 2024

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Abstract

The migration of my family from India to Aotearoa brought a range of traditional values and practices with them including the art of rangoli. The aim of this research is to use motion design as a public intervention within a threshold to reveal interstices for future generations facing kōrero. A threshold, which is a liminal space activated to reveal 'digital rangoli' — experimental animation that can explore ideas of whakapapa and tūrangawaewae as an Aotearoa-Indian. The results of this practice often represent acceptance, reflection, and a perspective that can illuminate new pathways into our future. This process has allowed me to understand and unpack many presumptions that are often made of Indians in Aotearoa New Zealand. With autoethnography as my method, I collect knowledge through audio and written reflection, journaling, sketching, motion experiments, and photography. In this research I piece together these findings in such a way that discusses the progress of my digital rangoli experiment in relation to significant moments of my life that elapsed during my postgraduate studies. Identity is something that we all grapple with at our own capacities. This project seeks to offer third culture kids of various backgrounds alternative ways of viewing their own whakapapa through the application of art and design.

Project Introduction

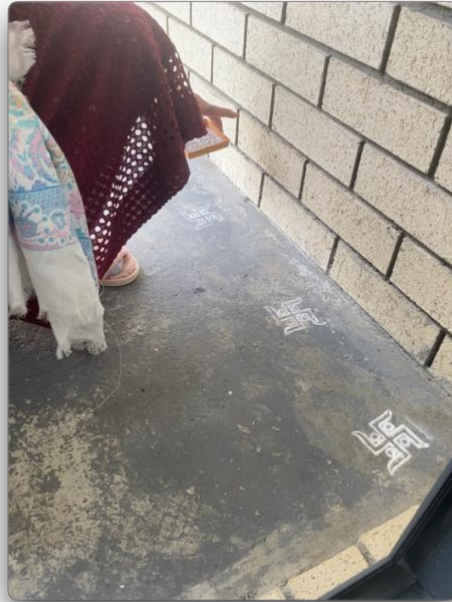


Figure 1. Topiwala, Amul. Author's mother creating rangoli. using a stencil at their home in Waitakere. Aug. 2024.

Reflecting on public and private moments of ways my Indian culture played out on this whenua, I fixate on distant moments my mum created rangoli during Diwali, a form of sand art, using rice grains at the entrance of our home in Waitakere in Tāmaki Makaurau. Diwali marks the Hindu New Year and in its lead up, we clean and decorate our homes, spend money on new clothes and make homemade sweets and snacks to gift our friends and family. During the time of cleaning the home is when we would begin to make rangoli at our front entrance way. Since 2002 the Asian New Zealand Foundation has organised public Diwali events in Auckland and Wellington but smaller events are still organised in centres around the country (Johnson 79). Using a mix of autoethnography and somaesthetics as a design methodology, I map across a timeline the key points that have uncovered and embedded layers of meaning into this project that has been very close to my heart. Attending Asian Aotearoa Arts Hui (AAAH) as a commissioned artist in 2018 planted the seeds of what has informed this design research. My friend Bhavesh Bhuthadia and I created Bhoj Bhavan 2.X to follow up from our 2018 installation Bhoj Bhavan in 2024. In my first attendance of the festival, I was able to meet other tauwiwi of colour that too asked questions around identity and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand. These relationships grew

deeper after attending wānanga at Te Rau Karamu marae in March this year closing its 10 years of celebrating Asian Aotearoa Arts.

After being exposed to questions around Asian identity and our place in the history of Aotearoa, I began to query my journey to this place. Decolonisation seemed to be where I was heading but through this research I have learned that this is a process rather than a destination. I didn't communicate with my family history through this work but I communicated what I learnt of rangoli and the depth at which I view the practice. Returning from Pōneke to Tāmaki Makaurau I brought curiosities back with me. 'What constitutes Aotearoa national culture?' and 'How are 'ethnic people' represented in the narratives of New Zealand historiography?'. My response was more questions: What was my role as an ethnic person within the media? How often am I seeing Indians feature in the mainstream? As a person of colour, is there a way I can make a difference? I had broadened my thinking and creative lens to approaching a problem - design or otherwise. Moving down to Pōneke to commence a Masters of Design, I suddenly had the chance to observe my family's history and attempt to fill any gaps in my knowledge of coming to be in Aotearoa. I ask myself what I wanted to create and communicate using my skills in animation. From this creative inquiry, my expression of digital-rangoli has emerged – public experimental motion graphics.

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To my family, thank you for the sacrifices that you have made to get me here.

To my friends past and present, thank you for always expanding the horizons of my world.

Glossary

Aotearoa: New Zealand

Ba: maternal or paternal grandmother

Dada: maternal grandfather

Dukaan: a shop, dairy, place of business

Khichya no laut: rice flour poppadoms

Manaakitanga: hospitality and generosity

Maramataka: Māori lunar calendar

Masi: mother's sister

Tāmaki Makaurau: Auckland

Tangata Tiriti: non-Māori people of the Treaty of Waitangi

Tangata Whenua: people of the land (Māori)

Waiata: Māori song

Whānau: family

Whanaungatanga: relationship, kinship

Velan: rolling pin

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Mihi

કેમણે, મારુ નામ અમૂલ અભિ ટોપીવાલા.

tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa
Ko Inia
te whakapaparanga mai
(engari)
Ko te whau whenua tupu
Ko waitakere te kāinga
Nō Tāmaki Makaurau au
Kei Pōneke au e noho ana
He experimental motion designer au i
Ko Amul Abhi Topiwala toku ingoa
Tēnā tātou katoa

Ko wai au?

Home Connections



Figure 2. Topiwala, Amul. Author's Parents during Studio Photo Session. Hand Etching by the Author aged 6. Photograph, 2001.

My mum's name is Dhara Topiwala and was born in Secunderabad, Hyderabad, India during 1974. My mum's side of the family are from Navsari and they migrated to New Zealand sometime during the 1960s. My dad Anil Topiwala was born in Indore in 1967 and arrived shortly after marriage in 1994. I popped out on the 24th of June 1995.



Figure 3. Topiwala, Amul. Author in Manhar dada's tailoring dukān in Avondale. 1998

Kemchho and kia ora. My name is Amul Abhi Topiwala and I am a first generation child of Indian immigrants born during 1995 in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.



Figure 4. Topiwala, Amul. Family Photos during Hema Ba's 70th Birthday. Photograph, Oct. 2023.

From birth till the 2000s I grew up in Te Whau Avondale with plenty of family around me, young and old. Cross generational living was common around this time as that's how my family supported each other when migrating here. My uncles Mihir/Murray and Vaibhav/Bobby were big influences growing up because they were men navigating the world

of their youth. Pictured in the centre image (fig. 4) is me, my uncle 'bob mama' as I call him in Gujarati. To his left are my Hema ba and Manhar dada (mum and my uncles' parents).

At the age of 5 in the early 2000s, my parents bought their first home. We moved out to Waitakere, West Auckland. Away from generational living and into our own space. After all, getting married and buying a house was one of the things you did at that time. It was one of the things laid out by your family. It was tradition.

I have fond memories I keep visiting to remind myself of the collective nature of what being Indian means to me. In our family home in Avondale, I remember my the women in my family coming over on a summer's day to make khichya no laut. From what my mind can grasp of the distant memory, I remember the sound of oil on a steel plate that would prevent the dough from sticking on the surface. The velan beating and sliding on the ball of dough. The atmosphere was pleasant and my memories more because I got to try the dough. To this day my ba still makes khichya no laut for me, my brothers and little cousins.

I have two younger brothers. Yash was born in 2003, and Rahul born in 2005. They grew up seeing less of such generational living and I feel it has made a difference in their belonging and their ability to feel they can integrate with Indian cultural values. Family doesn't appear to be a huge priority for them. I feel that they have struggled to see much value in collective living, and grasp the joy and support that can be felt when being around that. The rhythms don't feel aligned. For me there can be a role for everyone, and things can just work. A space to tell stories, to connect, to be one as a people. I'm sure this existed for many families all over. This exists for many cultures but this is my Gujarati-West Auckland version. For me, seeing the world first through Gujarati culture and suddenly being reminded about the one I live in fails to make space for this kind of thinking.

Like khichya no laut, sak, bhat, dhal, rotli, and so on, the cooking, making, doing practices that I have observed my mum and ba carry out have left a deep impression on my outlook on life and creativity. It is through them I have learnt the meaning of resilience and collective care.

