

A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon

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A Thesis

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By

Rohini Gosain

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Masters' Examination Committee
Approved by:

Kelly Dobson, Department Head, Associate Professor
Department of Digital + Media, Primary Advisor

Naomi Fry, Lecturer
Department of Digital + Media, Secondary Advisor

Susan Doyle, Assistant Professor
Department of Illustration, Tertiary Advisor

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All that I have learned is from what I've been immersed in and has surrounded me. My parents and Rohan have been the layer closest to me and whom I have learned the most from. This thesis too is based off their teachings, my learnings and our collaborative experiences as a family; the love, the care and that the true meaning of life is in enjoying it now to the fullest. Thank you Ma, Pa and Rohan for always being there to support me through the best, the good and the bad.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Abstract

0/Off

Sci-Phi

String Theory/Contrast
Conservation of Energy/Circular
Brownian Motion/Curiosity
Parallel Universes/Chance

Before I Knew I was an Interventionist

'The Fire Within'
'Chameleons Have No Ears'
'You, Me and Rain'

I'm an Interventionist!

Construction of Situations/SI
Breaking the Space/Graffiti
Fantastical Worlds/Conceptual

Now That I Know

Viewer
Place
Window
Immersion

1/On

Experiment I

Window Seat
'To-Fro-To'

Experiment II

'Come and Go'

Experiment III

'A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon'

Observations & Inferences

Bibliography

Abstract

According to the string theory, the universe in its entirety is made up of small vibrating strands of energy. This has an ominous ring to it, like a complex math problem with a suspiciously simple answer. How could an entity that is supposed to be the definition of totality, the summation of an infinite number of heterogeneous bodies, be so homogeneous and stripped in nature?

Zooming out to get a better and bigger picture, the cosmos appears to be a symphony of light and dark, and as we accelerate closer towards, say, planet Earth in order to see ourselves beyond mere specks, the variegation increases even more: the changing colors of every sunset; the numerous species of animals, insects, birds, fish, microbes, trees and plants, many that we don't even know about; the changing seasons. And just as we start brimming with appreciation and amazement, down to the simplest entity even beyond atoms and molecules, the string theory tells us that everything, absolutely everything, is made of the same basic unit – tiny strands of energy. Just the way they dance on their tails (or maybe heads, who knows!) differs and is the sole cause for all the complex systems around us. This contrast between our perception of things and their actual composition is not easy to

notice, unless you're looking for it.

While growing up in the midst of a wonder-riddled world, curiosity intoxicates us with the urge to know more. Tons of questions baffle the mind as we try to figure out a pattern, a system and a reason that orders our richly diverse habitat and its constituents. With time, this curiosity dies down a bit, and we get absorbed and swept away in the prescribed, the known, the obvious, the ubiquitous. But what if we decided not to accept these standards? Would we notice a quiet disruption in our conditioned surroundings? Would an anxious rabbit in a waistcoat continuously checking his watch while hurrying away make us run after him?

Revolutionaries talk about the forcible overthrowing of the present order and the imposition of a new system. I would like to offer the potential seeker something else: a secret, fleeting revolution in the form of a quirky moment of freedom and play that blurs the notion of time and place for as long as the viewer is enraptured with it. The moment the viewer switches off his or her attention, the circuit is released and he or she returns back to his or her familiar environment.

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Sci-Phi

As children, the stories from ancient Indian epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata fascinated us the most, as they transcended the small mysteries that we unraveled in our daily explorations of the world around us. The epics tell stories of the Heavens, the Earth and the Underworld; of Gods taking on the human form and becoming a part of the cycle of life. A famous Indian saying goes “Jab jab hota naash dharm ka, aur paap badh jaata hai, tab lete avtaar Prabhu phir vishwa shanti paata hai,” which translates as “And when justice and righteousness get crushed and evil reigns on earth, that is when the Lord takes birth on Earth and restores peace.”

Childhood was a constant exploratory trek, discovering and absorbing a new experience at every corner: there was the imaginary world with tales of heroic Gods in the form of common people playing powerful kings, quick-witted ministers and fighting devious demons described in stories from the scriptures. And then there was the real world laden with new and exciting findings every day, sometimes in the form of the shiny wing of a dragonfly and at other times in discovering what objects a magnet attracted or repelled.

In the ‘unlearnedness’ and innocence that comes with childhood, the two worlds seemed to melt into each other, and I saw no separation between them that would make me doubt the existence or non-existence of one or the other. Looking back, the imaginary and real world had three characteristics, or pillars, upon which their magic was built: both stood out from the usual and mundane through some form of contrast; piqued the curiosity of the one who catches that contrast; and come across as a reward to the ecstatic explorer in the form of a chance find. Through my life these three aspects, or as I have coined them, the trinity of contrast, curiosity and chance, have consistently irrigated the fields of my thinking, yielding a different way of seeing and a fertile imagination.

String Theory/Contrast

The stories of Gods’ incarnations as common folks were fantastical and fed illusionistic imagery to the rhapsodic mind. The adults loved them too, because they always had a moral. One such story was that of the lord of creation, Vishnu, who took birth on Earth and was brought up in a cowherd’s family by the name of Krishna. He was a bundle of miracles and hailed as the answer to all evil. One day, his mother, Yasodara, received a complaint that Krishna had been eating

mud. On being questioned about this, Krishna openly refuted the blame and offered to show her his mouth to convince her. Krishna's mother was then astounded to find herself looking at the entire universe down her son's throat: the planets, stars, and cosmos twinkled back at her as they filled her with their immense warmth.

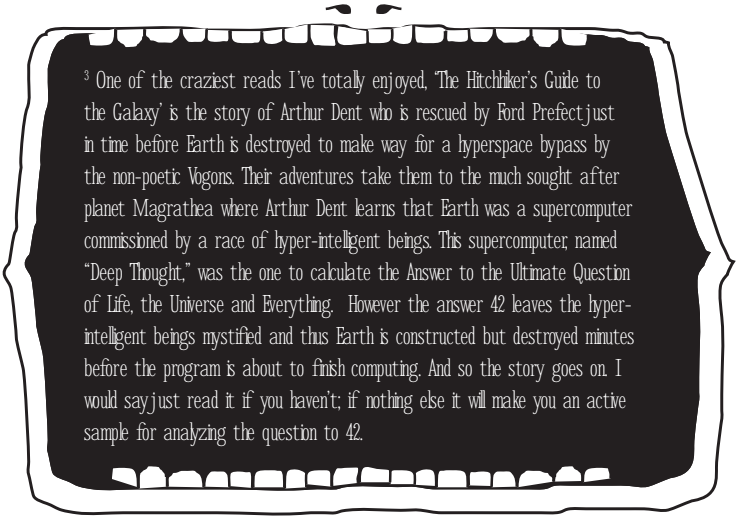
That one glance at the cosmos in its entirety in her son's tiny mouth must have been a moment of immense contrast for Yasodara. Had the world shrunk to an orange pip or had Krishna miraculously grown to celestial proportions? I, at least, had that question, and my grandmother convinced me that the view was so grand and overwhelming that Yasodara couldn't think of anything but the beauty of the view. It is only now that I think I know what she meant. Thanks to the random order of the internet, I often chance upon extremely interesting reads when looking for a very mundane topic; and it was while searching for something so plain that I fail to recollect it now, scrolling down the Google search's results, that a link with the phrase 'elegant universe' caught my eye. The finger pressed, the button clicked, and I found myself reading about the makeup and materiality of the cosmos. That day I learned that everything in

our universe and in the universes beyond it is made up of the tiniest strands of energy. In his book *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, popular physicist Brian Greene explains the underlying principle of the superstring theory: "According to superstring theory, every particle is composed of a tiny filament of energy, some hundred billion times smaller than a single atomic nucleus, which is shaped like a little string. And just as a violin string can vibrate in different patterns, each of which produces a different musical tone, the filaments of superstring theory can also vibrate in different patterns.... All species of particles are unified in superstring theory since each arises from a different vibrational pattern executed by the same underlying entity" (Greene 18).¹ Each of these strands are vibrating in a unique way, thus creating the dynamic world around us in different permutations and combinations. This is the string theory or superstring theory as Brian Greene refers to it. I read and reread it, and felt like the hyper-intelligent beings from Douglas Adams' *'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy'* (Adam).^{2, 3} While discovering what the string theory was all about, I also wondered when was the last time my neurons had absorbed a physics definition that fast. The simplicity and intensely homogeneous nature of the 'entire' universe was like my Yasodara moment,

staring into Krishna's mouth. Instead of disbelief and apprehension towards the plausibility of such a phenomenon, my mind was filled with a fascinating vision of my perception of the room I was sitting in. Tiny sparks dancing on their tails in the millions, forming Van Gogh's 'Starry Night' times infinity of splendor.

This homogeneity of the universe that various physicists are trying to understand and prove in terms of equations seems to put in question concepts of 'diversity', 'multiplicity', and 'contrast'. Brian Greene goes on to explain the exciting consequences of proving a theory that unifies all of the laws and theorem of physics: "If superstring theory is proven correct, we will be forced to accept that the reality we have known is but a delicate chiffon draped over a thick and richly textured cosmic fabric" (Greene 19).⁴ Therein lies the beauty and awe-inspiring nature of creation. The fact that an obvious-to-the-eye heterogeneous world has evolved from millions of permutations and combinations formed through the vibration of a string of energy is a luminous thought. It definitely made me see the things around me in a new way, especially the materiality of objects. In the process of understanding the homogeneity versus the

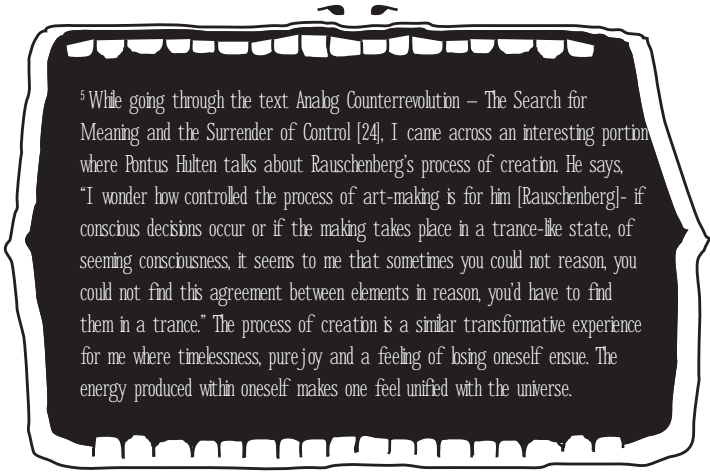
heterogeneity of our world I realized the existence of a contrasting situation between what we see and perceive and what is actually there. Thus entered the idea of 'contrast' and the realization as to how it had engaged and attracted my attention to things around me constantly, even before I understood the scientific explanation at its base.



