

Live Art in Scotland – Hamshya Rajkumar

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Stephen Greer (SG): I don't know if it's a useful place or not to start, but I have been thinking about people's first points of entry or first encounters when it comes to working with performance, whatever that might be. And as I think I probably said in my email, I'm wary of origin stories. But I do like and I am interested in first impressions or influences, so maybe we can start there. How did you first come to start working with and through performance?

Hamshya Rajkumar (HR): So I guess, what I've enjoyed as a kid, I actually did enjoy doing dance. I used to be a Bharatanatyam dancer, which is a very ancient Hindu, Indian classical form of dance. And I did enjoy being physically present. And I used to study architecture and I failed my third year, wasn't happy. And that's when I switched into the sculpture and environmental art programme. And there, I think one of the first works that I did was performance work, because I felt like an object would never articulate maybe how I feel or the experience. And viewing objects in space, I just find quite fatiguing. Like, I don't even like going to gallery spaces myself, and spending a lot of time there. So I found myself wanting to do performance, because it felt like I could.. whatever feeling that I had, whoever I'm responding to, I felt like I can articulate, I can connect and can create that, choreograph that experience in space, more than I could by sculpting, putting a bunch of objects in space, withdrawing from it. And I felt like I also maybe.. not maybe the thrill, but I felt like it was an empowering situation

when even though it does make you feel quite vulnerable and quite fragile, to really put yourself in that position of kind of expression. It felt like it's more real and maybe more authentic to me as a human being. Because I feel like, especially when I was a kid, I did have really strong depression, when from this kind of point of existentialism, when you're trying to get out of that and push yourself to be more present. That really, I think, that has a maybe more of a healing effect on me in that sense.

SG: That's really interesting. Maybe the line of flight that I'm interested in following is thinking about that quality of presentness. And maybe what I understand of the quality or this place of improvisation in your work, knowing that you've come from experience of a particular dance tradition or choreographic tradition. And that, as I understand quite a few of your projects, that you you're working through and with improvisation. Could you tell me a little bit about that? The place of that [dynamic] in your work?

HR: Yeah, so one thing I hated as a Bharatanatyam dancer is performance for an aesthetic experience. Even though there was a lot of intention, maybe through through movement, like the way you would hold your body and that kind of discipline within the body. That felt like true intention. But then the narratives that we would have, were just.. I felt like they were just sometimes.. they just make me so angry. Like, we have this one Hindu God called Krishna who's a typical musician, he gets all the ladies and you're just being a woman and just swooning over this man, you're crying on the floor. And I always asked my guru, like, give me Kali, give me give me a really vicious woman. I like really hard rhythm. I want to dance from a place which I can connect it to. And I just didn't like it - so it felt natural to break off [from] that classical tradition and to kind of figure out who I am as a performer or as a live artist, which is terminology I still don't really understand but want to work with. I guess I like live art bit more. To move into improv made sense because I can 'deformat' myself as a Bharatanatyam dancer. I still remember what it's like to dance from a sacred space or move with intention. But then also, you know, find what that truly is for me. I think improv is.. I think that champions your voice better. It's also really fun as well. Because when you are working in a live setting, you need to respond to the people or the spaces around you. And that can be quite.. I think that's more of an authentic experience in itself.

SG: Okay, okay.

HR: Did I answer clearly?

SG: Yes, that's perfect. I'm just pausing and thinking because I suppose I'm interested in how that responsiveness relates to or ties into the interest in the nonhuman or the other-than-human in your work. Is improvisation a register which allows you to explore those kinds of relationships?

HR: Yeah, if I'm out in.. For example, I've been spending a bit of time out in Ravenscraig. And if you're out there, you know, the wind is moving in a different way, that's going to maybe affect how you want to move, or you know, that there are different life forms, moving and kind of pulsing in their own ways. So to kind of work with [that] you can't work in a very prescribed way that feels like you yourself are being quite dominant and quite assertive, or you're set in your way. It feels like it's more of a fluid and - what would you call it? - more of a reciprocal relationship, if you are working in the space of improvisation, because you're allowing them to contact you and you're allowing yourself to contact them. It feels like it's more of a balanced relationship. That's also an ideal in itself. You know, I'm a human, I would think and see things in a specific way. But moving in this space of improv tries to dismantle that as much as you can.

SG: So even though, as you say, [there's] this human agency and choice, [it's about] trying to kind of maybe diffuse some of the hierarchies that are may be inherent to that, I guess. Am I right in thinking that some of that work that you've been doing at Ravenscraig relates to the project you've been working on at Tramway? Was that a collaborative project with Niroshini Thambar and Nik Paget-Tomlinson?