What I got to observe at my Hema ba's house was a mandir, an entire space dedicated to Hindu deities. The smells of the divo and incense, hints of sandalwood. A big conch shell with a coin inside. Though I still may not fully understand religious Hindu practice as my elders see it, I have observed that many can find comfort in the ritual.

Like many children born in the 90s, television was a pleasant escape from reality. I think my

keen interest in animation came from always having an outlet to creatively respond to something with. Whether that moment was a joke shared in a conversation, boredom, or at times even a traumatic experience. A moment I remember with a certain detail is when my mum and I were drawing together in our Brabham Place home in Avondale. She was on an arm chair and I was on the ground. She copied a picture of the Pokémon Venomoth onto a blank page with such accuracy and it was as if it was almost incomprehensible for my tiny brain.

The modes where I did get exposed to contemporary Indian views at the time were mostly through radio and TV. My Hema ba has been an avid listener of Radio Tarana. Besides Bollywood and what came on Apna TV, there didn't appear to be a lot of visibility of contemporary Indian culture in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. There was a Diwali festival but that was largely focused around food and performance.

School tensions

I went to three schools before attending Massey High School. My first was Newton Central School from 2000-2005. It was here that I can recall my first instance of bullying and being called racist names. Other than being bullied though, getting crafty with art materials and making stories were the times the good outweighed the bad.

West Harbour Primary School was the second school I attended from 2002 to 2005. It was walking distance from home and my Haringanga ba (dad's mum) came to New Zealand for the first time and was around to pick me up from school and look after me. I was introduced to Māori language here, learning basics like colours, numbers and some waiata.



Figure 5. Lata, Trazy. Hare Krishna School Bus.

When it came to feeling like I could belong somewhere, it was at Hare Krishna School I felt most comfortable. Here I learnt how to write in cursive handwriting, start my day with a bhajan or kirtan, have freshly made meals by the mandir devotees. Within a week I had switched schools and was on the Hare Krishna School bus heading to school grounds in Kumeu.

University – Rediscovering a Creative Voice

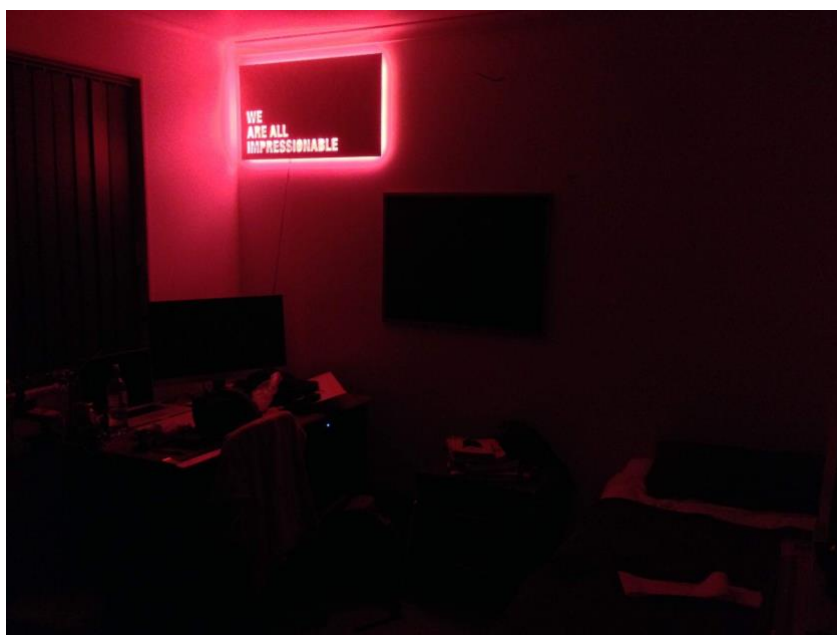


Figure 6. Topiwala, Abhi. Untitled (Epiphany). Lasercut Plywood, 2015.

This is a work I made in my first year of my Bachelor of Design and Visual Arts degree. I had several inspirations, Jenny Holzer and her Truisms from the 1970s being one of the key references whom I discovered during my time at Unitec. Jenny's work I also alluded to my love for hand painted lettering by using plywood. Although, I ironically took a step away from hand lettering to make room for new experiments. I used Adobe Illustrator and used Helvetica Neue condensed black to typeset something that I wanted to say.

Prior to my years at Unitec, I took art history at Massey High School which introduced me to the western art canon. Many artists stuck out to me but most notably American feminist artist Barbara kruger and abstract expressionist Jackson pollock. I'm certain the urge to call this work *Untitled* stemmed from finding the sometimes intentional use of the word peculiar.

It is pleasant to come across my reflection in response to the making of this work.

“The inspiration of the title as the name implies, was drawn from an epiphanic phase Topiwala was recently going through in his life. Coming from a traditional Indian family, Topiwala's parents have been accustomed to the Indian ways of living and thinking. Being born and brought up in Aotearoa but being raised as a child with Indian ways and customs created a lot of difficulty and an unsurprising push pull for him. Arguably that could have been the cause of this Epiphany.” (2014)

Looking back to this work ten years on, it is a surprise to see that my attitudes towards what I call a push-pull – or moments of tension and release, are still very epiphanic. I have grown in many areas of my being and to speak to a section of a spectrum of emotions is an exciting premise. The section in this case... Though not certain what the details of this moment of my life were, dark times seemed to be a constant. Struggling with depression and thoughts of suicide, I had many nights of crying myself to sleep. I had brothers looking up to me and in a turbulent household where we were an outlet of frustration and angst, I did what I could. I did my best. Dinithi Bowate's words resonate in this instance “[My parents] tell me I don't wake up early enough, don't study enough, take too many breaks. Why did I get 99% instead of 100? Why haven't I planned out my next 5 years already? The emotional traumas our parents inflict on us are just traumas inflicted on them by society.” (40) I wanted to do my best but it was difficult because there was no one else I could look to that had done it like I wanted to. Hence why when I seeked out role models, I always had to be critical of different

parts that I was looking for. There wasn't anyone I could look to that seemed to experience the world like me.

Asian Aotearoa Arts

Originally started in 2013 as a Chinese New Zealand Artists Hui 2013 I was fortunate enough to attend the 'mega hui' in 2018 and contribute to and become a part of the Asian Aotearoa Arts (AAA) whānau. As a grassroots Kaupapa (AAA) has shown me that being an immigrant and child of immigrants is a complicated business. The programming featured talks workshops and art activations across the city. It is through my creativity that I had the chance to make sense of what was occurring in my mind. I was able to express myself through drawing. A mark making method that was crucial through this research.



Figure 7. Topiwala, Abhi. *Distant Relatives* panel. Balamohan Shingade, Grace Lai, Professore Yiyang Wang and Emma Ng. 2018.

I began the news graphics role in March of 2018 and I had gotten a good sense of my responsibilities within the first few months. We had a daily briefing; incoming work that all of the team kept an eye on and took on depending on our individual capacities.

My friend and now long time collaborator Bhavesh Bhuthadia asked me to work on a commission together for the Eat My Culture portion of the AAA programming. While collaboration for me has been critical in creating quality work, looking back at *Bhoj Bhavan* specifically is a wonderful visual marker in the trajectory of my works since. Through

Bhuthadia family connections we were paired with Great India and created a work that drew from both our cultural backgrounds of being Gujarati Indian born and brought up in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. I remember the evening where the collaboration began to take shape. We were at Bhavesh’s family home in West Auckland, sharing tea and homemade chevdo. The crunchy limri (curry leaves) and the deep fried translucent green sprinkled in a sweet, salty and spicy flavouring. I got to taste Bhavesh’s version of home. Although the questions that arose during this project did not have the chance to feed into the creation of *Bhoj Bhavan*, it has fed into the crafting of this research.



Figure 8. Topiwala, Abhi. *Bhoj Bhavan*, a collaboration with author and Bhavesh Bhuthadia for *Eat My Culture* programming, 2018.