³ One of the craziest reads I've totally enjoyed, 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' is the story of Arthur Dent who is rescued by Ford Prefect just in time before Earth is destroyed to make way for a hyperspace bypass by the non-poetic Vogons. Their adventures take them to the much sought after planet Magrathea where Arthur Dent learns that Earth was a supercomputer commissioned by a race of hyper-intelligent beings. This supercomputer, named "Deep Thought," was the one to calculate the Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe and Everything. However the answer 42 leaves the hyper-intelligent beings mystified and thus Earth is constructed but destroyed minutes before the program is about to finish computing. And so the story goes on. I would say just read it if you haven't; if nothing else it will make you an active sample for analyzing the question to 42.

Conservation of Energy/Circular

Having studied both Science and the Arts, reason and aesthetics have always found ways of creating a common ground in my head. Not only did the vision of an energized world satisfy my senses, but it also helped me understand and accept the transfer of energy concept that we had learned in school. Interestingly, the more I created, sketched, drew, sculpted and doodled in art school, I began to recognize a certain happiness that for me was associated with the process of creation as energy transfer.⁵

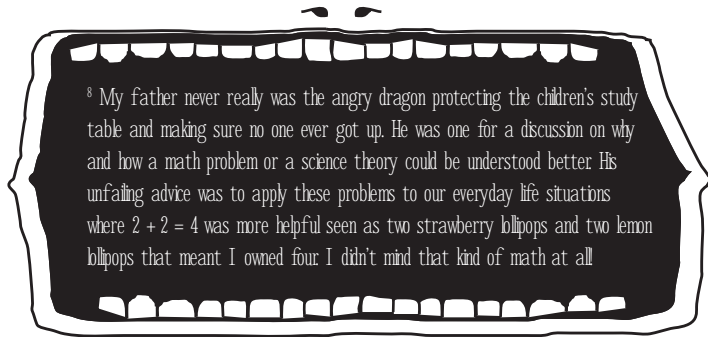


⁵ While going through the text *Analog Counterrevolution – The Search for Meaning and the Surrender of Control* [24], I came across an interesting portion where Pontus Hulten talks about Rauschenberg's process of creation. He says, "I wonder how controlled the process of art-making is for him [Rauschenberg]- if conscious decisions occur or if the making takes place in a trance-like state, of seeming consciousness, it seems to me that sometimes you could not reason, you could not find this agreement between elements in reason, you'd have to find them in a trance." The process of creation is a similar transformative experience for me where timelessness, pure joy and a feeling of losing oneself ensue. The energy produced within oneself makes one feel unified with the universe.

In the scientific world, the law of Conservation of Energy states that, "Energy can neither be created nor destroyed. It can only change from one form to another."⁶ It also states, "In any process in an isolated system, the total energy remains the same."⁷ At times, and with the human brain, being the wonderful Pandora's box that it is, the theories and principles of Science that I learned during my school years jump back into my daily life.⁸

Over the years, applying the reasoning of how our world works to what we observe and explore as artists/designers has been an interesting path to follow. Applying the law of Conservation of Energy to the world of art, I see the artist absorbing energy from the world around him/her in the form of inspiration, nooks for the wandering mind, and disruptions that affect his/her sensibilities both positively and negatively. He/she then transforms that energy through the process of creation into an artwork. The art piece – when offered to the viewer in a gallery setting, public park, office environment, museum, or even someone's home – transfers that energy the artist captured through the piece, and through his or her reactions to it. The viewer, in turn, completes the cycle by sending vibrations in the form of emotions back into the world

around us, from where they were originally captured.



⁸ My father never really was the angry dragon protecting the children's study table and making sure no one ever got up. He was one for a discussion on why and how a math problem or a science theory could be understood better. His unfailing advice was to apply these problems to our everyday life situations where $2 + 2 = 4$ was more helpful seen as two strawberry lollipops and two lemon lollipops that meant I owned four. I didn't mind that kind of math at all.


Brownian Motion/Curiosity

This idea, once thrown on the turntable and left to twirl inside my head, seemed to possess magnetic qualities. Like Alice's fall down the rabbit hole, old memories and associations, as well as many questions began to cluster around the idea of 'flow of energy'.⁹ Questions are good. They mean the mind is not taking what it sees for granted and actually reasoning. Discovery, innovation, breakthroughs – all have a single crucial basis – curiosity. Being a curious cat myself, and realizing how rewarding it is through my mind-wanderings-to-art pieces, I figured "curiosity" was another strong contender for the 'trinity'. Being

the artist and possessing the freedom to present my work as I deem appropriate, I started with the idea of making work for the curious viewer. After all, that's how I discovered the synthesis of art and science as a starting point as well as a key component of much of my work. This synthesis is more than method for me: it is a way of thinking that I have been steadily developing since childhood.

One lazy afternoon, as my mind sauntered far from the complex addition problems I was supposed to be battling, a heavenly beam caught my attention, not far from my bed. The stream of light lured me from my entrapment and I stood in wonder next to it, spellbound, watching these miniscule particles dancing in the light. You couldn't catch them, but could chase them around in curious endless games. The curiosity that event conjured in me was like an affirmation: secret worlds existed around us, and walking into them will almost always be rewarding. A few years later, a physics class explained the phenomenon as 'Brownian Motion,' in which millions of particles surround us in a continuous state of suspension. These particles possess a random motion and thus bang into each other now and then. This interaction creates a transfer of energy from one to the other that keeps them going.

Each one's influence on the other is the basis of this universal system. I wonder if I finished my homework that day.



Alice could be mentioned a lot during our conversations as she is one of my most inspirational figures, one that has always reinforced the adventurousness in my head and given it a stamp of approval by her very existence. If she had closed her eyes shut as she fell down the rabbit hole and not dared to pick things off the shelves, she would never have had all of those questions: "Do cats eat bats?", "Do bats eat cats?". I sometimes get the feeling that all the wandering in my head might exist because Alice made it so legitimate.

Parallel Universes/Chance

Greene once again challenges our perception of reality and presents his own view: "Instead of the three spatial dimensions and one time dimension of common experience, superstring theory requires nine spatial dimensions and one time dimension....As we don't see these extra dimensions, superstring theory is telling us that we've so far glimpsed but a meager slice of reality." (Greene 18).¹⁰

The concept of one system affecting the functioning of another, interestingly, extends into how our lives function as well. Each action/choice/decision that we make – from determining whether to have breakfast to which course to take in the Spring semester, to which city to live in – changes the course of our lives, since the next step is dependent on it. The point that really caught my attention in all of this was how differently things could turn out based on every moment of our existence. While reading more about the superstring theory, I came across Brian Greene's concept of extra dimensions in the universe, some of which are so 'tightly crumpled' that it renders them either too small to be viewed by our current equipment, or too large due to our approach to exploring the universe. Ideas associated with it include "the room provided by large



extra space dimensions might allow for something even more remarkable: other nearby worlds – not nearby in ordinary space, but nearby in the extra dimensions – of which we’ve been so far completely unaware” (Greene 18).¹¹

Greene’s words pointed in the direction of ‘chance’ with the existence of other worlds and the potential of bumping into them, which turned out to be the perfect third pillar for team ‘trinity’! I then came across a fascinating article by the physicist David Deutsch, on the idea of “visible” and “invisible” moments. “Reality does not end with what we see or perceive, and the “rest”, this “invisible”, constitutes an undefined territory where an infinite number of worlds are organized in the same way the visible world is” (Deutsch).¹² This is the basis of the idea behind the concept of the butterfly effect that is interestingly explained as, the simple flapping or not flapping of the wings of a butterfly could lead to the creation or absence of a hurricane in a completely different part of the world. This perfectly defines what I want to express to the viewer who stumbles upon my work; a viewer who might write in his diary that night: “Today I chanced upon a curious contrast.”

Before I Knew I Was An Interventionist

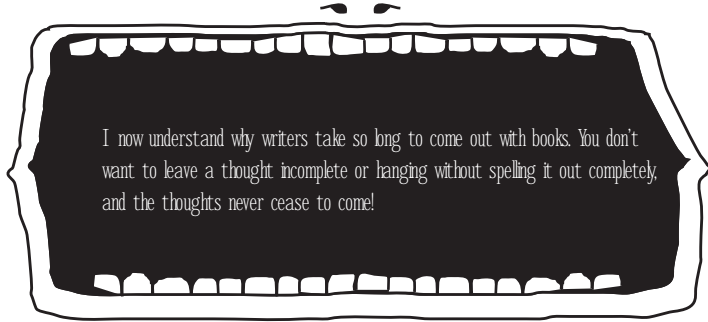
As our numbers steadily increase on the planet, it is an interesting and distressing paradox that we are closing into ourselves more and more. Each one of us is reducing and barricading the space around himself so that he doesn't stretch into the closest person. However, by eliminating the other, a person is left solitary. That's no fun. We're missing out on the one thing that transcends space, time, place and language. It's the warmth of human relations. This is my language and story: creating spaces that bring people together and make them chance upon a journey with friends and strangers and experience the effect of the other(s) on them.

As is the case with a lot of people from the creative field, be it writers, artists or musicians, the characters, stories and scores that they create come from some aspect of their lives, whether it is a miniscule moment or an entire memory.¹³ My inspiration for creating work comes from instances that touched my heart and mind in some way, at some point. At times these are as random as getting drenched in a joyous downpour

on a hot and dry summer afternoon, dancing like crazy with my best friend, or, contrarily, experiencing a quiet moment in my aunt's backyard and suddenly noticing a grouping of fireflies. These moments actually acted as igniters to artworks I ended up creating.

