

An Alternative Perspective

By Shreya Singh

Through the use of photographs, we preserve memories of family and friends and connect with each other in the conversations that arise from these photographs. Being a child of first-generation immigrants, I heavily relied on photographs to understand my family's history. For immigrant children, most often photographs are our first and only interactions with people who share our blood and DNA. In my case, even though I have never met my grandparents other than my maternal grandmother, I still feel a connection to them through the photographs I have seen and the conversations that come from them. In this way, when we build our family histories, photographs become the artifacts and sources that we rely on to remember family occasions, traditions, and friends. I believe images can be used as a tool to give us insight into different periods of time and people's identities.

While barriers remain in regular conversations— cultural, geographical, or language – photography reminds us how we are connected to others in a visual manner. Being born and brought up in the UAE, my connection to my ancestors stems from my memories of family discussions. My aunt often describes a particular room in the multi-generational home she and my mother grew up in Lucknow, India. Large, elaborate portraits on the walls documented the men in our family. In this project, I am providing an alternative perspective into our family history representing the women in my family. I believe it is equally as important, if not more so, to emphasize their presence in our family history.

My process begins with the photographs of family members I have collected over the years. I use a combination of printmaking techniques to form the portraits of my grandmother, her daughters, her sisters, and her grandchildren. These portraits include motifs of things each individual liked and valued significantly, giving an insight into each person's personality and life.

These portraits are framed using wooden blocks with Indian patterns. I am using this as an opportunity to start building on our family tree and tracing back through other generations.

Finally, the last aspect of this installation includes three panels of cotton fabric that I hand-dyed with natural indigo and turmeric dyes using Indian dyeing techniques. I believe materiality also brings back memories and emotions through time and space. For example, the bright yellow turmeric dye reminded me of my mother's home-cooked Indian meals. In this way, I believe the potency of materials creates a strong bond between individuals and memories. I overlaid family photographs I had taken while I was growing up. I believe that materials can hold sentimental meaning and often have memories attached to them, whether they are photographs or colorful dyes. With all these elements together, this installation provides a different 'perspective' on my family's history.