Curry Muncher

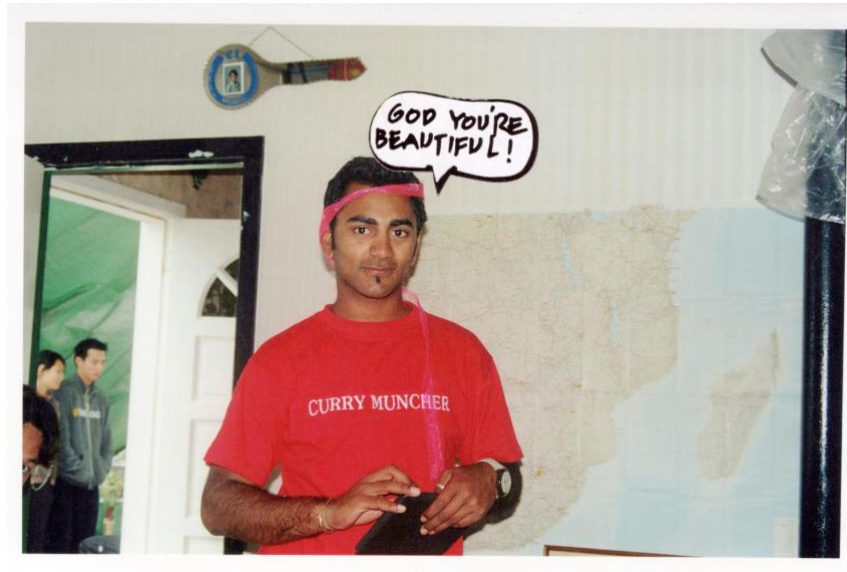


Figure 9. Merai, Kamal. Author's uncle in a curry muncher T-shirt he got embroidered. 1999.

Fig #. My Uncle Kamal Merai (mum's cousin) in a curry muncher T-Shirt he made in 1999

When my uncle showed me this photo it took me back to a memory of being called curry muncher at Newton Central School sometime between. I recall this here:

Warm concrete stairs
Rough metal handrail down the middle
We're in the middle of the courtyard.

“CURRYMUNCHER. BUDBUD. Hahaha”

I'm crying but it doesn't hurt.
Why am I crying?

Braided long ponytail.
Snotty nose

Then,
a tender embrace

Though there are parts of the memory I am unable to fully recall, Liliana Meneses states “reconstructed memory represents what the event means to the individual, and this is just as

important, if not more important, than the event itself.” (“Writing Out of Limbo: International Childhoods, Global Nomads and Third Culture Kids”, p. 287)(287)

This occurred at Newton Central school. My dad used to work at dada's dukān (grandpa's tailoring shop) on Great North Road near the Ponsonby and Karangahape Road intersection.



Figure 10. Recreation by author on Procreate, 2024

After allowing some time between recalling this encounter with racism, I'm reminded of one of the first art projects we got to do at Newton Central. We used crayon to lay block out colours on a page and then painted over with black paint, otherwise known as scratch art. Once it dried we could scratch the paint off to reveal the colours below. I might have made an underwater scene.

I asked my mum if I was bullied at West Harbour School, and it turns out I was. I struggle to remember bad memories from after this first incident. I wonder if that's why I have held the view that I hadn't faced much racism. Maybe because I've chosen not to see it.

Some of my digital rangoli creations that are discussed in this research were left untouched for more than a year since its creation. Making the work was the easiest part. The hardest was to comprehend the depth of possibility that creating digital rangoli had unfurled. This

project is my process of creating a digital space to inquire about what I have learnt over the years.

I worked in the commercial broadcast and news media industry over four years. It was hard to see myself or any hints of my cultural identity truly reflected in any of my work. There were moments of connection....

Invited projects...2018 work Great India work

My project explores themes of identity, belonging, and shares my Aotearoa-Indian perspective

Context Review

What is my Aotearoa-Indian perspective?

Up until I had applied for my motion design role, on my CV I had proudly wrote 'Kiwi-Indian.' By using 'Kiwi' rather than 'Aotearoa', I was brushing a lot under the rug. I was choosing not to deal with a certain past, a collective past.

My involvement in the national Asian Aotearoa Arts Hui in 2018, offered some creative fuel to interrogate the cultural value of design in my motion graphics industry. Critical questions such as 'What constitutes Aotearoa national culture?' and 'How do ethnics feature in the narratives of New Zealand historiography?' became influential in my decision to undertake this ambitious research project in 2022.

I remember my mum creating rangoli at the doorstep of our home in Waitakere, Tāmaki Makaurau. I found the process intriguing and fun. I attempted creating some myself though what was being created didn't match what I had the urge to depict. With frustration, drawing with a pencil was my preference. I had better control over the line. I knew its limits.

The problem initially was that the scope was too large. I didn't realise that I was better off looking at my own narratives rather than trying to learn of other local Aotearoa-Indian histories.

Before going more into my background, I need to state that this research and the order in which it has been conducted has been far from conventional. Nonetheless, it is fair to say it

has been a year of making and a year of reflecting. The methodological framework I am basing this research on is a mix of autoethnography and somaesthetic.

“We are two New Zealand born Gujarati Indians. Our place in Aotearoa is questioned on a daily basis, it’s the feeling of being caught in the in-between. Where we are far from our roots, and although we were born in Aotearoa, we are manuhiri (visitors) to this land. Our attempts to consolidate these differences has led to deep conversations questioning a sense of belonging.” (Patel and Patel)

Towards Decolonising Design

“[M]ainstream design discourse has been dominated by a focus on Anglocentric/ Eurocentric ways of seeing, knowing, and acting in the world, with little attention being paid to alternative and marginalised discourses from the non Anglo-European sphere, or the nature and consequences of design-as-politics today. This narrowness of horizons and deficiency in criticality is a reflection of the limitations of the institutions within which design is studied and practiced, as well as of the larger socio-political systems that design is institutionally integrated into.”
(Abdulla et al. 130)

What I had come to learn of design meant I needed to interrogate who and what my influences were because New Zealand society is one that is built on the colonisation of tangata whenua. In the RNZ I needed to understand my place in the history of Indians in this country. This meant that I needed to understand and acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Rangoli and the Threshold

Rangoli and how I observed it being drawn was near the entrance of our home in Waitakere, West Auckland. One instance I can recall better than others was where mum poured rice around a metallic Om she statue that she borrowed from ba. The negative spaces of the statue were filled in which stopped at a circular boundary. I kept looking at it thinking it could be so many other cool things. Like the things I saw after school on TV. The colours are tricky to visualise, but mum used coloured rice grains. Upon asking her recently over the phone she says the colours were likely green, red and yellow.

Upon further investigation into how the traditional artform is carried out in India, Tadvalkar states that the practice is known throughout the region with different names. Rice flour or

paste is created to draw within a threshold to invite guests and gods into the home and often coincides with auspicious events such as weddings, naming ceremonies and festivals like Diwali. (Garg and SAARC Cultural Centre)

Diwali in New Zealand



Figure 11. Topiwala, Amul. View of Wellington Diwali Festival at TSB Arena. 2023.

Diwali or otherwise known as Deepavali translates from the Sanskrit word to row of lights and signifies the Hindu New Year. Though there are many versions in the Johnson summarises (Fig 2.) five significant days of Diwali I can speak to from my point of view. This falls on a different day every year depending on the lunar calendar but is typically sometime in October or November. Initially I wanted to create work that would inform people about rangoli and Diwali Festival seemed to be the best place for this dialogue. Although, once given the opportunity to show work in progress under Asian Aotearoa Arts I was convinced that such creations should be in cross cultural spaces that foreground relations between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti.

Experimental motion design

Instead of offering traditional narratives like those found in the commercial realm, experimental animation typically offers formal challenges to the spectator. In

commercial cinema, the spectator is ordinarily compelled to speculate on how the story will resolve, and it may invite viewers to reflect on the behaviour of the characters and themes raised by the story. The underlying question viewers must ask when engaging with an experimental animation is more likely to be how should they engage with the given material. (Taberham 18)

Len Lye has been largely influential in my understanding of experimental animation. During one of my first classes at Unitec during 2016, Miriam Harris showed the work of Lye. I was instantly enchanted. Since learning of his work and referring to it over the course of my time in the industry, there is always something new I can take away from Lye's process and his way of working. Guy Brett notes that Lye called the area of the brain developed first in human evolution the 'old brain' which was a way to link the ancestral past with the body living in the present (50). As someone that doodled a lot through high school in books in between the margins, I find some truth in this.

It is through the making of space to doodle digitally that I can continue to feed my ancestral knowing with my present body. I feel the need to clarify that whenever I doodle, I am not transported to some ancestral fantasy land, but I will say that at times I feel in a certain state of flow. Upon revisiting his work again, I have a deeper sense of understanding for his way of working and outlook on life.