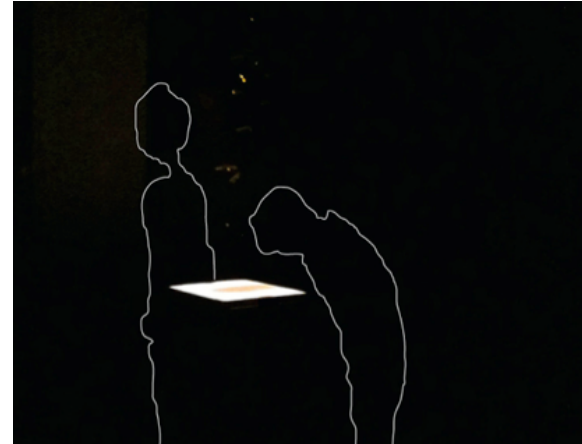
The sunny skies of India are perfect breeding grounds for little earthlings. As kids, it was always good to go out and thus many an afternoon was spent exploring and discovering 'new lands' and weaving new stories that superseded any theatrical setting. A discovery, though, is only enjoyable when shareable and even more importantly created in conjunction with another enthusiastic mind. My brother and I had the best of times creating our own worlds of mysterious space travel, rich kingdoms, and sometimes even domestic eccentricities. The trust, happiness, warmth and bonds that formed through this group play are my most precious treasures and possessions in life. Playing with friends is one of the greatest teachers: we learn to survive the cold distance of some mates, being poked fun at for our well-combed hair, being divested of our own toys and also making the best of friends with those who fight for us with someone double their size, meeting the ones you sacrifice your chocolate cream cookies for, and cooking up plans to sample the

craziest things to do list with. The works I create are essences of these cherished moments from my life.



'The Fire Within'

'The Fire Within' was literally ignited by my fascination with fireflies. The first time I saw these creatures, I witnessed the personification of magic. I had only read about them previously, and as such they were as unimportant to me as any other bug crawling in the garden outside. However, that one evening I actually chanced upon them around dusk, and it was a view that I will never forget. In the fading light, the transient dimming and glowing of a host of fireflies seemed to decorate my aunt's little garden, turning it into a mysterious forest where fairies were now playing hide



▲ Rohini Gosain, *The Fire Within*, 2010, Interactive installation



▲ Rohini Gosain, *The Fire Within*, 2010, Interactive installation



▲ Rohini Gosain, *The Fire Within*, 2010, Interactive installation



▲ Rohini Gosain, *The Fire Within*, 2010, Interactive installation

and seek. They quietly glinted around, moving so slowly and gracefully that one was scared to get in their way. At the same time, one wanted to catch hold of them and their magic, to keep forever.

Years later, when a sudden gust of moist wind brought with it the memory of that precious evening, I started wondering about my relationship with that moment. Pondering it made me think of how similar that experience was to our constant attempts at trying to contain thoughts and memories that exist in our minds. Ironically, the more we want to catch hold of and anchor them, the more evasive they become. Thus the essence of 'The Fire Within' was conceived.

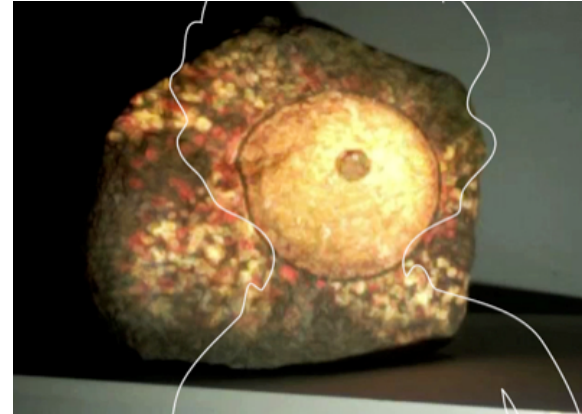
In the piece, an internally lit pedestal presents the shadow of a glass jar on the translucent cover at its top. Above the pedestal a group of "fireflies" seem to be suspended in the form of pulsating yellow LEDs, each supporting a thin strip of paper with a memory of mine written on it. On getting closer to the pedestal to view the memories, the fireflies closest to the viewer start buzzing and thus make the reading difficult. The shadows of the fireflies fall on the jar below and it seems like they are contained in the jar. However, the jar is not actually there and neither are the fireflies

caught in it, just as the more we try to keep memories close to us and locked in our heads, the faster they slip out of our hands. Thus, the frustration in the inability to read the thoughts written on the strips reflects the kind of frustration we experience in trying to keep a grasp on our thoughts and memories.

‘Chameleons Have No Ears’

‘Chameleons Have No Ears’ is an extremely quiet piece, representing one of the many moments, small nuances and experiences that we at times overlook due to their minute and silent nature. What looks like the head of a creature that is steadily being built up with more and more color added to it, on closer inspection reveals a rock with a projection on it. As the drawing being projected evolves programmatically, the head of a chameleon seems suddenly to be looking at you, its gaze locked onto yours, following you wherever you go.

Just the rock on its own has no movement, no animated gesture and no meaning. Once overlaid on the rock however, the projected surface of the chameleon suddenly infuses it with life, meaning and pulsation. The chameleon is a creature that has no ears but can sense things around it through vibration, touch, chemical



▲ Rohini Gosain, *Chameleons Have No Ears*, 2009, Interactive installation



▲ Rohini Gosain, *Chameleons Have No Ears*, 2009, Interactive installation



▲ Rohini Gosain, *You, Me and Rain*, 2010, Interactive installation



▲ Rohini Gosain, *You, Me and Rain*, 2010, Interactive installation

receptors, light receptors and vision. The chameleon's eye in the generated drawing is programmed to follow any object/being in its field of vision. Thus, the creature now seems living, conscious of your presence and reacting to you. The chameleon's eye can individually move three hundred and sixty degrees and thus the creature's gaze never leaves you as long as you maintain the link with it.

'You, Me and Rain'

The joy of running out to play in the rain is one of my fondest memories. Rain to me feels like the epitome of any multi-sensorial experience that nature has created. I'm not sure if this is how anyone else feels, but the quaint and unique fragrance of wet mud deserves an adjective of its own in the OED! A quick sniff spreads a distinctive sensation through my entire self, feeling like rebirth. It has the essence and association of growth and new life to it that make it one of my closest experiences with nature. What's more, the sound of raindrops on a tin roof or the treetops, leaving them shiny and gleaming, is a one of a kind phenomenon that affects one's disposition in strange ways.¹⁴ This metaphysical phenomenon of revitalization and rebirth gives way to an unusual happiness inside that bubbles

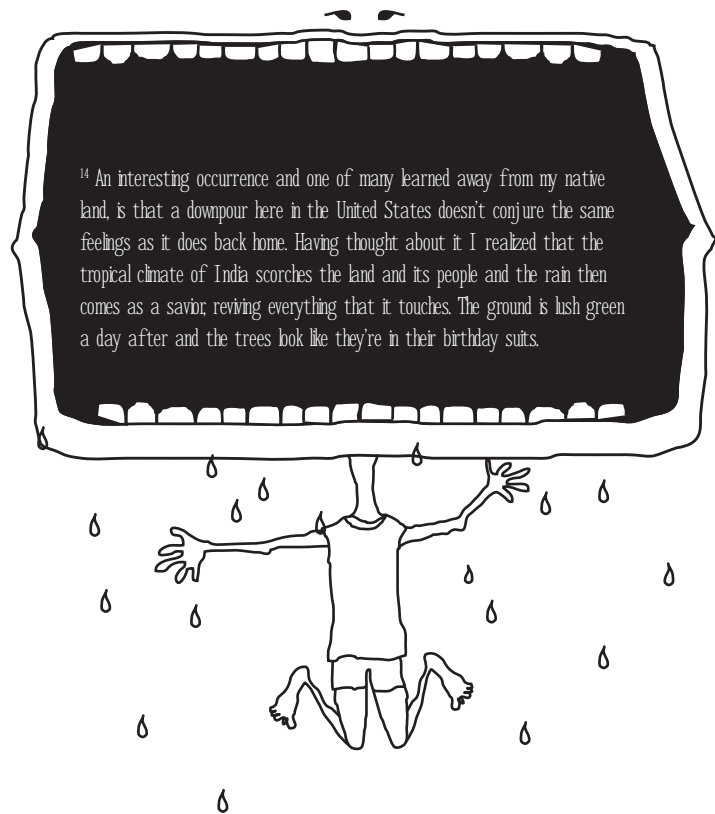
into ecstasy.

Humans are social beings by nature. No matter how much of an introvert a person is, somewhere, deep down, one always wants to share one's happiness and best moments with another. It could be a friend, relative, parent, child, stranger. It could be anyone, but if you have something that makes you happy, you generally want, almost involuntarily, to spread the warmth of that feeling. Using the essence of that experience, 'You, Me and Rain' rewards the coming together of two or more friends or strangers in the form of a "downpour."

The setup is that of an empty space (in a gallery setting, it would be an empty white wall). The viewer used to walking past, say, a building, without noticing the new knob installed on its front door would probably walk past it. However, the curious might approach the wall, and a slight blurry spot then appears on it a little above the eye level of the average person. As the viewer comes closer to the wall, the blurry spot keeps growing and slowly takes the form of a pulsating cloud, with darkening shades of grey. Each viewer that approaches the wall creates his or her own cloud. With a group of more than three people and

thus enough clouds, a clap of thunder and a steady rain on the viewers' shadows encourages the viewers to interact with the visual and enjoy the auditory experience. The ecstatic viewer becomes a part of the piece. The moment any one participant leaves, the rain ceases and clouds are left pulsating, waiting for another grand finale. Once everyone's left, the wall returns to its white state, waiting to be rediscovered.

The thread that binds all of these pieces to each other is the idea of coming together. In the case of "The Fire Within", people are given access to a tiny waft of a memory that strongly draws a connection between who I am, the people who make me and the world I belong to. The idea is for the viewers to find their own connection to that experience, whether little or big. "Chameleons Have No Ears" makes us aware of the world of animate and inanimate objects, and the idea of inanimate objects possessing hidden or not so apparent 'lives' that we can in a way partake in. Finally, "You, Me and Rain" talks about sharing the simple joy of dancing in the rain, making it more special by dancing with others. The engagement with another entity, be it a person, program, rock or wall, brings with it varied experiences, with interaction lying at the heart of each.



