

Samundar and Haldi

To grow in a place is to grow through it. To take one's place not only in but also of an environment, shaped by its qualities and weathers, and by the events of one's own time.

Quishile Charan's recent practice traces a line through both her own and her extended family's personal histories which have been shaped by political unrest and its enduring consequences, and by the diplomatic relations between two countries; Fiji and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Compelled to leave Fiji in 2001 by circumstances beyond their control, Charan and her mother emigrated to New Zealand when Charan was nine years old and her mother in the later stages of pregnancy with her younger sister. Leaving behind all that was familiar and formative; family, home, love, and a relationship to- and way of being situated within-a specific environment, they also left behind a fledgling textiles training initiative for rural women in Fiji, focused on developing the skills and economic independence of local women. Committed to traditional modes of making and to continuing a practice of working with locally available resources, what had been initiated with funding procured from the New Zealand government as a design and development programme, intended to further the competencies and economic viability of traditional craft practices, extended its reach to work with the homeless women and children of Suva.

Addressing her emerging practice in textiles as both a reparative investigation for the self, connecting with traditions of adornment and subsequently embodiment through an engagement with cultural materials, and also as a means of connection and continuation of her mother's project, Charan shares with us in this exhibition the early materials she has developed in conversation with her female relatives. Block carving, cutting, pigment making and printing techniques that have been passed at a distance via email and various instant messaging forums.

The textile works exhibited here at Objectspace rest in brief pause, before they are gifted back to members of her family living in Fiji, Australia and within New Zealand, to be made into clothing, wall hangings, curtains and other soft furnishing in her family's homes.

Present at the heart of this project is a making practice in development, one which seeks to call forth the feeling of a place, Viti, Fiji, through the relationship between substances, pigments, cloth and image. A collection of impressions and evocations, and a material investigation of environment and memory.

Elle Loui August

Humble tones of memory resonate within the work. There is a sense of peace within your making. Processes of cutting and removing in order to reveal the world that is circulating within the mind. Pigments made tangible, materials for the senses.

Haldi, the soil I walked on, the place of home. Viti is soaked, soaked with haldi, my body drenched in the sun. Haldi's smell is of the soil, the dirt of home, and when my hands are stained yellow the memories are attached. They live like a skin, a skin of protection. The textiles are the ground and the sun, the earth I once walked on and the sky that encircled me. Haldi, it dances on the textiles forming a barrier to the outside world. I am young again and home, tucked away in the yellow orange soil.

The disruption of culture, how must one deal with this destruction?

Viti is alive in me. I am cut from the soil of Viti, made from, and one with the fenua (land). Samundar (sea) flows and moves and Nana fenua (mother land) floats before my eyes in dizzy dreams, these memories are torturous and full of longing.

We speak and I listen imagine these situations occurring; laughter, light, sun, and coconut trees. You took me there and I listened, I felt the sea air on my tongue.

Aaji's fingers in my hair plaiting, fua in the kitchen smiling and laughing, dolly kaka singing in hindi to the cows in the fields. Hanging the cloths on wire and holding it up with pieces of wood, you can feel the water in the air, the rain clouds roll in and the rain falls, the heat pulses not moving. The water is a relief, your body is saltily from the ocean, sweat and rain.

Each exploration through your materials reflects a longing for home. The connections the materials make, and you Quishile as the bearer, who holds these precious experiences.

I am reminded of the Nadi mountains that loom above Viti, reaching high above in the horizon. They are the keepers and protectors of Viti.

Salome Tanuvasa & Quishile Charan



Viti I dreamed of you last night

I am at my house in Auckland
I get a phone call
It is Aaji and she is crying
Aaji says she needs me to come home to Nawaitcoba
The environment shapes and molds itself into an aircraft
I feel my body in limbo, I feel numb as Aaji cries on the phone
A sense of distress comes over me,
an urgency to follow Aaji's voice back to Nawaitcoba
The surroundings start dropping all around me
I'm no longer where I was
Suva appears
The city builds itself around me as people appear and start to talk
I haven't heard people speak Fijian since I was last home
yet this is all I hear

As I run she is there
Aaji is standing there in a pink saree
The same pink saree that I loved as a young girl
Aaji would bring it out and wrap it around herself
It is one of my fondest memories of Aaji
Her in that pink and gold saree, glowing
Glowing like haldi

Aaji is a vision
A vision of Devi
I cannot explain it
It is spoken in the air and it is all around us
Aaji stands before me glowing in that pink saree she glows as devi
the two are indistinguishable
they are the same
Aaji holds my hand and asks without speaking where have you been?
You have been gone for so long
I searched for you but could not find you
You have been so far away for too long
She pulls me into her
and wraps me up into her body
I feel safe
Aaji is crying
She starts singing and I close my eyes

I realise I'm not where I'm meant to be
I cannot see Nawaitcoba or Aaji
The phone has disappeared from my hand
I can still hear Aaji's voice in the distance
So I start running
Running in a direction that does not exist in this reality

I start dropping
Falling
I shut my eyes because I am scared

All of a sudden I'm back in the farm house
No one is home
I am alone
...
I feel someone breathing
I can hear them

When I open them I am wrapped in the pink and gold saree
I'm small
I am a baby again
Folded in Aaji's arms I hear her praying
The bell is dingling as she does her morning prayers
She looks down at me and smiles

This is the fourth night
The fourth night of this dream

Quishile Charan



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