My first brush with motion graphics was during a lesson on rotoscoping during my Bachelor of Design and visual arts, drawing over frames of video footage. My classmate Jamie and I went to the performing arts students and got them to respond to a provocation which we documented. Taking the footage into After Effects I drew over every 4th that responded to the provocation visually.

Contemporary Aotearoa-Indian Perspectives



This project coincides with exhibitions across the motu with emergent south Asian voices. With the first of it's kind at New Zealand Portrait Gallery, *Invisible Narratives: Contemporary Indian Creatives from Aotearoa* opened on the 1st of September 2023 and brought together seven artists: Sarah Dutt, Jacob Rajan, Mandrika Rupa, Mandy Rupa-Reid, Rafik Patel, Tiffany Singh and Shruti Yatri. It was a moving experience being in a space seeing such concentration of contemporary Aotearoa India works. I looked closely at how each artist created channels to explore identity and belonging through their art. Sarah Dutt creates paintings that speak to her Indian and Māori whakapapa. Titled *Where I belong, Toku Tuurangawaewae, Swadesh Hai Mera स्वदेश है मेरा*, this work brings together the artist's great-grand aunt Te Ata Po's moko kauae and mehndhi. Tiffany Singh's hanging fabrics come together to emphasise the significance of these barely visible narratives. From a distance the projection makes out to be video footage and on close encounter, the text in languages such as Hindi, Māori and Gujarati reveal the words 'a place to stand' or Tūrangawaewae.

me like I imagine in some people seeing this hung in the Mangere Arts Centre - Ngā Tohu o Uenuku. I am drawn to how the gaze of the characters are direct and oddly disarming. The eye is deemed to be the mirror of the soul (Hume 35) and in these renderings, the Bradys' forward lean do gaze into ones soul. What are they trying to say?



THE CURRY BUNCH:
Title Sequence Grid
3 x 3 Grid of nine canvases
Each canvas 900mm x 900mm

Bhana states that “[t]he purpose of the resulting works may seek to examine and assess the intertextuality between mainstream Western culture and Eastern culture (and subcultures), and what influence this has on constructions of identity.” (48) Bhana uses *The Curry Bunch* to interrogate the issues of both borrowed cultures. This serves as a dialogue to unpack notions of representation and

“its greater purpose advances towards a constructive form of social criticism - an endeavour to employ wit as a strategy to unveil more intricate and considered polemics such as cultural identity, cultural appropriation, cultural hybridity, consumption, nostalgia, celebrity culture and image construction.” (51) in this juxtaposition of seemingly opposite cultures, the mashup forces viewers to grapple with a fictional reality. We as viewers are urged to look at the potential flaws in both

In his series *Frankie Goes to Bollywood*, Bhana depicts Bollywood stars in loving embrace over beaches on the West Coast of Auckland. Upon reading the artwork titles, viewers can note that English is removed as a mediating language. In response to this series Balamohan Shingade asks “On whose terms should Indians be made visible? Bhana does not depict

Indians succeeding in the Pākehā mainstream, but rather on their own terms.” (Shingade).
By placing Bollywood artists in a

A section of the invisible narratives exhibition I enjoyed seeing was the backroom for whānau to colour in their own rangoli.



Research Question & Aims

How can experimental motion design bridge Indian traditions in contemporary New Zealand through Digital–Rangoli in public to share an Aotearoa–Indian perspective?

Research Aims

1. Make visible traditional Indian ways of mark-making through experimental motion design to communicate rangoli in contemporary New Zealand
2. Highlight Aotearoa–Indians that have provided commentary on identity and positioning oneself in contemporary NZ
3. Explore the larger domain of projection and motion (including cel animation) as an effective medium

Seeing, Making, Moving – a critical design framework

Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and what we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living.”

(Adams et al. 10)

Seeing



In 2015 I purchased my first camera – a mirrorless micro four thirds Olympus E-M5 Mark 1, with money I saved from part-time work at a call centre job. My immediate family and I went to India to visit extended family. I was three years into my design studies and a combination of what I was taught, and my personal interests had primed me to document my country of origin. Hand painted signage, people, buildings, public and private life all featured as my subjects.

I have used photography and a mix of digital and physical mark-making in documentation and ideation of my process. Liamputtong & Rumbold recognise “drawing and photography as appropriate modes of creative expression for vulnerable and marginalised people that have not been heard through traditional channels.” (qtd. in Bartleet 134) Though it may not reflect how I feel anymore, I had a sense of feeling better than those living in India. I was from New Zealand. I was taught what ‘good design’ looked like and had seen the work of “the rock-stars of Euro-Western thought” as Zoe Todd points out. (qtd. in Mareis et al. 234) During my time of study, I considered myself a Kiwi-Indian. The story was simple, a Kiwi is our national bird - Indian is self explanatory. Upon hearing about how the Aotearoa-Chinese community here were alienated did I learn of the unjust and inhumane ways Indians were treated too.

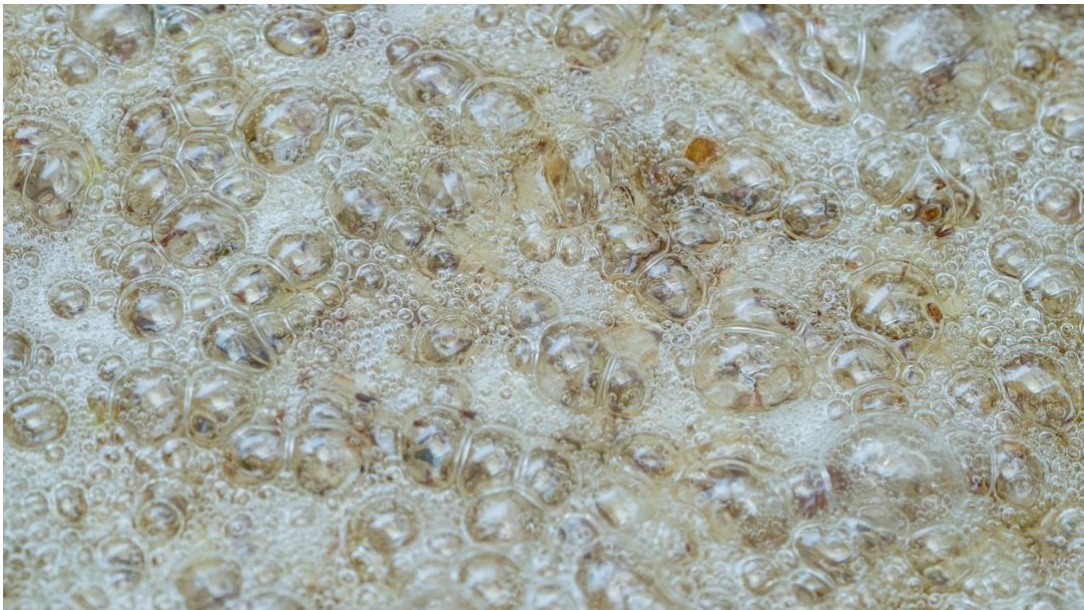
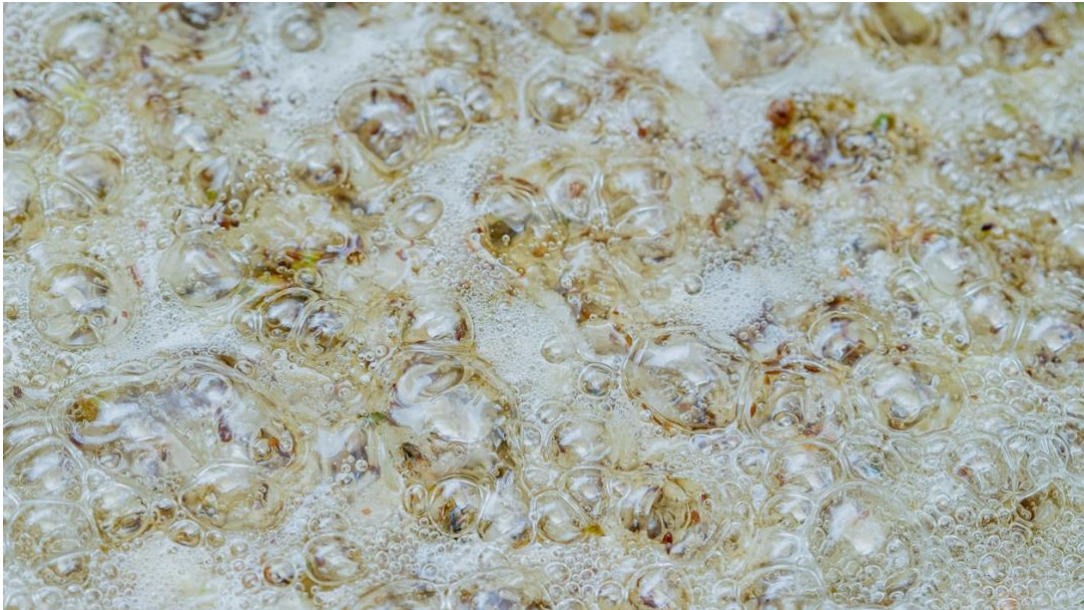
A lot of the solutions that arose came from thinking about my research questions outside of conventional design thinking. Since arriving at my research question, I had found myself responding in embodied ways. On moving to Pōneke Wellington, I had the freedom to experiment with new ways of being. Picking up running as a form of exercise as well as cooking for myself was vital in this experimental process.

