

BITTERSWEET

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Extended digital program: 28 September – 1 November 2020

Curated by Western Sydney artist and emerging curator **Shivanjani Lal**

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Bittersweet is a survey of emerging and mid-career Fijian contemporary artists. It is a talanoa a way in which conversations or in this case artworks can be shared which lead to a collective understanding. These conversations are both bitter, and sweet. iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) and Indo-Fijian artists, have been invited to navigate histories, offerings, ideas of craft and acts of return — speaking to new and old ideas of Fiji and our lives in Diaspora.

The following artists have made work which speak to their current experiences as artists living in diaspora across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom: Manisha Anjali, Mohini Chandra, Quishile Charan, Yasbelle Kerkow, Shivanjani Lal, C.A Moses, Dulcie Stewart, Luisa Tora and Sangeeta Singh and Emele Ugavule have created works that speak to the relationship each has with Fiji and how their connection to the Island colours their art.

Manisha Anjali ushers audiences into the exhibition with a sound work, a ritual which is an aural offering for those entering to be mindful and is a signpost for spirits of family and ancestors to be comforted by the presence of kin.

Mohini Chandra's work explores what happens when you return home, after everyone has left. This three part video work asks the question: what do we hold onto when all that is left behind is memory?

Quishile Charan collaborates with the women in her family to learn craft techniques. In this work, they helped her source natural materials often used in food, but repurposed to create a textile which speaks to the love she has for them.

Yasbelle Kerkow uses fish skin tanning as a way to create the foundation of their set of unique state prints. These prints connect cultural practices learned from family and printmaking skills learned in Australia to explore

ideas of skin and mark making.

Shivanjani Lal's work is a series of instant prints; printed onto recycled brown paper sourced in Bombay. The images on the prints were taken during two recent visit to Fiji in 2019. The series is part of an ongoing archival project, with Lal taking 100 photographs on each return visit to Fiji to create a contemporary archive which accounts for familiar places such as her family farm (Yalava) as well as locations important to her family (Ba, Rakiraki and Korotogo). The number 100 is an arbitrary number, which enables her to take images and still have time to be with her family.

Returning for C.A Moses is difficult. Currently based in the UK, Fiji and its familiarity is found in his Barra Amma (Mothers sister) who lives in Kent, a woman who has spent over forty years living away from the Pacific. These photographs of her in her home speak to what we hold on to and remember as we move further away from the island in both time and distance.

The archive is everything to Dulcie Stewart. Through researching contemporary painted Fijian Street signage, Dulcie recreates the visual language of the Fijian markets stalls and shops, reminding of the special place these sites have for diaspora. The signage becomes a metaphor where imperfections become memories, the island signage cannot be replicated all we can do is approximate the village market. All we can do is remember.

Luisa Tora and Sangeeta Singh's collaborative work filmed in a suburban backyard in Auckland captures them molding clay. Through the video, we see the artists pushing and pulling to create a new landscape which speaks to their relationship as artists, friends and Fijians living in diaspora.

Emele Ugavale uses collage and storytelling to share a tale of her family. Her Father lived with her Dada (Uncle in Fijian Hindi) after her Dada's father passed away. As

a consequence her father's Fijian isn't great his Fijian Hindi is better. Language and story becomes a lens in which ideas of the past are both connected and distorted in the act of a story being shared.

These artworks speak to the relationships the artists have with their family and the environment, and interrogates ideals of how we hold on to values in diaspora, how we navigate distance, and how we remember where we come from through ritual, food and storytelling.

This exhibition is an outcome of two searches. The first search was my searching for artist-peers within the Pacific arts community. Beginning online and then slowly into the real world through coffee catch ups and food; these relationships built into friendships and peers which developed into the conversations that have led to this exhibition. In the development of this project I broadly researched Pacific projects within Western Sydney that focused specifically on Fijian experiences, including two projects that were produced by Casula Powerhouse: the 2009 anthology 'Shifting Location: Indo-Fijian Writing From Australia' edited and introduced by Subramani, and the 2007 exhibition 'Chutney Generation: An Australian-Fijian-Indian Cultural Extravaganza'. And most recently, I have spent time researching 'Marama Dina', a 2019 exhibition at Campbelltown Arts Centre of indigenous Fijian women who used tattooing as a way to speak to contemporary experiences of womanhood. Through this research, we see the legacy of our community within this landscape and an art history that ties us to Western Sydney just as much as our familial relationships connects us to Fiji. With *Bittersweet* I hope to share our knowledge with our community in Liverpool and inspire potential alongside future generations.

Written by Shivanjani Lal
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