¹⁴ An interesting occurrence and one of many learned away from my native land, is that a downpour here in the United States doesn't conjure the same feelings as it does back home. Having thought about it I realized that the tropical climate of India scorches the land and its people and the rain then comes as a savior, reviving everything that it touches. The ground is lush green a day after and the trees look like they're in their birthday suits.

I'm an Interventionist!

The world around us is a complex network of systems; some of our creation and others natural, evolving since ancient times. We rely on these systems to keep our lives in balance and order. Day in and day out, we can keep following the norms, almost blindly, at peace with their workability. Until one day, someone suddenly asks herself the question 'Why'?

An investigation/retrospection into the matter leads to alarming findings. Born as free souls, we slowly lend ourselves to constructed systems in order to make sense of our place/position with respect to the millions of others around us. However, in the hurry to fit in, we tend to overlook the reasons for answering to those rules. Why do we have to follow the clock and the time it gives? Why can't the concept of night and day be reversed? What would happen if I never got a formal education? What if I learned by seeing? Questioning the norm, that was the gist of what I have been doing as explorations in my work and what this thesis lends to. Having suddenly realized the trail I was on, I wondered how many people had trod that path before. Had there been maps drawn up, clues left

for those who came searching the same, manifestoes of groups who wanted change? Pretty revolutionary, I thought to myself. Revolution? Revolution! That was where I could start! Artists are continuously expressing their thoughts and ideas and thus making impressions on people's minds. During one of my initial conversations regarding this fresh spark with Kelly Dobson, an extremely interesting artist, person and our department head, we shared some great insights.

Not only did Kelly generate an equal amount of enthusiasm to mine, but she also pointed me towards some very exciting and interesting art movements, artists and ideologies that I wasn't familiar with. The Situationist International was one such find.

Construction of Situations/Situationist International

A group of international revolutionaries, the Situationist International (SI) was at its peak between the 1950s and 70s. In Simon Ford's *The Situationist International: A User's Guide*, a quote from the SI Anthology enumerates, "...revolution is not "showing" life to people, but making them live. A revolutionary organization must always remember that its objective is not getting its adherents to listen to

convincing talks by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves, in order to achieve, or at least strive toward, an equal degree of participation" (Ford 11).¹⁵ The Situationists canvassed for and were mainly about 'setting up environments favorable for the fulfillment of primitive human desires' (Ford 11).¹⁶ This was proposed through the 'construction of situations' (Ford 11).¹⁷

The SI utilized the literary medium to a great extent to spread their ideals. The *Internationale Situationniste* was one such journal that contained analysis of strategies for current and future revolutions. A quotation from the first issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* states, "We must thus envisage a sort of Situationist-oriented psychoanalysis in which, in contrast to the goals pursued by the various currents stemming from Freudianism, each of the participants in this adventure would discover desires for specific ambiances in order to fulfill them. Each person must seek what he loves, what attracts him. [...] Through this method one can tabulate elements out of which situations can be constructed, along with projects to dynamize these elements" (Knabb).¹⁸

Guy Debord and Asger Jorn formed the pivot points

of the SI collaboration. In Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, he talks about the degradation of social life to the extent where the concept of being has been taken over by the commodity. It is in this context of inverted relationships that he discusses the capitalist spectacle, an all-encompassing way of life in which the relations between commodities has taken over the relation between people. He clarifies:

"The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord).¹⁹ Debord proposes to "wake up the spectator who has been drugged by spectacular images, through radical action in the form of the construction of situations, situations that bring a reordering of life, politics and art" (Debord).²⁰

It is through this line of thought that the concepts of psychogeography, derive, detournement and unitary urbanism were introduced by the SI. In one of their many texts the SI describe these concepts as, "Psychogeography. The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Ford 34).²¹

"The chief means of psychogeographical investigation was the derive, which consisted of drifting and deliberately trying to lose oneself in the city" (Ford

34).²² Ford goes on to explain, “in a derive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there....From the derive point of view cities have a psychological relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones” (Ford 34).²³

Breaking the Space / Graffiti

We are often quick to write-off the graffiti artist as a vandal, one who does not respect public/private property and is thus worthy of punishment. However, if we stop and think about it, beyond the set rules of what is right and wrong, and step into the mind behind the drawing, we might interpret his actions as 'expression'. Why is the graffiti artist painting on public canvas? What is he trying to say through the visual/text? Whom is he trying to reach out to? Why did he choose that particular place to express his thoughts? I strongly believe that there is a reason behind everything that occurs; especially when it's behavior that's unusual. It is easier to predict functioning in terms of known standards. What interests me more is



▲ Banksy, *Balloon Girl*, 2004, Screenprint



▲ Banksy, *I Heart NY*, 2010, Screenprint, on Cedar St, New York City



▲ Robin Rhode, *Untitled*, Harvest 2005, Digital animation

unraveling and trying to understand functions away from the norm.

I came across Banksy's work in my days as a Graphic Design graduate student. In yet another of my browsing-the-internet moments, I encountered this graffiti artist's work who had taken the street art world by storm with his thought provoking and simply yet beautifully styled stencil art works all over London. The mysterious artist has literally painted many a town red over the years and created what are in my mind some of the most brilliant and stimulating art works ever made.

Banksy's work appeals greatly to me for its 'quiet' presence. The characters stand muted in their carefully chosen place and yet seem to scream out to the pedestrian. Banksy's play with the space makes you laugh, but also seems to be laughing back at you. The dark humor jolts the pedestrian out of his mundane zombie dream space to look up and take notice of atrocities happening around him.

Robin Rhode is a South African street artist who works primarily with charcoal, chalk and paint and creates what he calls 'performative drawings'. Common to

both Banksy's and Rhode's work is their breaking of space, something that I found was one of the aspects of my work as well. Rhode's in his biography *Who Saw Who*, talks about how he works with space: "The work is always against the wall. But with the performance and theater, there is the wall. And the wall collapses. It's like my Munich piece. I sculpted the shoes in chalk and a dancer put on the shoes and moved, making a drawing across the floor. People asked me, "Why aren't you using the wall?" But the wall had collapsed – he was drawing on that surface" (Rhode).²⁴

Both Banksy and Rhode are revolutionaries in their own way, creating spaces of escape within the existing world and providing them as check points to the masses, hoping to strike a chord with some. Rhode reminds us that "another reality, constructed by drawing and mark-making, can live within a marginally existing world" (Rhode).²⁵

Fantastical worlds / Conceptual

Another South African artist who has been creating beautiful animations in his own unique draw-erase-and-redraw style is William Kentridge. In an episode of *Art 21*, a documentary series about contemporary visual art and artists, Kentridge suggests that in the



▲ William Kentridge, *Drawing from Stereoscope*, 1998–99, Charcoal, pastel, and colored pencil on paper, 47 1/4 x 63" (120 x 160 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York



▲ William Kentridge, *I Am Not Me The Horse Is Not Mine*, 2008, Performance Still



▲ Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, *The Marks We Make*, 2003, photogravure

world of his work, “the impossible is what happens all the time” (Kentridge).²⁶ An animator, sculptor, filmmaker, and performance artist, he brings to life political events in his duotone charcoal animations and opera performances through vivid translations. Kentridge works sans a storyboard and thus says that ‘The film is me’. Working with stereoscopic images as well, he reverses the process where “the distortion is the correction and the correction is distortion” (Kentridge).²⁷

His bold strokes and contrast-rich medium of charcoal join together a strong visual narrative that matches the intensity of the story being unraveled. I was inspired to try out the medium of charcoal after viewing a lot of Kentridge’s work and thoroughly enjoyed studying and exploring the language of that medium. I believe that each medium has its own language and character. Some are more friendly, some resist being controlled. It’s like how one of my friends described getting to know strangers; you need to find that soft spot and through that the way into their heart. Charcoal has a gorgeous range of contrast, dark versus light, hard versus soft, intense versus subtle effects - all in one black stick. Learning to befriend and make it speak one’s thoughts was a great experience.

The introduction to the work of the conceptual artist duo of Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison is something that I am really grateful to my thesis advisor Susan Doyle for. The ParkeHarrisons work together to create meticulously constructed sets that they use as backgrounds, along with photomontage and painting techniques, to create fantastical worlds. The works are based on the theme of the 'Everyman' dressed in a black suit and white shirt, attempting to fix/save our polluted planet Earth. The results are beautiful, charismatic and fantastical renditions of curious worlds/situations that do not exist anywhere but in our minds. Their successful capturing of these whimsical and precious moments that somehow look fragile enough to be broken just by breathing in their vicinity, are literally breathtaking.

All the artists and their works that I discuss above have a few things in common that I realized only after having committed my thoughts to words and discussed them with my very insightful thesis advisor Naomi Fry. The most striking feature is the imaginary world that these magicians effortlessly create and present to us to immerse ourselves in; it is my favorite place. They are reminiscent of the drop down the rabbit hole, where Alice keeps finding the strangest things on shelves



▲ Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, *The Guardian*, 2003, photogravure



▲ Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison, *Tethering the Sky*, 2004, photogravure

along the sides of the hole, asks herself questions about her existing knowledge of Geography and Math and seems to blur what is and what could be what is. The second interesting phenomena that Naomi brought to my notice was that all these works were based on some kind of political agenda and were responses/reactions/questions/discussions/critiques on issues that concerned us as a society and people and the world we live in. I, too, through my secret quiet revolution, am offering to the seeker a momentary escape and redemption from the chaos and false order stricken world we are immersed in. That is my agenda. We are all out to say something, make a difference, intervene or even just jolt our comrades from mere spectatorship to an active, thinking participation.

I do not know if a utopian world exists or not, I do not intend to set out to seek it, not just yet. But what if I could intervene in the usual everyday to create a momentary disruption? A small door through which a secret garden could be viewed, if one could only find the door?