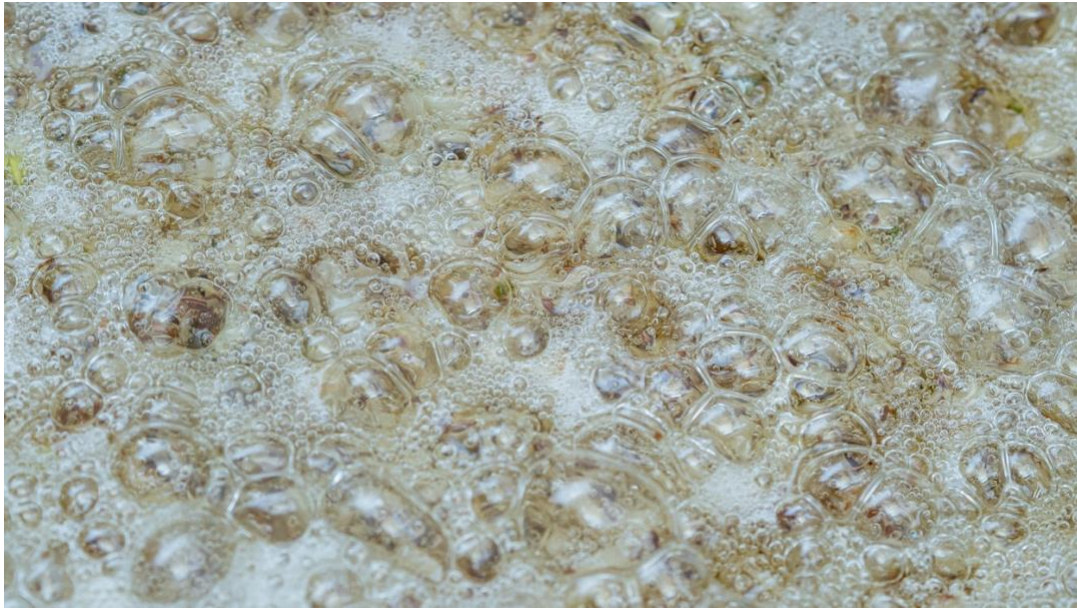
Practicing Running



Since 2022 I have ran 1,271km. From not being very active in Auckland to committing to a 10km race, and two half marathons, I can safely say that I was able to change in unexpected ways. I deepened the connection between my mind and body. By observing my 'inner voice' I could constructively renegotiate this dialogue. While running, I noticed any tensions that came from different parts of my body and could cross check that with one another. Håkan Nilsson explores running and mindfulness in two ways; through a western secular lens; and a traditional Buddhist lens. He notes "[t]wo of the most important positive outcomes of mindfulness training are the release of tensions and the elimination of an incongruent self-image. (361) I learnt of the different kinds of ways my body experiences pain and by running I was able to push play on my own personal pain mixtape that was recorded in my genes.

