

biennaleofsydney

Monica Rani Rudhar

The fire in me was lit long ago, 2026

three-channel video installation

Courtesy of the artist

Copyright © Monica Rani Rudhar

Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body

Education Resource (7-12)



The fire in me was lit long ago, 2026

Three-channel video installation, looped 8mins.

Installation view in Rememory:25th Biennale of Sydney at Lewers: Penrith Regional Gallery, 2026.

Courtesy of the artist and Ames Yavuz. Photography: Maja Baska



biennale of sydney



Monica Rani Rudhar. Photograph: Jacquie Manning.

Overview

A simple golden ring here carries the heavy weight of a revolution. In this three-channel video installation, Monica Rani Rudhar transforms a family heirloom into the Lion of Punjab, unlocking a secret history where the sugarcane fields of 1940s India were not just farms, but landscapes of defiance used to manufacture gunpowder bombs for independence.

This artwork refuses to tell a linear story; instead, it physically mirrors the fractured nature of memory. By splitting the imagery across multiple screens and bringing the scent of soil into the gallery space, Rani Rudhar immerses us in a past that feels broken yet potent. She weaves a complex thread between generations, linking her grandfather's colonial resistance to her father's endurance of racism in Australia, proving that strength is a quality that can be culturally inherited.

For Rani Rudhar, this is a masterclass in acting as a historian of the personal. It demonstrates how deep investigation into fragmented oral histories can be resolved into a sophisticated time-based experience. Rani Rudhar challenges us to look beyond the surface of our own family treasures to find the intentions, choices, and actions that shaped who we are today.



biennale of sydney



I Cook a Lot of All These Foods, 2022,
three Channel video 15:38 carpet, curtain, glazed earthenware, furniture, shoe rack, oil, moth balls
Installation view, Firstdraft, Sydney.
Photo by Anthony Hodgkinson



biennale of sydney

Discussion Questions

Monica Rani Rudhar's work is a three-channel video installation that delves into her own familial history to interrogate the legacies of resistance and endurance.

- How does Rani Rudhar use specific **imagery** to change the **meaning** of a landscape from a **symbol** of **oppression** to a symbol of **power**?
- Why do you **think** she chooses to focus on a small, **personal object** to **represent** a massive **historical** event like the fight for **independence**?
- How does she bridge the gap between **private** family history and **public** political history?

Rani Rudhar uses her art to ask what stories from familial experiences deserve to be remembered and shared.

- Why is it **important** for artists to **document** scary moments, such as **encounters** with racism or danger, rather than just happy memories?
- How does presenting the video on **three separate channels**, rather than one single screen, change the way the audience **experiences** the story?
- Does this **structure** suggest that **memory** is linear and reliable, or fragmented and broken?

Practical Activities

Activity 1

Locate a microscopic detail within an exhibition space (a singular brushstroke, a fastening, a texture) or select a small personal artifact from your pocket.

Create a drawing that monumentalises this object. It should touch all four edges of your paper, transforming it from something hand-held to something architectural. Focus your shading on communicating mass and density.

Use tonal variation to translate the physical qualities of the material (e.g., lustre, roughness, or weight) onto the paper.

Write a reflection on how this shift in scale alters the audience's relationship to the object. By making the small object huge, have you turned a personal memory into a public monument, a weapon, or a shield?



biennale of sydney

Activity 2

Format a double page in your diary with three equal rectangular frames to create a storyboard triptych. Select a specific artwork or a broader theme (e.g., ancestry, resistance) as the subject of your narrative.

Close your eyes for thirty seconds to observe the invisible qualities of the space before you begin your drawing, such as sounds, temperature, or smells. Fill the frames with three distinct sketches: a detailed close-up of a symbol, an abstract rendering of the atmosphere, and a wide shot of the context.

Use loose, rubbed, or textured shading for the atmosphere to capture the feeling or mood of the space. Annotate the space underneath each frame with a description of an imagined soundtrack, voiceover, or sound effect (e.g., whispering voices, crackling fire, or heavy silence).

Write a reflection on how separating these elements alters the story told by the artwork. By breaking the narrative into fragments of sight and sound, have you revealed a hidden memory, a lost history, or a secret?



Drop Earrings That Once Belonged To My Mother, 2022

Terracotta, glaze, lustre, chain, wire, 125 x 163 cm

Photo by Monica Rani Rudhar