Now That I Know

Having all these revolutionary thoughts running through my mind, and simultaneously twirling the ideas of silent disruptions and momentary escapes into fantastical dimensions in my head, I felt the urge to create this imaginary world. A retrospective look at the works I had created before this moment (and discussed previously above), brought together a kind of inventory of notions that I had subconsciously been playing with. This became the skeleton of the boat for my onward journey.

Viewer

The binary character of connections is simple yet powerful. They are either complete or not, on or off. And within this system, they control the functioning of entire networks from a micro to a macro level. When a connection breaks, entire industries come to a standstill. And when complete, these same industries could move mountains.

Reflecting back on the work I had created thus far, I recognized a method within it that was reminiscent of the circuit. Before it was viewed, the work barely existed in its environment. Alone, solitary and blank,

the pieces always mimicked void spaces that anyone could overlook. However, there was always a tiny portal element to lead one into the work. The piece came to life with the introduction of the viewer into it. I am often reminded of the moment in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, the pleasure the tiny Mary Lennox has when she happens to stumble onto the 'secret garden' with only a red robin as witness. Thus, the viewer became not just a spectator but also a participant.

The viewer as a switch to a work is one of the areas I am exploring through this thesis. In a way, it is reminiscent of a symbiotic relationship, where the piece gains life from the curious person who enters to discover and unravel it while the viewer is transported metaphysically through the experience s/he is immersed in. For example, 'You, Me and Rain' starts out as an empty white wall with the slightest pulsation of grey dots on it. If you catch that and move closer to figure out what it is, you are rewarded with every step in that the cloud grows bigger and bigger the closer you get to it. Once close enough and with more than three people creating happy clouds, the viewer is further rewarded with thunder and a virtual downpour. Now I realize that conceptually, the notion of the

circuit is crucial here: As the viewer leaves, s/he breaks the circuit, the clouds recede and the wall once again returns to its potential state of blankness.

The concept of the circuit also returns us to our previous discussion of the flow of energy between the artist, the artwork, the viewer and the environment. There is a constant flow of energy in the creative process of the making of art, beginning with the inspiration that the artist derives from his environment, leading to the form of the piece that s/he makes, which then evokes a reaction in the viewer, causing emotional vibrations to accumulate around the space the piece occupies, and changing the temperament of that environment. This flow too is maintained through a delicate balance between the artist, art and its audience. In the case of my work especially, the general rule reads: no viewer, no flow.

Place

As an artist, I want the work I create to not only come to life, but communicate with the viewer as well. In a media-frenzied world like ours, flashing lights, humungous billboards, and loud advertisements compete for the viewer's awareness so incessantly that our attention span shrinks more and more in order to

try and absorb everything being thrown at it. Within this scenario, I strive to counteract this madness and frenzy in order to bring notice to the quiet moment I offer. As Debord points out in *Society of the Spectacle*, the viewers who become spectators are so conditioned to commoditization and the spectacle that they cannot feel/see anything beyond that layer unless it's cracked someplace. These cracks/niches of spaces, rife with 'quiet revolutions', are my playground.

These niches are ordinary, mundane spaces that people often pass by every day and after the first few times, stop noticing. *Invisible Cities* by Calvino is a brilliant piece of literary writing that talks about the concept of space and place. Marco Polo narrates the stories and descriptions of many cities that are stretched out in the land of Kublai Khan, the Mongol Emperor. The narratives are spun around the various aspects of a city including trade, its people, structure and history. Polo describes the most mundane of spaces as rich repositories of memories, history and moments that define a city. Some are simple everyday cities that we are surrounded by, others more fantastical such as Baucis, a city that is suspended over the ground, and does not touch it at all. In *Invisible Cities*, Polo explains that "...there are three hypotheses about the

inhabitants of Baucis: that they hate the earth; that they respect it so much that they avoid all contact; that they love it as it was before they existed and with the spyglasses and telescopes aimed downward, they never tire of examining it, leaf by leaf, stone by stone, ant by ant, contemplating with fascination their own absence" (Calvino 77).²⁸

These stories of strange constructions and structures, such as those found in Baucis, feed the imagination in terms of the potential of space and its conversion into place. Another interesting aspect that Polo illuminates for the Khan is the 'way of seeing of the beholder'. When describing the process of experiencing the city of Zemrude, Marco Polo suggests that "It is the mood of the beholder which gives the city of Zemrude its form. If you go by whistling, your nose a-tilt behind the whistle, you will know it from below: window sills, flapping curtains, fountains. If you walk along hanging your head, your nails dug into the palms of your hands, your gaze will be held on the ground, in the gutters, the manhole covers, the fish scales, wastepaper" (Calvino 66).²⁹ Thus Calvino in his own brilliant way encourages us to trust our imagination and take the leap that stretches into the realm of the fantastical, illusionary and bizarre. Infact, during the

course of the narration, it is beautifully put across by Calvino, that all the cities Polo describes to Khan are basically numerous renditions of Venice, his home, and these thus come across as brilliant examples of the derive and detournement that the SI talk about. How to visualize places within spaces that are not visible to the 'trained' eye.

Along the same lines, I seek spaces that we constantly inhabit or move through, exploring cracks for quiet disruptions, such that the curious viewer could get transported to a place that one cannot access otherwise; that does not exist unless we believe in it.

Window

But where would this place be located? And what kind of a space would it be? Logically, this was the next quest – to find the kind of spaces that would be ideal germination grounds for these quiet revolutions I was looking for. What are the spaces we are most immune to? Which are the spaces we take for granted? When traversing corridors, lanes and roads what is our experience like? Once again, Calvino's *Invisible Cities* provides a poetic answer. As Polo says, "for everyone, sooner or later, the day comes when we bring our gaze down along the drainpipes and we can no longer

detach it from the cobblestones. The reverse is not impossible, but it is more rare" (Calvino 66).³⁰ It is this rarity that I am striving to create.

When starting out on a problem, what better place than to begin at home! While trying to deconstruct my everyday space, the realization of it possessing an 'inside' and an 'outside' struck me as strange, more so as it was something I saw every day. Here were two completely different worlds, nested within each other but with each oblivious to what was happening in the other. While carefully scouring the room I was sitting in, the window suddenly seemed to shine brighter than usual. Another Yasodara moment it seemed had dawned upon me. Thinking of the window within this conceptual framework of the inside versus outside, it shone as a portal, actually the only portal that connected the two worlds. From a framing point of view, the window acted like the painter's viewfinder – a rectangle that artists cut into a piece of stiff paper and use to capture their composition in landscape paintings. Anne Friedberg, in her book *The Virtual Window From Alberti to Microsoft*, explains the significance of the window in the context of framing from the Renaissance onwards: "Alberti invokes the image of the window as an instructive substitute for

the rectangular frame of the painting. As a visual metaphor, the window functions to reinscribe its image onto another image, the painting. The relation of images in this circuit is bidirectional: the window is like a painting (it frames an opening onto the world) and the painting is like a window (as a technique to construct perspective, the painter should frame the view)" (Friedberg).³¹

Thus the liminal space of the window became the experimental area. Within it were two parallel worlds, the outside and the inside, between which the spectator moved, physically or metaphysically transcending fixed standards like boundaries, time and orientation. The usage of the window for the construction of perspective that Anne Friedberg talks about is something that I was greatly interested in, though with a slight change of perspective (pun intended!). The space that was held within the window for me was another world that we were looking upon, much like Alice's peek through the small door into the magical garden. However, the orientation of the outside world framed by the window did not dictate the orientation of the inside world. This led to some interesting experiments discussed ahead.

Immersion

Listening to music for me is a process connected to the soul. It is an immersive experience that transports one into a different world as one loses sense of standards like orientation, time, space and direction. A similar experience is what I aim to simulate for the viewer who takes the first step of participating in one of my pieces. A lot of the work I've created in the past speaks to the way the viewer approaches the piece. The more aware, curious and bold you are in the space you inhabit, the more rewarding your experience becomes. Just like the music that wouldn't be appreciated/enjoyed sans it's immersed listener, my work would not exist sans the viewer. A lot of the experiences unfold in a feedback action-reaction loop technically and within the human sensorium.

Having carefully selected, absorbed and assimilated my thoughts, I was ready to set out on the trail. The excitement was to see if the trail led to a labyrinth or a maze, and more importantly, what was at the end of it. It is interesting to think of that phase, the beginning, the doubt of being well equipped, the uncertainty of leading away from the trail. But that was the fun part – I was going to make the trail as I proceeded, I was going to make different trails.

1/On

It is very interesting sometimes to sit back and think of all the connections we can make within our lives. I've found the thesis to be an excellent and ideal opportunity for doing so, and a very rewarding one. My parents have always taught me to learn from around me and my Indian roots are a beautiful part of who I am. While mulling over the concept of the trinity that I was working with (contrast, curiosity and chance), it dawned on me that there was a parallel concept that was very close to the world I came from. Hinduism too presents the Hindu triad of Gods namely, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh in the form of the Great Trinity³² as called the "Trimurti". They are personifications of the basis of all life, the cycle of creation, preservation and destruction that everything is based upon.

I decided to use this idea of creation, preservation and destruction as a skeletal structure for my experiments with the ideas of contrast, curiosity and chance. Thus formed a three-stage experiment frame that was the basis for the next three works that evolved: Experiment I worked with the idea of creation of parallel worlds between which subjects moved; Experiment II explored the idea of preservation, deconstructing and then

reconstructing space, breaking the rules with rules; Experiment III informed destruction by totally altering the space and creating a new place.

Experiment I

Window Seat - The Backstory

Let's rewind back to David Deutsch's introduction of the existence of parallel instances of a moment in different universes (Wahler).³³ The 'visible' and 'invisible' moment as described by Deutsch talks about the potential of something that is about to happen. While I sit here typing out my thesis, in a parallel world, I would have finished by now and celebrated with a big Snickers ice cream bar. In another parallel universe I might keep writing for hours, and just as I type in the final word, the system crashes. Ok, we are going to hold that thought while I back up my files.....

.....
.....Back!