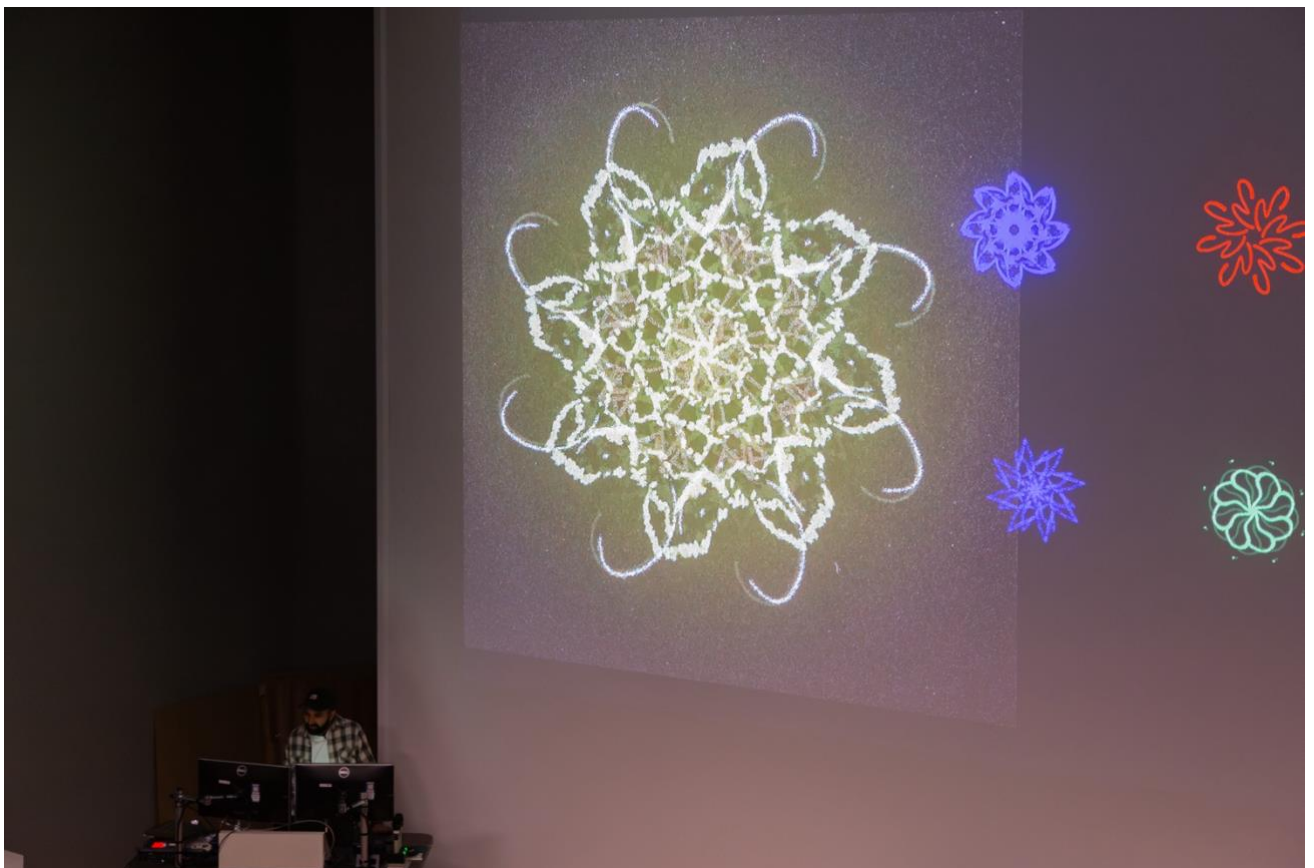
Recreating Meals and Memories



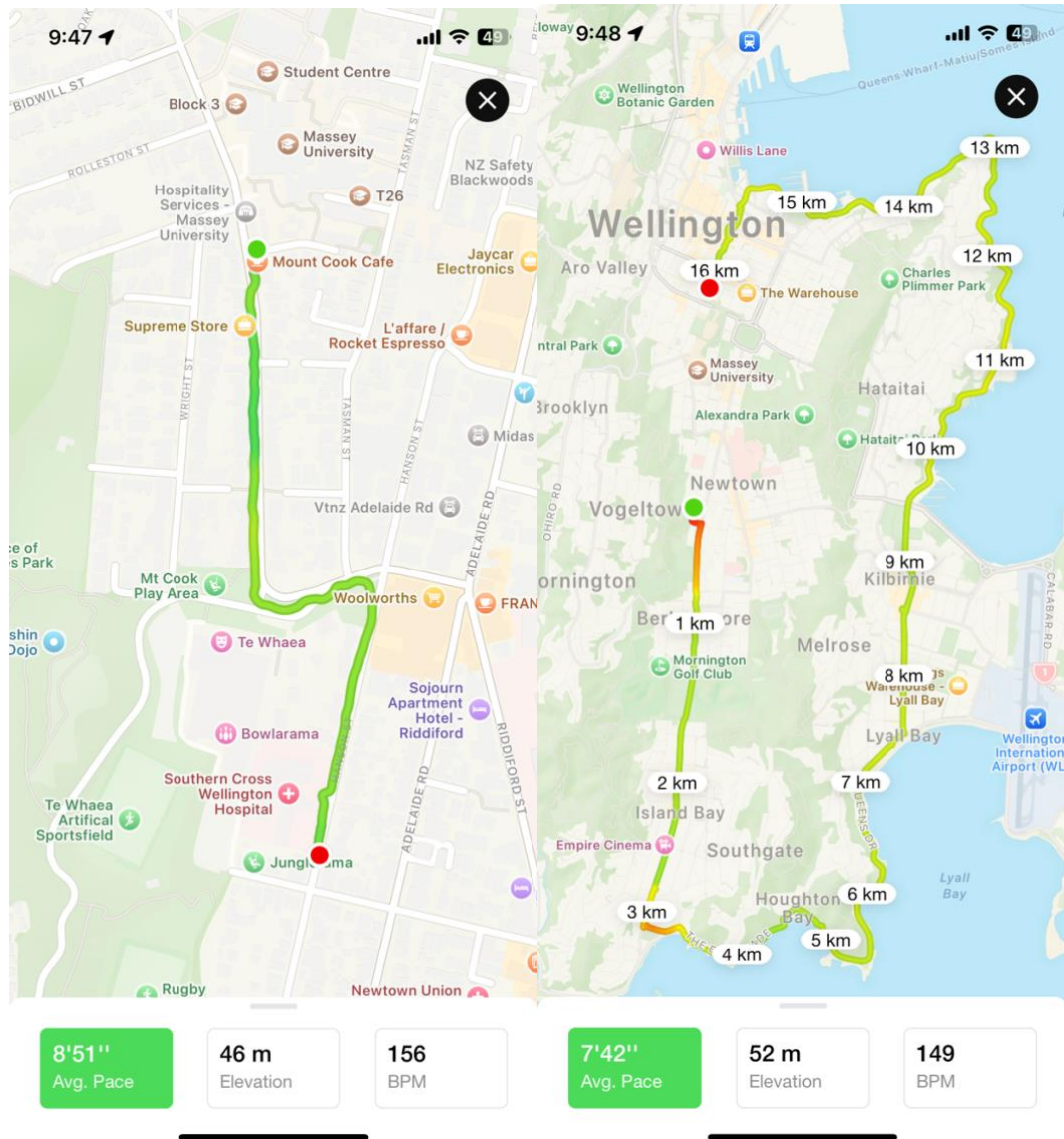


Whenever I have needed to make something quick and comforting, both my mum and ba have their own versions of daka nu sak (pronounced duck-ah) a Gujarati tomato-based egg dish. I learnt mum's version with onion and tomato by seeing her making it for my family and I many evenings. Once the chutney or gravy is made, eggs are cracked into it and garnished with coriander. I learnt Hema ba's version with fresh tomato I learnt while staying at my uncle Murray's place while I was in Auckland post house fire. My family were staying a couple houses down in Massey with neighbours and I stayed with Hema ba, Manhar dada, uncle Murray and aunty Jane in New Windsor. Cooking as inquiry recognizes bodies and food as sites of knowledge and engages researchers as researcher-participants in reflexive, collaborative study that explores the ways in which the embodied self is performed relationally through foodmaking. By creating meals like theirs for myself, I act out cultural movements and by thinking on the motion I can

Arohaehae 2.5



On the 29th of September 2023 I was given the opportunity to discuss my masters research in progress through Asian Aotearoa Art's. I had missed my third Arohaehae (a critique or presentation which we have four in total) due to having a housefire in my west Auckland home on the 13th of August that same year. I presented in the Pit on Te Rauwharangi Massey University campus and despite being on university grounds, my kōrero was open to the public. Though I was actively practicing ways of dealing with stress through exercise and eating what I believe my body needed, trauma is complicated and I had a very public breakdown when I reached the slide that introduced my parents. I took a moment to breathe and jump around. After I gathered myself, I mentioned that these are tears of joy and gratitude. My family were safe and sheltered but I can only imagine what it might have been like to live through witnessing our home burning. At the point of this presentation I had digital-rangoli set up and showing, the audience were able to see and witness my creation. It was hard to believe I had gotten to this point. Part of me was unsure if I was deserving of this opportunity.



Home Ablaze

Though not present during the fire, I remember being out on a 16km run. I answer Rahul's phone call and he said "our house is gone." I think I yelled back in a devastated manner, asking "Rahul, what do you mean?" I was 1km into my run and I had broken down on the spot on the corner of Hanson St and Hall St. My log says I started my run at 2.25pm. I restarted my app 24 minutes later at 2.49pm and completed the run. It is not so much the struggle of processing what has happened to my family that has been the most difficult thing. It is more so jumping almost immediately to the potential to change things at home for the better and being met with resistance when it comes to such a change. Something inside me wanted to change everything for good. In doing my best, I had done what my parents asked of me indirectly. Not by becoming a doctor or lawyer but through graduating with a bachelor's and consequently by landing a full-time job. After doing what I was hoped of me, I

wanted it to be my turn to respond. I wanted to share what I thought should be next in this traditional timeline.

Bhoj Bhavan 2.X

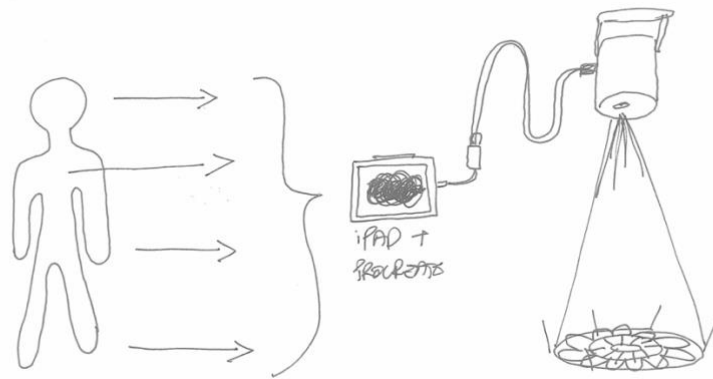




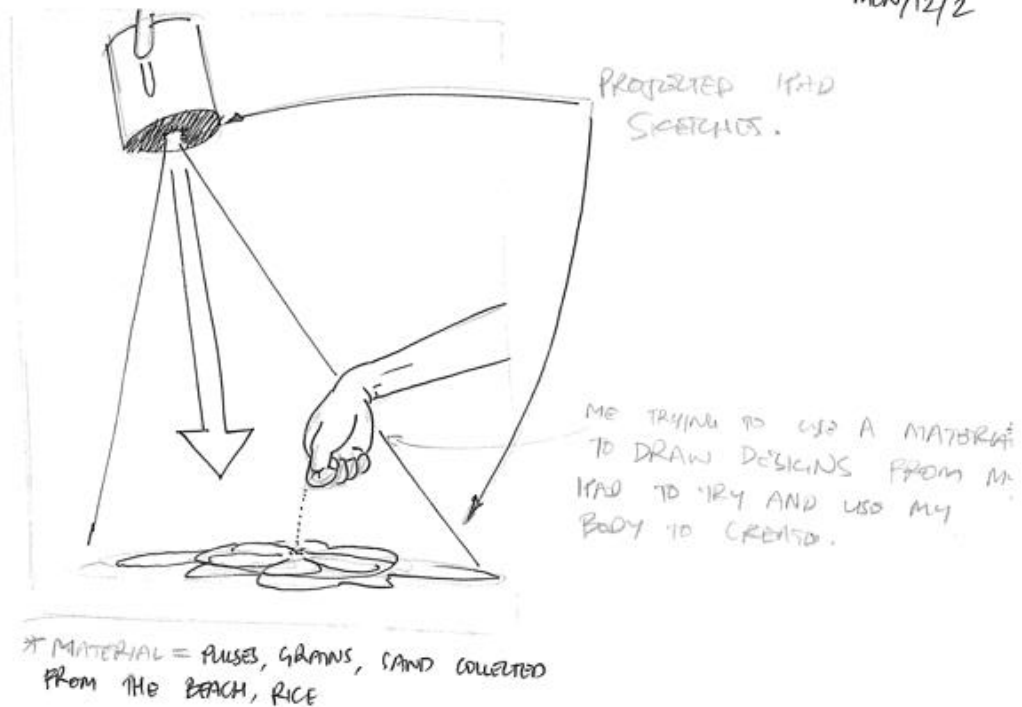
In May 2024 Bhavesh and I were commissioned again to think up a new work for the Great India window. The progress at home was slow but with insurance and building consent approved, restoration had commenced. My mind set while creating work almost mirrored the progress at home. I was given a chance to implement my research into a lasting public project. I had decided to venture into Augment Reality graphics using adobe aero. By pulling my experimental animation process into a spatial setting I got to think of the placement of digital-rangoli. By doing so I was also able to respond to the questions that arose while initially realising *Bhoj Bhavan* in 2018. While creating the first iteration of *Bhoj Bhavan*, we had created the work in Adobe Illustrator and I knew that if time permitted, I could make all the assets move. It is through this digital potential we have semi-future proofed the work by being able to build on the installation and by keeping the option open to animate the entire window as well as add more digital-rangoli directly in front of the work. Through this we can update with work to coincide with any significant event like key milestone years

