

Mosman Art Gallery Education

Learning Resource | Years 7-12

Monica Rani Rudhar

Developed by Artist Educator Ella Condon

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This learning resource has been written for secondary students in years 7-12 and their teachers. Designed to support deeper engagement with Monica's video work *We Were Connected in a More Complicated Way Than Either Of Us Could Even Begin To Understand*, 2023 on display in the Cube at Mosman Art Gallery 2026. The learning resource unpacks key threads in the work using the artists voice as its premise. Inquiry questions evoking sensory responses and a practical activity inviting the creation of an alchemist potion to support deeper engagement with Monica's practice are included in the resource.

Biography

Monica is a contemporary artist based on Gadigal land, Sydney. Her artworks range from sculpture, video and performance and explore themes of longing and loss related to cultural identity. Born to Indian and Romanian migrant parents, her work traces intergenerational stories within her family to create space for imaginative possibilities.

Monica's practice seeks to restore familial histories, traditions, and rituals that have been dispersed by the migration and displacement of her ancestors. Born in Australia to Indian and Romanian migrant parents, Monica addresses the loss and longing she felt growing up without family nearby, and how this impacted her sense of cultural identity. She has reclaimed intergenerational stories within her family to create space for imaginative possibilities.



*Photograph of Monica Rani Rudhar,
Photograph: Thea Elder Photography*

Work of Art

Fragmented oral histories are the starting point of Monica's works of art. Through her auto-ethnographic approach, telling stories from her family interwoven with video and still images, Monica's video work is a poetic and considerate reflection on her own identity. She takes her audience on a journey, unpacking familial stories of how she came to be through storytelling and visual imagery.

"I recall my mother's stories about her beloved childhood cow, Monica, and though she denies naming me after her, I like to imagine a past where I existed as this cow and was able to comfort my mum through her difficult childhood. My father tells stories about the cravings my mother had for mangos while she was pregnant with me." – Monica.

Monica's video work *We Were Connected in a More Complicated Way Than Either Of Us Could Even Begin To Understand*, was created in response to an object within the Powerhouse Museum's collection; a specimen of yellow-coloured pigment puree, or Indian Yellow that was commonly used in the 19th century. It is a dye originating from India, made in the bladder of a cow fed only mango leaves and water. The video work was commissioned for the festival Holi the ancient Hindu festival of colours; a celebration of rebirth, togetherness, and the triumph of good over evil.



Monica Rani Rudhar, *We Were Connected in a More Complicated Way Than Either of Us Could Even Begin To Understand*, video still.
Courtesy and © the artist.



Monica Rani Rudhar, *We Were Connected in a More Complicated Way Than Either of Us Could Even Begin To Understand*, video stills. Courtesy and © the artist.

Video link: <https://www.monicaranirudhar.com/work/chotto-motto-dbbdd>

Inquiry Questions

Discuss the following questions:

- Take a moment to watch Monica's video work and view her still images. What do you notice? Offer a word each as an initial class brainstorm.
- Now imagine you could take a step into the world of Monica's video work. What do you imagine it would smell/ taste/ feel like to be immersed within this work of art?
- Describe the textures in the video stills above. How would you describe Monica's use of colour?
- Consider smell and its ability to evoke memories. Take a moment and think of a smell that reminds you of something special. It could be a particular food, clothing, the weather, a pet or something entirely different. Share as much or as little as you.

Practical response

1. Working individually, write a short poem in response to Monica's work of art. Reference one or more senses (smell/taste/touch/sight).
2. Share a favourite line from your poem to the class.
3. Next, in pairs discuss the senses you wrote about (eg the texture of smooth mango.) Have a conversation about why this sense stood out to you. Describe how it makes you feel.
4. In small groups, discuss how this poem could be transformed into a alchemist potion. You may like to discuss how to incorporate one element/ingredient each into the potion.
5. Write the steps involved to create this potion. Include a list of ingredients from everyday accessible items. Include a liquid, a plant or mineral ingredient. Some suggestions are below.
6. Create your alchemist potion.

Materials

- a kitchen grater/ sharpener, a jar or vessel to mix potion in, mixing tools.

Ingredients

- a plant, leaf, petal
- a mark making tool crushed up eg crayon/pencil shavings/oil pastel/ charcoal
- a liquid eg water/oil
- any other smells you wish

Extension

You may like to use this alchemist potion to make marks with on a variety of different surfaces and textures. Notice what it responds best to. Experiment with blending and density with your mark making tools. Consider using unlikely surfaces to paint onto including fabrics, plants, papers of different textures.

Reflection

- Do you have any familial stories that have been part of forming your own identity?
- What does the title of Monica's video work mean to you?
- Lastly, do you have any questions for the artist? If you would like to ask her anything, write a class email and send it to her. education@mosman.nsw.gov.au