Alongwith the concept of parallel worlds, I was parallelly thinking about the kind of space within which I would like to place a new piece I had begun making. Would it be indoors or outdoors? I had already zeroed in on the concept of the 'insides' of the room, the fact it had an exterior and the window as the only

connection with the dynamic outside world. The buildings, streets and roads don't really figure in that view, but what do are the random clouds that happen to float by, the birds circling amongst them waiting to swoop down if you'd only drop that French fry, the leaves that are sensitive to the slightest breeze or the many commuters that constantly renew the topmost layer of the streets. It's a stark contrast with the static furniture and stale air of the room that only move around when occupied for a while.

Other than the spatial and geometric relevance of this portal, I started to wonder how else it was uniquely connected to me. In a rumination session, I realized that windows have held a fascination for me since childhood. On the bus, on the train, on an airplane, in class, in the room I shared with my brother – the affinity was always for the space that showed a peek into a different world. I wondered which aspect it was that attracted me the most – the swiftly changing scenes, the contrast between the static world I was situated in and the fast moving/somewhat moving world outside, or the amazing breeze from the open window that seemed to pour new life into me. Strangely enough, even if it was dark outside, the strong contrast of the lights to the night they were



▲ Initial handmade animation lightbox

immersed in had an enrapturing quality. I could sit at the window and stare out for hours and that was the space to wander and float that took me to great places. I can say with some surety that that's where imagination grew for me, because there was enough mental space and time and opportunity for it to germinate. Years later, my connection with the window is just as strong, and something I now realized I could use as part of my work.

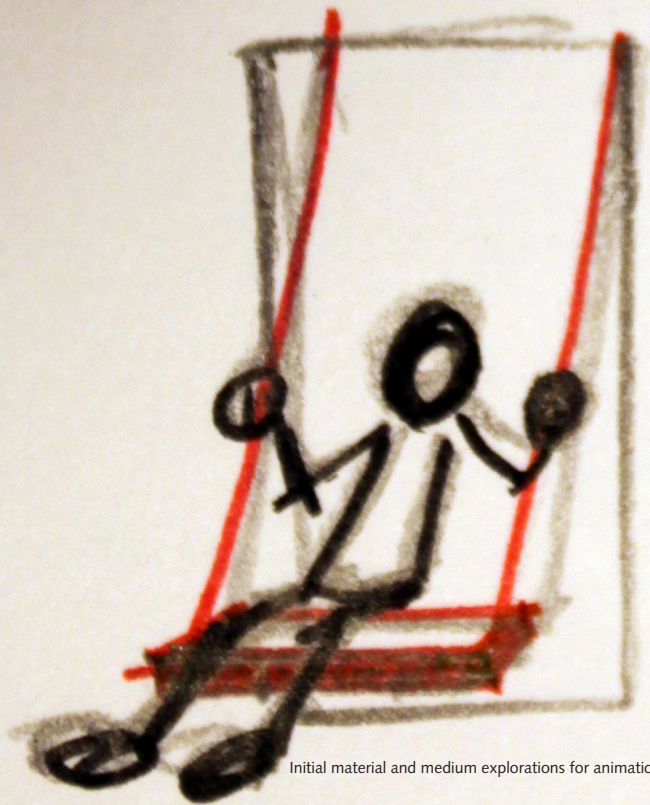
'To-Fro-To'

One of the happiest moments for me is swinging on a swing. It's just something about movement and wind in my face that produces happy hormones galore (Oh, that and chocolate!) The simple structure of a rope connected to a small plank of wood can provide you with joyful gentle rocking as well as take you up, up and away, seemingly soaring above all land creatures. There is a playground near my place and the days I am at home around the afternoon hours, the excited shrieks and unrestrained gurgling and giggling of children at the park produces a happy, sunshiny feeling in me! The swings are the most coveted spots as they produce the longest and fun times, I guess. Standing and looking out the window in my room, all these unconnected and random musings somehow just fit

together into one joyful thought. What if my next work depicted a small girl on a swing?

I could visualize a billowing summer dress, a little girl with pigtails and bare feet swinging back and forth in utmost delight. I had been wanting to draw for a while, though I hadn't for almost a year. The charcoal begged to be picked up on the RISD Store shelf and I happily gave in as I now knew what to do with it! I would draw my little girl and every frame of her ecstasy. Animation seemed to be the best medium to express the play and ephemeral quality of the experience, as it spoke in the same fluid language.

Thus began the immensely enjoyable task of putting together a light box in the form of an old wooden painting frame and a clamp lamp on it that worked perfectly. Having never animated before, the process turned out to be more fun – as well as more tedious – than I had anticipated. Getting the transitions of motion smooth, making sure the perspective was not weird, deciding how much of the figure I wanted visible and understanding the medium of charcoal and making it say what I was wanting it to were some of the amazing lessons and key elements of the undertaking. Initially, I started with matchstick figure



Initial material and medium explorations for animation style ▶



drawings to understand the kind of movement the figure and swing would have. The next few animation loops were dedicated to understanding the language charcoal spoke and finally I knew what I wanted the animation to look like. It's interesting how the process speaks back to you! I always start with a gut feeling, and as I work more and more with the concept, the medium and mechanics of the piece become an essential part of the process of directing how the piece develops. It's important for me not to impose an initial idea on the process but let it meander, not wholly, but to the extent that it continues to speak its own language.

Hours on end of animating make the process a meditative one. During those hours, the window was still at the back of my mind, waiting to be fit into the puzzle. During one specific drawing that turned out to be particularly satisfying in comparison to the previous six, the final jigsaw piece floated in and I thought it would be perfect to have the girl swinging in and out of the window, as a projection! She would appear on the walls on the interior of the room as she rocketed to the roof and then swing back out and disappear – “where to?” would be the question that I would love to have triggered in the viewers' minds by then. Has

she gone into another world? Does she exist while we don't see her, or does she exist in the world only when we do? Ultimately, I saw her as existing in two parallel worlds: one where you could see her, and the other where you couldn't. On trying this out on the window in my living room, the sight was pretty amazing, if I may say so myself! Interestingly, when she swung back out, she was visible as a shadow on the adjacent building from the outside, before swinging back in. The imagery and illusion that was created was fascinating and transformed the window into a portal between worlds, moving to-fro-to.



▲ Rohini Gosain, *To-Fro-To*, 2010, Animation projection, Documentation

Experiment II

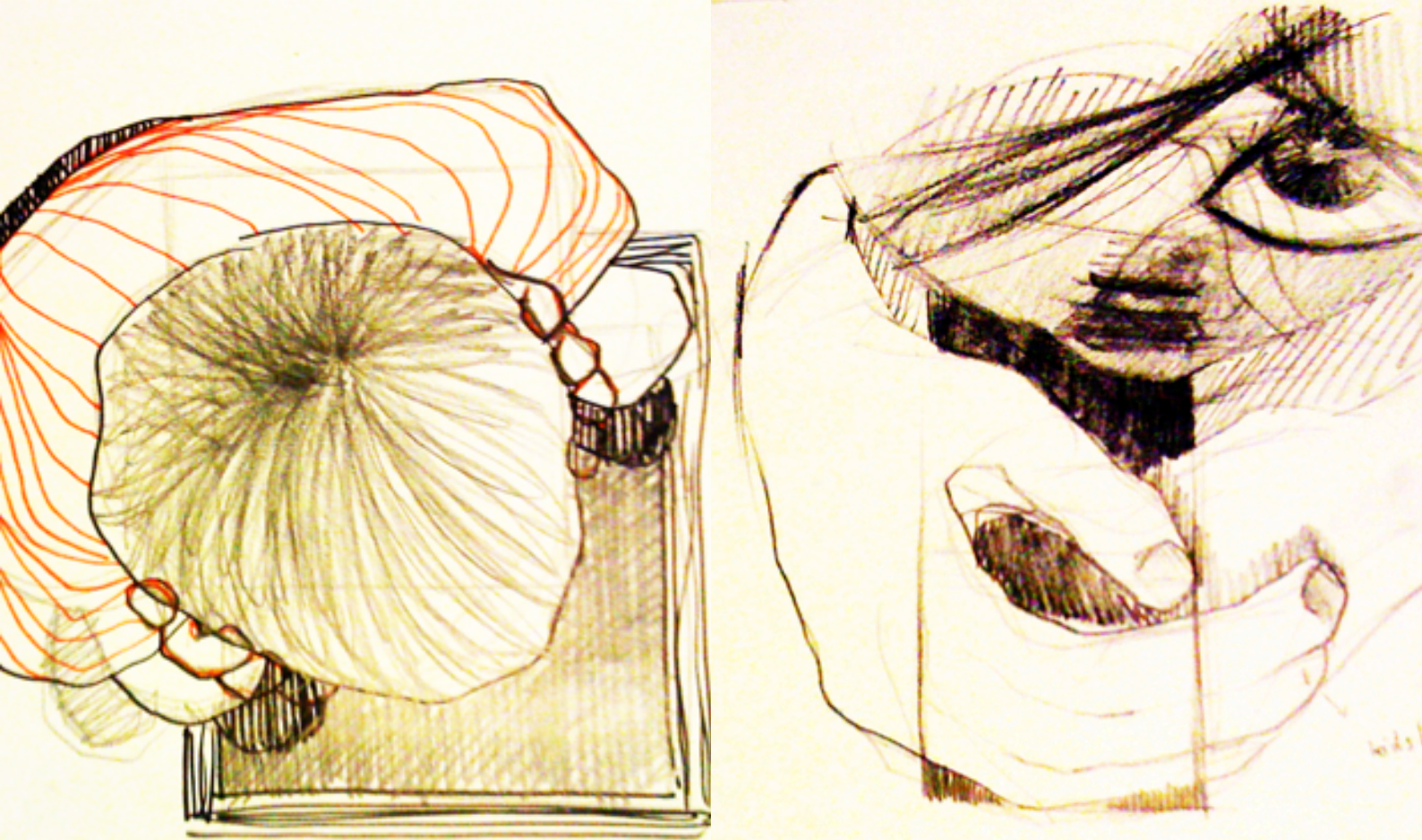
'To-Fro-To' brought with it more questions than answers, which I would say was ideal as the fun part of getting someplace is mostly the journey and not really the destination. The challenge remains in how to get there and what one finds by taking the journey. The window was now posing more questions in its world, and this time in addition to its transparency and portal-like character, I was also looking at it as a view into another world – an extension of the inside space. Thus, the window became like a bridge and deconstructed and then reconstructed the meaning of the two spaces, the outside and the inside, for us.