Design process





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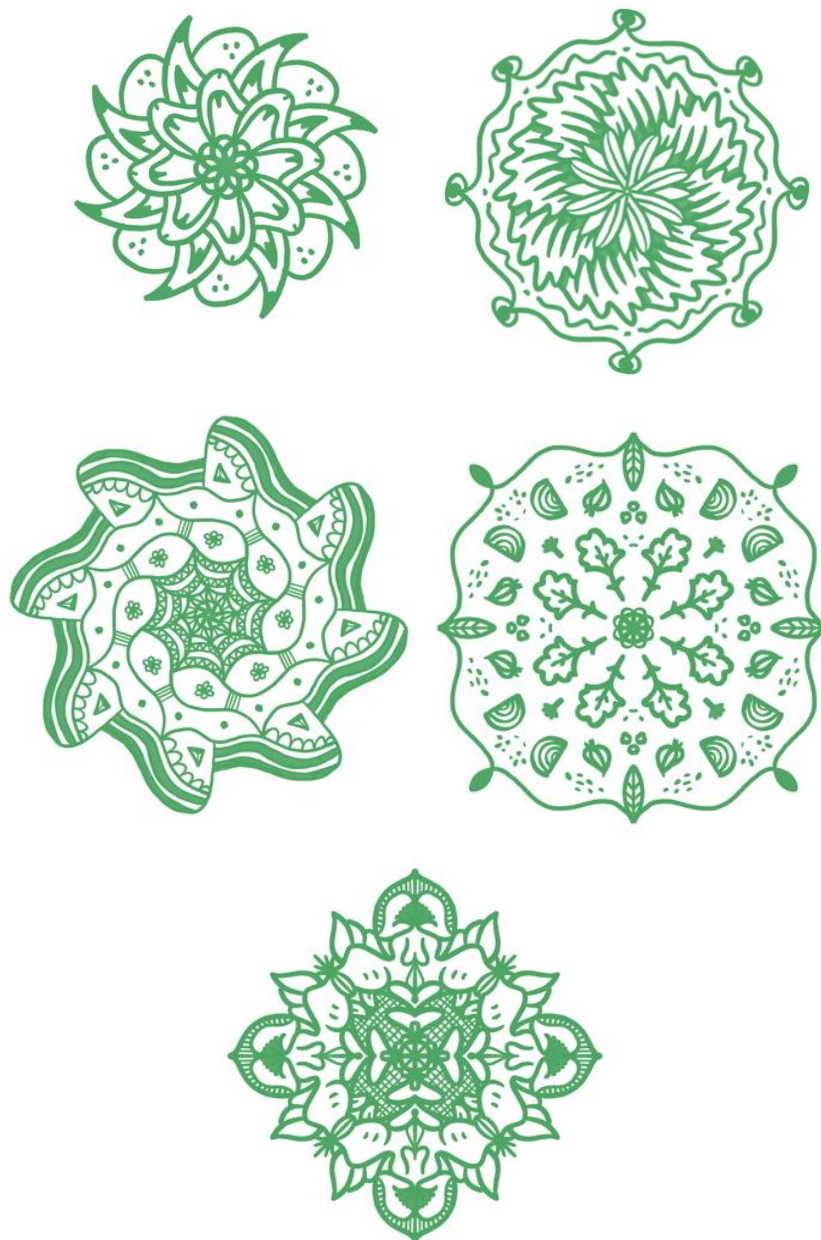
My process begins from sketches on Procreate, drawn in a sequence to reveal a range of motions. Starting with initial sketches. I use the symmetry feature to draw lines that rotationally repeat to resemble fractal like flower petals. This is brought into Adobe After Effects and after several sketches are composited over each other, the combinations in different orders result in innumerable motion expressions. I like to think that these drawings have undertones that stem from a lived experience of assimilating under the invisible forces

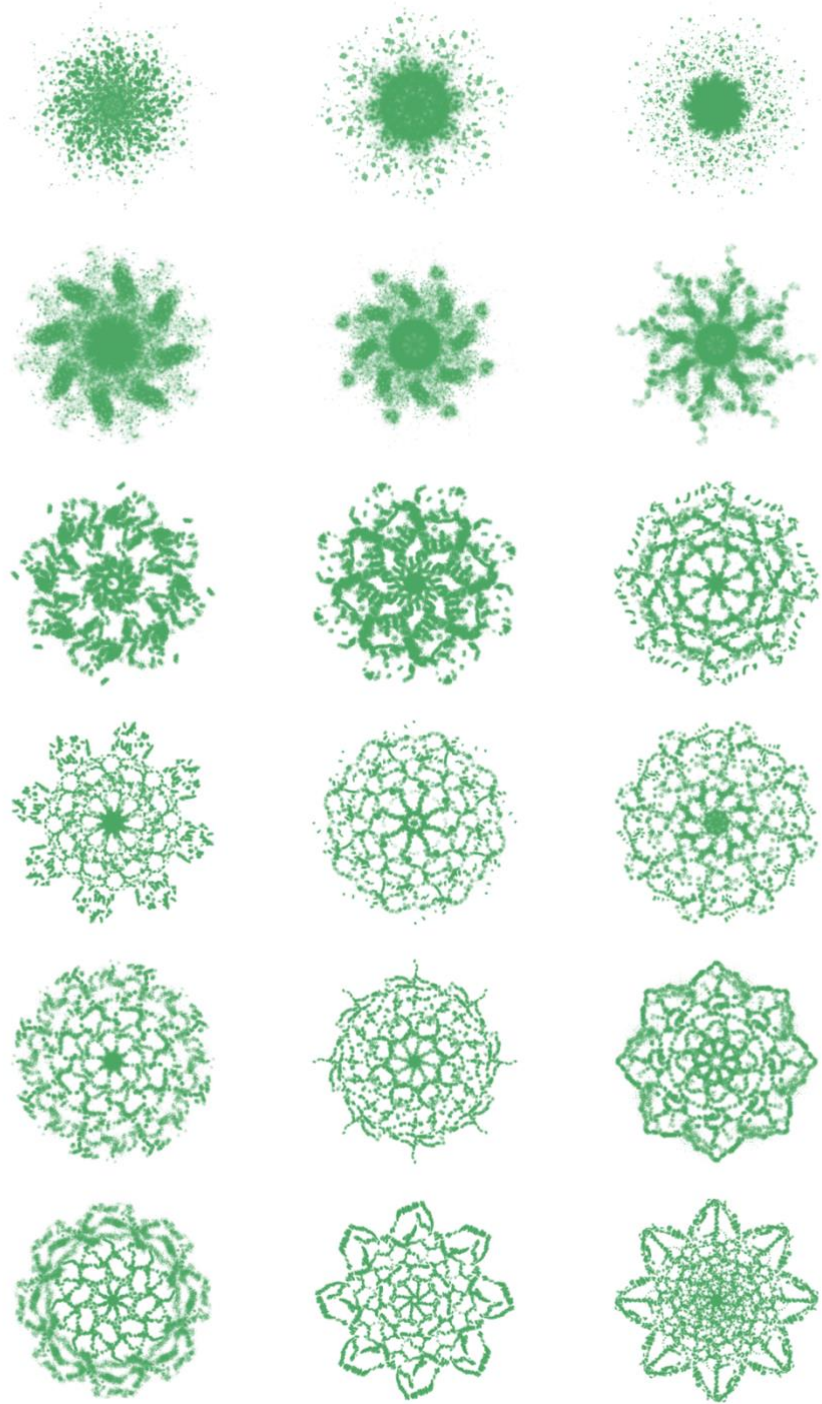
of a postcolonial society. It is through automatic drawing and by getting lost in this state of being or 'flow' where I can

What was my process?

