

Artist Statement

In my artistic practice, I embrace the natural pull toward certain subjects, colors, and materials, allowing intuition to guide my exploration. I delve into the complex layers of my human experience, reflecting on cherished memories and the elusive ones that shape my identity. Through my work, I strive to understand myself and uncover the threads of experience and patterns that shape my identity as a second-generation immigrant. Having grown up as a Muslim in California, I take inspiration from mehndi (henna), Arabic calligraphy, and the natural forms around me. With these elements I feel closer to the culture that I often feel distant from. This distance comes especially from the language and physical barrier between myself and my family in Pakistan which is why I like to play with calligraphic forms without writing anything with meaning. I use these artistic inspirations to create elegant compositions within a variety of media.

Painting and drawing intertwine in my practice. I aim to articulate the anxieties and nostalgia that accompany change, ultimately seeking a sense of calm. My process begins with washes of watered-down acrylic or powdered graphite, laying a dynamic foundation that guides the evolution of each piece. As I step back and observe, I find imagery within the layers of charcoal, pencil, acrylic, and oil, allowing the work to transform organically.

Ceramics offer a different dimension to my art, rooted in traditional forms and functionality. I adorn these pieces with designs reminiscent of mehndi, the paste that once stained my palms during family and religious celebrations. By creating mehndi cones filled with slip and piping intricate patterns onto the surface, I aim to encapsulate the essence of those cherished moments that brought me closer to my family.

Through my art, I seek to bridge the gaps between memory and identity, inviting viewers to share in this exploration of self and heritage. In the future I hope to fuse my practices to generate new ideas within my work.

This exhibition, *Where Memory Persists – Space, Spirit, Self*, brings together the work of five South Asian women artists who explore the complex relationship between cultural expectations and personal identity. Through painting, ceramics, and mixed media, the exhibition delves into themes of family, memory, tradition, and the transformative power of cultural symbols, inviting viewers to reflect on how these forces shape women's lives across generations.

Central to the exhibition is the female body, which serves as both a literal and metaphorical site where cultural narratives of gender, family, and tradition are enacted and challenged. Several works confront idealized femininity, interrogating how these societal expectations affect the physical and psychological experiences of South Asian women. The exhibition also examines everyday rituals, such as the act of preparing chai or mothering, as acts of remembrance that ground women in their shared cultural heritage. These works highlight how memory and tradition are not just inherited but actively reshaped, creating a space for reflection on how women redefine their roles within a changing society.

The exhibition incorporates an exploration of architectural elements, drawing from Mughal and Rajputani styles to comment on themes of aging, both physically and societally. These references offer a metaphor for how spaces shape identities, questioning how both built environments and cultural expectations can provide a sense of belonging while also imposing limitations on women's autonomy. By prompting viewers to consider the physical and psychological spaces women inhabit, the exhibition underscores how memory and identity are intimately tied to the places we occupy.

My own artistic practice aligns deeply with these themes. As a second-generation immigrant, I reflect on the intersections of personal memory, cultural heritage, and identity through my work in painting, drawing, and ceramics. I use intuitive processes to explore organic forms found in nature, as well as the domestic objects that resonate with my cultural background. My paintings—built through layered washes of acrylic and graphite—evoke a sense of nostalgia and transformation, reflecting on how memories shape our identities over time. In ceramics, I draw from the tradition of mehndi, applying intricate patterns to the surface of functional objects as a way to honor the rituals that connect me to my family and culture.

The exhibition serves as an extension of my academic focus on gender, memory, and cultural identity. Through my studies in [Department Name], I have examined how art can challenge cultural narratives and provide a platform for reflecting on the complexities of South Asian womanhood. This exhibition provides an opportunity to apply my research in a curatorial context, synthesizing my academic interests with my artistic practice.

The Dean Undergraduate Development Award will provide essential funding for the exhibition, covering artist fees, production costs, and promotional efforts. This support will enable me to gain invaluable experience in curating, project management, and exhibition design, while also contributing to a broader cultural conversation on the resilience and transformation of South Asian women's identities.