Beyond the physicality of the window and its frame, another thread initiated in 'To-Fro-To' was that of innocent play and freedom of mind. For me, the two actually go hand in hand. The idea of a little girl on a swing was about the innocence of acquiring joy through the simplest of actions. Children are the easiest to please, as they find enjoyment in the smallest things. Along those lines, I subconsciously floated back into memories of my childhood and was reminded of how much wandering was a part of me – be it physically roaming around discovering new spots,

new bugs, nests, branches and holes, or fixating on a leaf outside my window and spacing out into other worlds and thoughts. What was it like to be in another world? What is the definition of normal and what is the reference point by which we measure it? These were some of the questions coming together that soon took the form of "Come and Go".

"Come and Go"

"Come and Go" is nominally about a tiny boy patiently waiting around an actual window frame. However, the boy also stands between two fantastical worlds. One is the plane of the wall that the window is on, which becomes the ground the boy is standing on. The world beyond the window is what he seems to be peering down at, waiting for something to happen. As the projected boy peers down constantly, he rolls around, squats, strolls and somersaults. In the meanwhile, birds slowly appear in the "outside world", and seem to be circling and coming towards the boy. As they grow larger and larger there is a point where you can see that they are kites, the common birds of prey, and suddenly one of them swishes into the boy's world and circles up high above him. After a few turns, the kite quietly picks the boy up and takes him with it back into its own world, beyond the window frame.



▲ Initial sketches for 'Come and Go'



The animation was projected onto a large horizontal window, with the boy shown from a top view, moving around the window as if peeking into another dimension. The distortion of perspective was exciting to play with as it made the space and experience all the more fantastical and added to the fanciful aspect of the narrative.

Experiment III

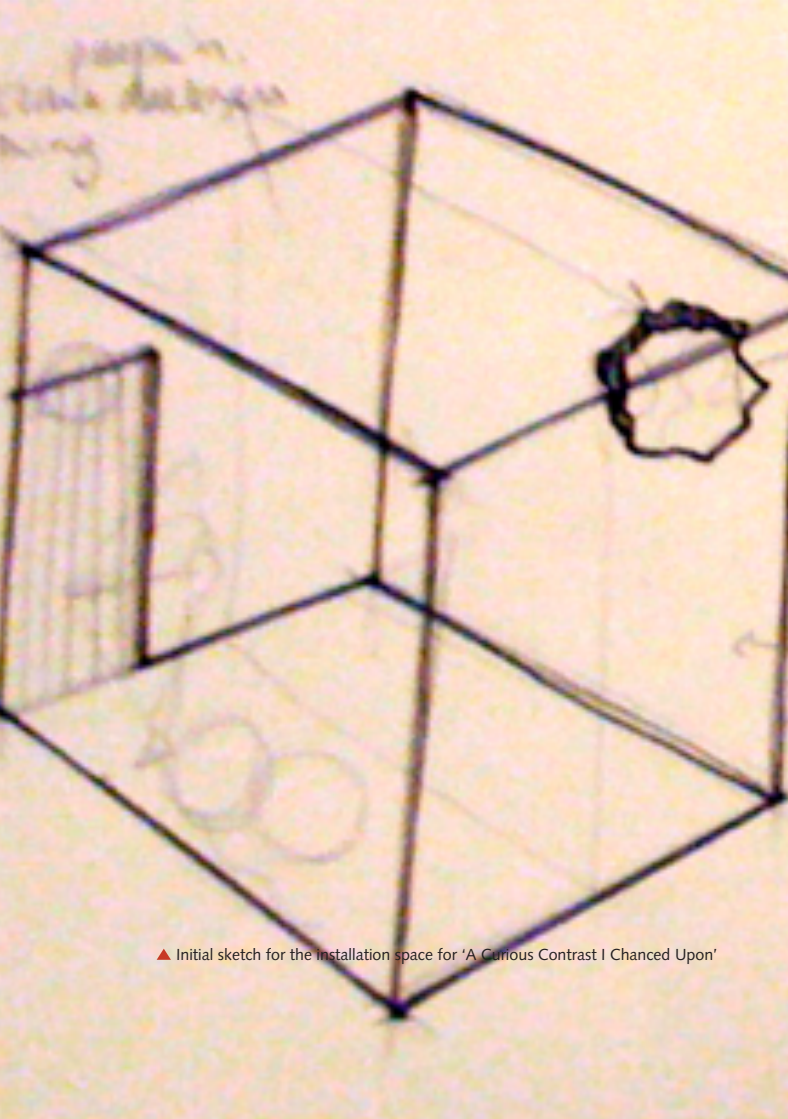
“A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon”

The previous two experiments were completed and as with every investigation, there came the time to analyze the results. From an examination and critique of ‘To-Fro-To’ and ‘Come and Go’, a mood board of keywords developed that formed a palette for me to work with for a piece that would make up the third in this series. Humor, abstraction, outdoors/indoors, science and art, seemed some of the themes that stood out as topics of interest that I was eager to explore. I’d only been through the process of animation in conjunction with projection twice, and there seemed a ton of potential waiting to be unraveled in that sphere as well. Thus slowly, once again, the foundation and structure for a portal into another parallel dimension were coming together with each of these puzzle pieces falling into place. The concepts of play and childhood had proven themselves consciously and subconsciously as the origins and inspirations for my previous work and I decided to resume that exploratory journey. Expect Resistance talks about the importance of play in our lives, stating that, “We can win back that lost

innocence [concept of play], for them [children] and for ourselves, by approaching everything we do as a game rather than a struggle or responsibility – by creating environments in which we can run wild” (CrimethInc. Workers’ Collective 59).³⁴

The environment I was looking at involved the concept of play not just among the characters in the piece, but including the viewer as well. As in prior pieces, I wanted to extend the viewers’ participation in the experience by making them the switch, but this time not having them act as the only ones breathing life into the piece but rather as participants in changing the course of the work’s narrative. Thus there is a parallel world present alongside the world the viewer is present in, i.e. the gallery space. The parallel world consists of two children, a little boy and girl, who are playing in their garden. They spend their day pretending to have picnics, playing ball, flying kites, chasing butterflies, digging earthworms, running around crazily and collecting odd objects.

This parallel world is not conspicuously visible to the viewers in the gallery space. If they happen to notice a rusted pipe section jutting out of the room’s wall, and they happen to be curious enough to bend and

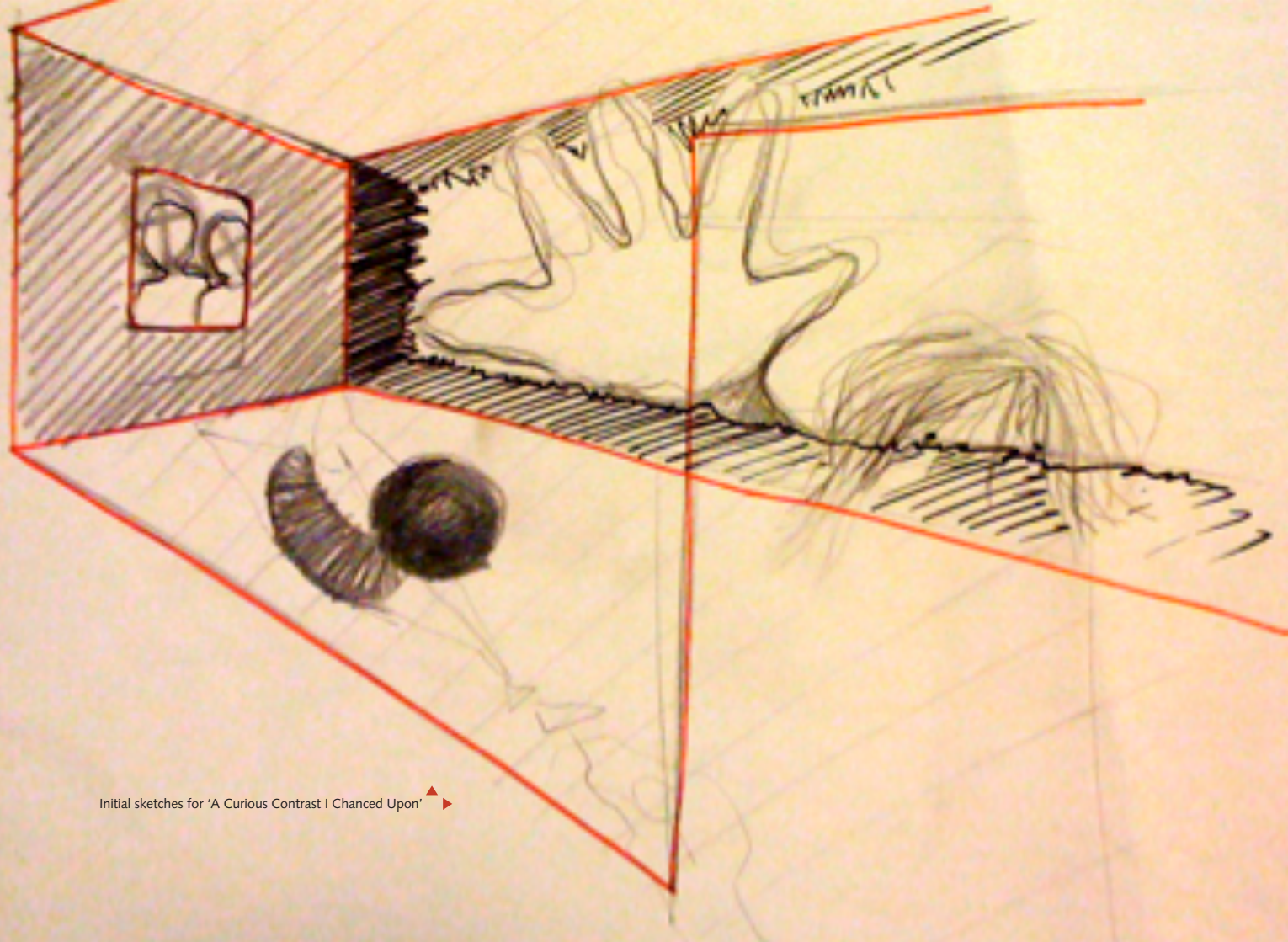


▲ Initial sketch for the installation space for 'A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon'