When it came to my digital sketches, I aimed to draw in many places, taking in my surroundings with hopes to capture both some essence of place as well as my state of mind. Drawing fragments of what came to mind, food, ingredients, clothing, flowers, and grains. This all collides to create to create a kind of ornamentation.

Sketches





Vector based Experiments

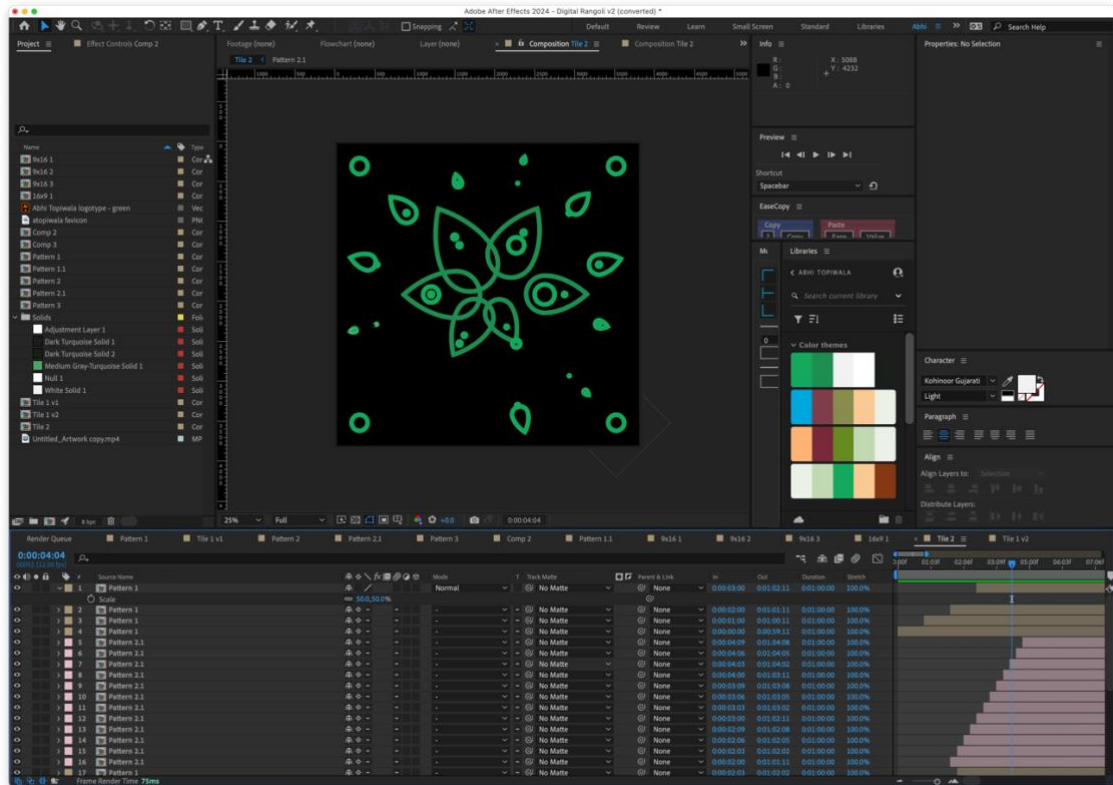


Figure 12. Topiwala, Abhi. Vector based exploration in Adobe After Effects.

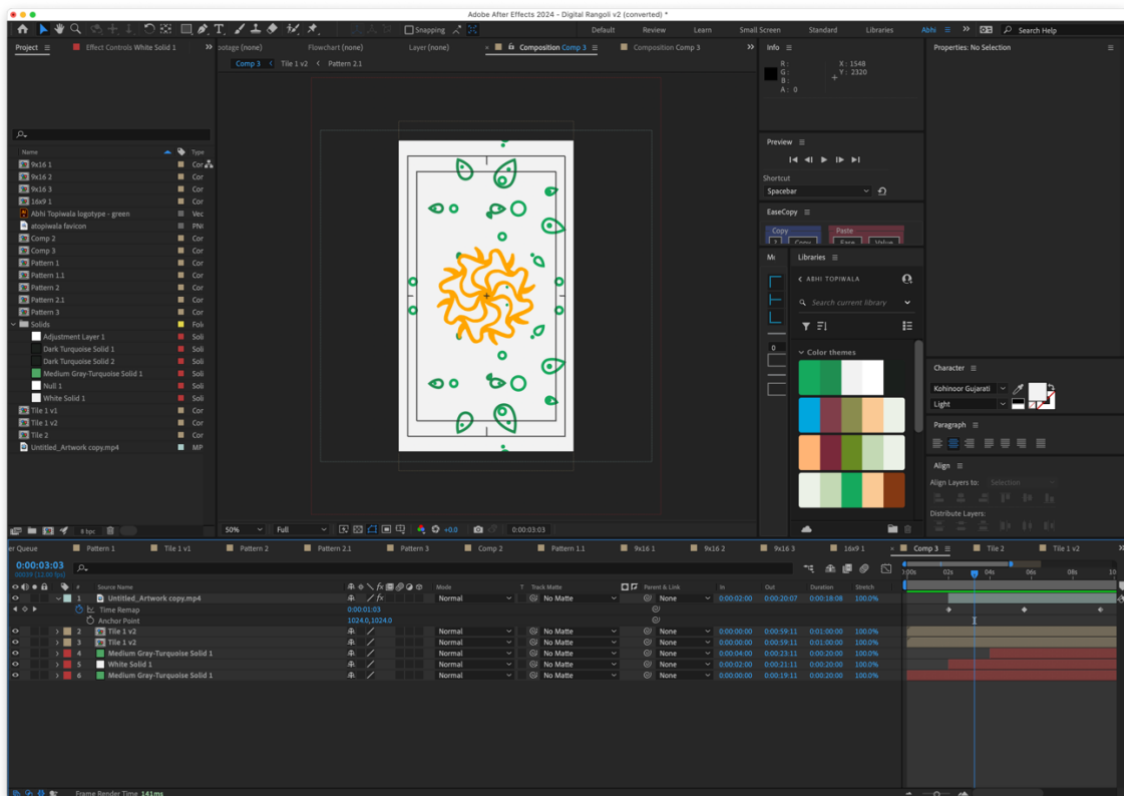


Figure 13. Topiwala, Abhi. Vector based exploration in Adobe After Effects.

Reflection

Through this work I have used autoethnography as a methodological framework to tease out creative ideas. Visual and somaesthetic branches of autoethnography can aid in locating one's self within and through culture. In this there is an opportunity to show how multiple cultures can collide to reveal a space/feeling where there wasn't prior to that moment of projection. I believe that digital-rangoli can make something seemingly so insignificant like a passageway or threshold, a transformative space to stand in.

By sharing personal moments of tension, I reveal how I have navigated through difficult points of my life. In responding with often creative and now experimental ways that seek capture motion of my day to day, I build a catalogue of movement that helps me understand intrinsic nature of rhythm and movement by looking at my own culture and with this, looking at Aotearoa. These can serve as reminders in my own life to navigate with care and consideration, to slow down where necessary or moving with haste if this is required.

What sticks and what falls to the side in this process of introspection? By reflecting on such significant moments within our personal lives, taking a closer view at the traces, clues, paper trails, we can unpack the why. In aiming to understand the why, we can uncover and discover nuanced opportunities for learning that might have otherwise gone unseen.

In the final days of this project, I crossed paths with someone I did not know, and they said to me that it is through my unique world view I was able to create this work. My mum might not have seen rangoli like I have imagined its digital extension. What can you see that others might miss?

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