

firstdraft

Gallery 2

2 December 2022 – 22 January 2023

I Cook A Lot Of All These Foods

Monica Rani Rudhar

I Cook A Lot Of All These Foods tells the story of the integration of the artist's mother to Indian culture upon marrying her Indian father in Australia. She recounts the rejection from her Romanian family after her marriage, and how she adopted a new way of living after feeling anchored in the safety of Indian cooking, tradition and being welcomed into a new family.

References to Monica's childhood reflect on the home as a key space where the complexities of cultural negotiations exist, especially within a multi-racial household. The work explores how these stories are memorialised and how the fragments of different histories and traditions cohabitate and are passed on.

Gallery 1

**Ngali Jugun Ganaree
(Of Our Country)**

Curated by Stephanie Beaupark

Gallery 3

A(Di)pology

Lucy Goosey Feminist Art Collective

Gallery 4

FUTURE NOSTALGIA

Charlotte Haywood

**firstdraft
gadigal land
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firstdraft.org.au**

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Monica Rani Rudhar is an artist working on Gadigal Land across video, performance and sculpture. Born to Indian and Romanian migrant parents, her work speaks to longing and loss as she navigates the cultural disconnection that stems from the complexities of her multi-racial ethnicity. Her work is delicately personal and takes the shape of a restorative autobiographical archive that seeks to record her own histories where these stories can exist permanently, unlike those that have been passed down orally from her family which remain fragmented. Her practice attempts to restore familial histories, traditions and rituals that have been dispersed by migration and draws on the labor required to move passed the barriers that stand in the way of reforging these connections.

Monica graduated from UNSW Art and Design (Honours) in 2021, and has exhibited at various spaces including Pompom Galerie, Verge Gallery, Pari and Tiles Lewisham. She recently performed at Carriageworks as part of Live Dreams: Distance, curated by Talia Smith and produced by Performance Space as part of Vivid Sydney 2022. She was also commissioned by Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre for a new work as part of 'Looking at Gold' curated by Luke Létourneau which opened in October 2022, and has been a finalist in the Blake Prize in 2021 and 2022.

The artist would like to thank Domnica Rudhar, Ashok Rudhar, Szymon Dorabialski, Kuba Dorabialski, Audrey Newton, Kit Bylett, and Lexie Wildman.

Artwork

For sales enquiries, please email
monica.rudhar@gmail.com

I Cook A Lot Of All These Foods, 2022
three-channel video, carpet, curtain, glazed
earthenware, furniture, shoe rack, oil, moth balls
15 minutes 38 seconds

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Monica Rani Rudhar

Home Food

Written by **Audrey Newton**

When we negotiate our identity and our home, how deeply do we consider their meanings? When one seeks refuge to build or rebuild a home after displacement and migration, it can create a gaping fault line in the new home, long after the physical, mental and emotional tolls of assimilation have taken place. It is a daunting venture for one non-English speaking cultural identity to neatly integrate into the fabric of Australian society. The venture is even greater to work through as a single unit with two contrasting cultural identities who share a common aim to feel settled and a part of something more opportunistic and safer.

Monica Rani Rudhar generously invites us to witness the multiracial negotiations which have taken place in her family home. As a child of a Romanian mother and an Indian father, Rudhar repeatedly breaks and unsettles home soil and resiliently uncovers the harvest and uses the harvest to nourish herself and those she holds dear. In *I Cook A Lot of All These Foods*, Monica opens the door to not only a rendered fragment of her home but allows her audience to witness generational and complex multiracial storytelling through the art of making food.

This story is told by Monica's mother in her Romanian accented English. It is a resilient accent that has not and will not adapt to Australian drawl. The insecurity in her English language ability is present in her need to over-explain and self-correct but it's unnecessary because this story is about belonging.

Monica's mother felt a sense of belonging in Australia when she met Monica's father, who is originally from India. Even though Romania and India are separated by 5,262 km of distance, love had drawn the pair together and from there they began to build a home. In this phase of their lives, Monica's mother found more acceptance from Monica's fathers' side of the family, than what she found in her own Romanian family or Australian culture. Through the openness and care of the matriarchs on Monica's father's side of the family, Monica's mother willingly began to learn about the richness of Indian culture through the significant act of making food. She actively became the domestic focus in the household and her father continued to keep teaching her Indian traditions and rituals. In embracing the culture that embraced her, Monica's mother turned the food-making traditions into traditions that are hers. You can hear it in how she speaks about the food, pronounces the ingredients in Hindi with the correct inflections and enunciations and you can see it through the confidence in her kneading the dough for the samosas.

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(cont.)

The confidence in Indian cooking has become so embodied by Monica's mother. This is because of her participation of oral traditions which take place in communal cooking and from the time Monica was young, her parents, brother and Monica partook in a yearly tradition of making a bulk of samosas for the year to serve to the guests who entered their home. The tradition is captured in the film showing the shared process of kneading the dough, lightly frying the samosa roti and then stuffing it with spiced potatoes and peas. A task they all shared and had taken part in which generated important conversations with one another. These delicious, deep-fried triangles of flavour and happiness were then served to family and visitors.

As Monica recreates this act of care and giving for *I Cook A Lot of All These Foods*, she is inviting her visitors to approach the space as one would if they were a guest in her home. She politely asks you to remove your shoes and take a seat in a rendering of the family lounge room and takes you through the intergenerational and multiracial stories she has been uncovering about her lineage. She makes you at home by getting you to feel the carpet at your feet and smell the deep-fried spices of cumin and ajwain, which blissfully heighten and complexly layer the flavour of the humble potato and pea stuffing. She lays her delicate slip-cast samosas on an Eastern European crochet table runner on the very same table surrounded by chairs from her family home where visitors would frequent. As you make yourself comfortable, you are welcomed to hear of her mother's journey out of Communist Romania to be embraced by her Indian father and his family. The opportunistic and safe Australia which became the home for them and their children.

As her mother narrates her own story of belonging, Monica guides you through how the stories of her parents' vulnerability and resilience have directly affected her today and how they directly inform her of her own personhood. Through her practice, Monica continually uncovers and extracts pieces of the past to make sense of the familiar and unfamiliar territories of two vastly different cultural identities and ultimately, herself. If we look at the samosa as a symbolic representation of the intergenerational and multiracial, the samosa that Monica makes brings three cultural points of the family axis into one rich and complex whole. Through her willful acceptance to uncomfortably uncover the unfamiliar complexities of her family's cultural heritage, Monica generously serves you the complexity of her story as neatly and as gracefully as she, her mother and father serve samosas.

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