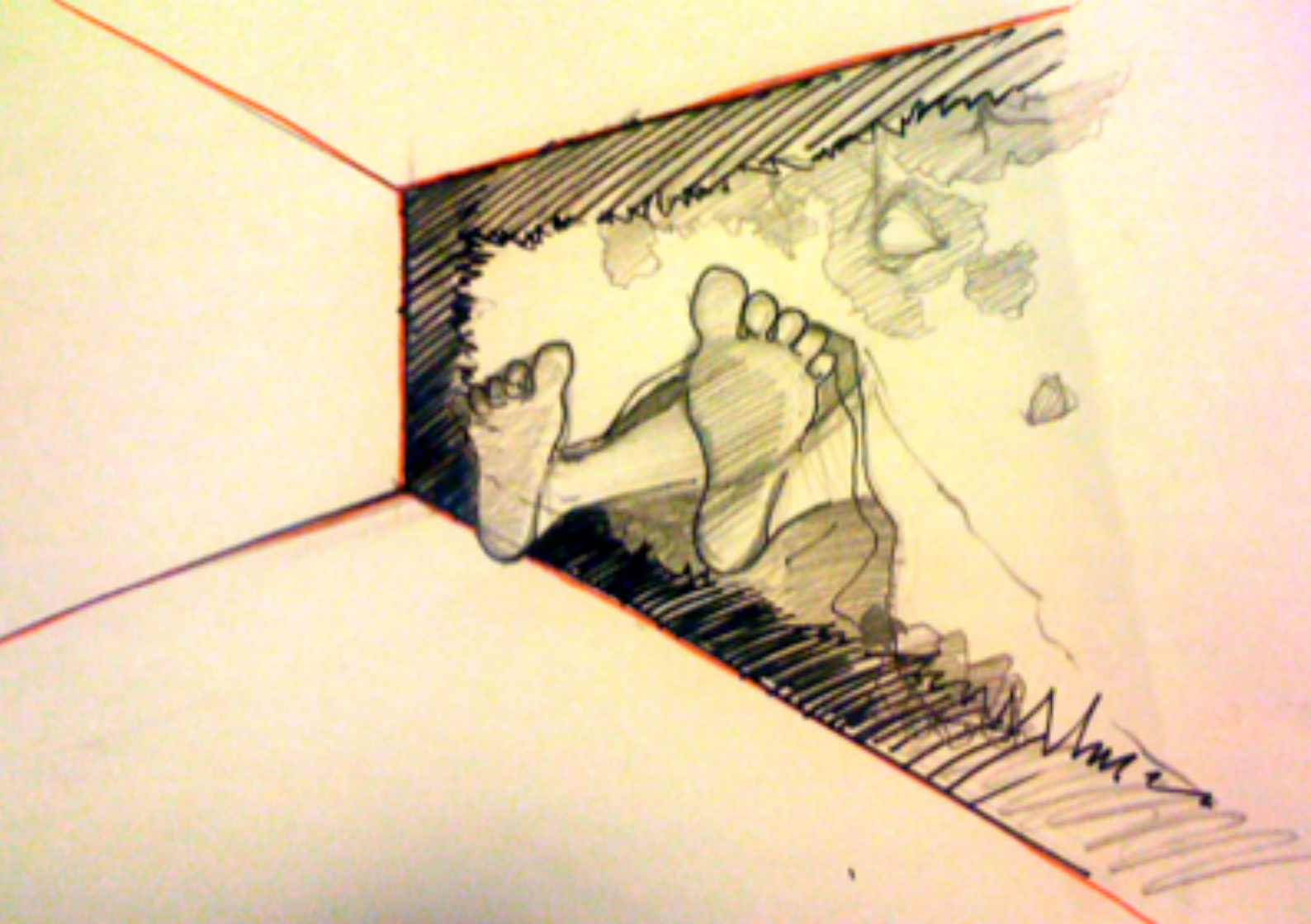
peep into it, they suddenly are peering into what looks like a dirt/rabbit hole. At the edge of the hole, above ground, the viewers would hear/see these two kids playing and enjoying a sunshiny day. If their curiosity is piqued enough, they would look for and find an opening that leads into the 'hole'. However, entering the 'hole' makes the children aware that some disruption has occurred in their world, a secret unknown entry. They move away from the hole and start whispering and talking, discussing the potential intruder. If the viewer waits for about fifteen to twenty seconds within the space quietly, the kids come back to play and enjoy the sun!

The viewer is rewarded with the experience he initially sought, but only after discovering and understanding the rules of 'play' according to which the piece operates.

"A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon" is not a representation of my or anyone's childhood in particular. Rather, it's reminiscent of essences of experiences/moments/objects captured over time in the collective memory and floating in and around us, in another world maybe, just like Polo's memories of Venice in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.



Initial sketches for 'A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon' ▲▶



During one of the many trying moments that Polo experiences with the king of Mongol, Kublai Khan, Khan asks him to narrate his experiences of the extensive cities he visited. Polo goes on till dawn, but cannot manage to put the Khan to sleep. As dawn breaks, he confesses that he has exhausted all his stories of all the cities he knew and the following heart-rendering conversation ensues:

“There is still one of which you never speak.”

Marco Polo bowed his head.

“Venice,” the Khan said.

Marco smiled. “What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?”

The emperor did not turn a hair. “And yet I have never heard you mention that name.”

And Polo said: “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice.”

“When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice, when I ask you about Venice.”

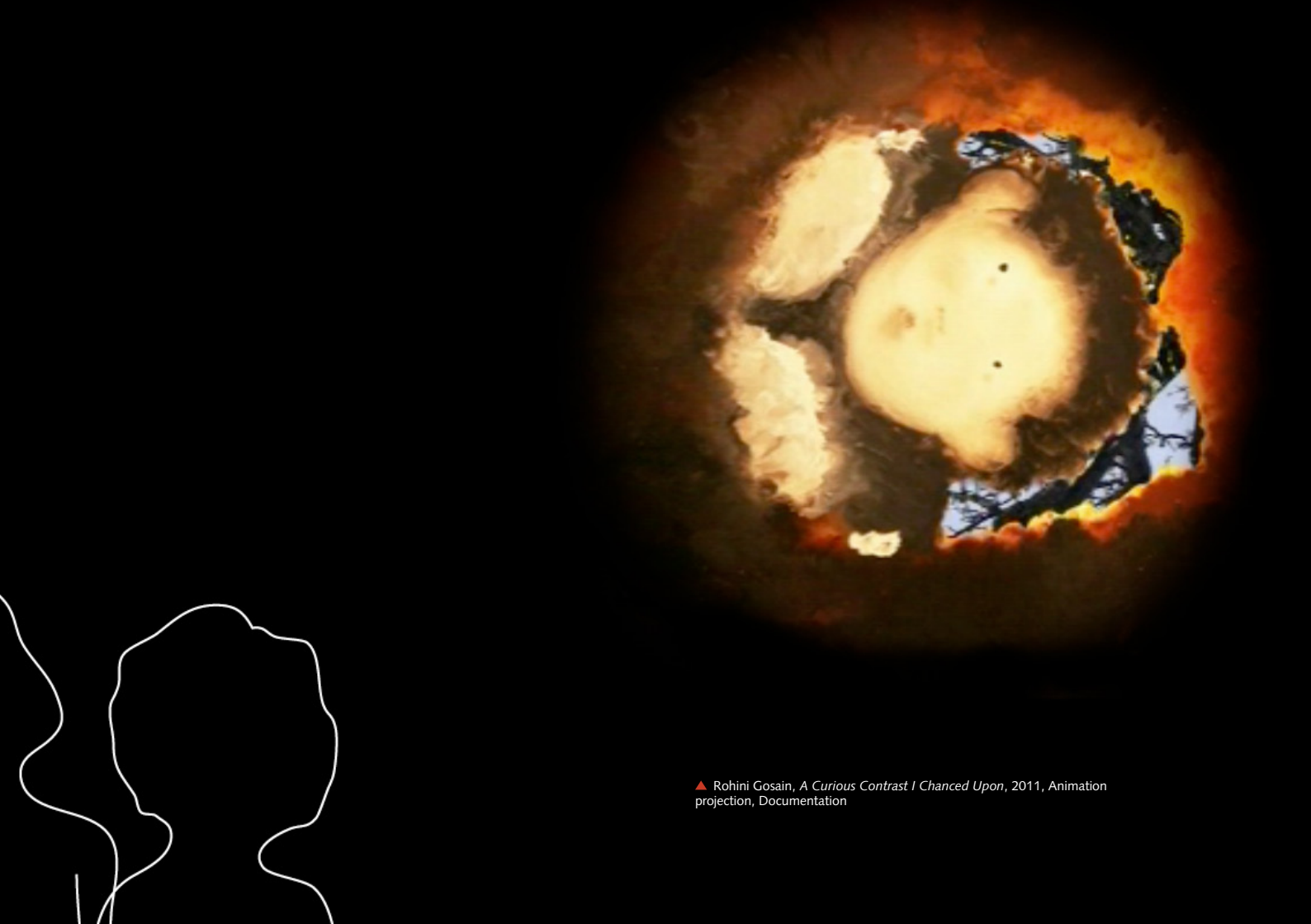
“To distinguish the other cities’ qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice.”

“You should then begin each tale of your travels from the departure, describing Venice as it is, all of it, not omitting anything you remember of it.”

[...]

“Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” said Polo “perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little” (Calvino 80).³⁵

And thus I wondered if that was the reason for the many layers to my work, the subconscious desire to not unravel the whole story in the fear of losing it completely. Interestingly it makes me think of abstraction, with simplification and complexity as the two ends of its spectrum. Within our lives too we move from a simple life and complicate it to no end till we reach the phase of resimplifying it to end in blanc. This process of addition of problems, subtraction of leisure time, multiplication of emotions and division of love and affection is what makes life interesting. I continue to seek these interesting moments from our everyday to create more quiet revolutions that bring a smile to everyday.



▲ Rohini Gosain, *A Curious Contrast I Chanced Upon*, 2011, Animation
projection, Documentation

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