HR: So originally, when I got the BUZZCUT emerging award, we were going to do a live performance. And I've never worked... because I'm still trying to figure it out, you know, practice wise and then how do I then relate to that within an institution, you know. I don't want to compromise too much. I like to

be outdoors. But I thought BUZZCUT seems like the best place to [go] because they are so experimental, but also Karl [Taylor]'s brilliant, he's very open and understanding, a good listener as well. I thought, okay, let's try and make our indoor live performance and bring these narratives into space and into an urban context. So that collaboration was going to be how to create an immersive soundscape, which can be kind of triggered by the movement of the body. So that one was a bit different. It wasn't maybe relating too much to the Ravenscraig project. I think that's just the very, very early stage of 'how would I want to work indoors?' because I do like working with sound. And Niroshini is also a Sri Lankan Tamil and a lot of the songs that we were using were certain birdcalls we found, we would hear in Sri Lanka. And Nik, our partner, and he's recorded little songs around there. So it was about trying to activate and really immerse yourself within that kind of sound body, I guess.

SG: So what's that kind of collaborative relationship like for you? Is it about having a shared set of concerns or a certain like landscape of, in this case, sounds or images that you're working with? Or are there are other other kind of dynamics which are in the room for you?

HR: Oh, Niroshini and I think we both kind of see landscapes as heritage. Growing up and even though my families aren't really, really strong Hindus, I grew up with images of peacocks and tigers and, you know, palmera trees and coconut trees, and even the foods that we would have all evoke the Sri Lankan landscape. And I was born here. I think my first time in Sri Lanka was maybe in 2005, or something. I know that my parents would have [had] those kinds of images; I've watched Tamil films and listened to Tamil music before I listened to English films or English music. The landscape and the language is really in you. And you know, metaphors of nature are quite strong, even in the Tamil language. So you've got this imagined landscape, but the landscape that I also want to connect to is a different landscape, which I'm also not kind of indigenous to. And Niroshini explores that through her sound practice. And I would explore that through my movement practice. So it made sense because both of us.. because we both have this really strong overlap in terms of who we are as people, but also what drives our practice. So it made sense for us to kind of go into space together and see what comes out from it. And that was just.. I've never really collaborated like that before. I always thought if I would want to collaborate with somebody, it's because I can really understand and intuit them very

well as a person. That was quite an experimental space, we didn't really know how that would go. But it was wonderful. we just used that as a space to play and really contact each other for the first time.

SG: Lovely. I'm interested maybe in knowing that that your practice is centred on.. is a movement based practice as maybe you were saying. That's not the entirety of it but maybe that's a centre of it, and thinking about some of the environments or spaces in which you worked. Am I right in thinking that maybe you've worked with Dance Base, and also with The Workroom? My understanding of those spaces is that they have a very broad and supportive view of what dance and choreographic practice might involve. Has that played out in your experience of working in those spaces?

HR: Yeah, definitely. I was always a bit worried, I guess, that 'would dance be too proscribed?' because I've had contact with dance [from] such a militantly traditional perspective that, you know, going to Dance Base - and I will be working with the Work Room over the next couple of weeks - and they're just very, very open and experimental spaces. And I'm very grateful that they exist because that just gives me that kind of support for this kind of practice to emerge.

SG: I'm interested in how that becomes a kind of structure of not just permission, but support for taking risks, and it doesn't feel like.. it ends up maybe not feeling risky at all. It just feels like an offer of possibility, maybe?

HR: Yeah, yeah. So the Dance Base [connection] was the Emerging Dancers Bursary. And that was really lovely, because I got to meet a group of dancers and one of them maybe came from a sculptural background, one guy called Sky Su who I really got on with. He went to ECA do sculpture and he had a dance practice. Whereas maybe there was.. Laura came from a contemporary practice [at] the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. And then there was the other Laura and Jorja, they both came from more dance schools and more of a dance prescribed practice. And it was interesting to contact people who came from really, really different backgrounds but were maybe interested in improv, or just trying to find our own kind of bodily language. Then Lucy [Suggate] was a really great mentor, because she was super open, and she'll offer lots of invitations. But she also really had.. I really like moving to music and

I actually really enjoyed the soundscapes that she would offer. Because I came from a traditional dance background, then I went to like a fine art background at GSA. And then when I went to [Dance Base] this was the first time I felt like I contacted maybe dancers or movers who were maybe at the same stage of practice as me, still at their earlier stages, and really contact each other and then explore all these different possibilities. I've never been around improv kind of movers. I don't know how to give the right term for it but I really valued that experience because being around that support group made that reality feel a wee bit more real. Because I felt like because I was working maybe live art at GSA before, there was maybe only a few of us who would do that. I didn't feel like I was in a dominant, stream, and then moving with people who would want to move more. I just felt like, I've got allies in a sense.

SG: I suppose the other - I'm pausing there but maybe it's still the right word.. the other part of this ecology that I'm interested in are things like artists residencies. And I know that one of the pathways or structures of development, whether you've studied, you know, in a formal institution or not, is working with spaces like Hospitalfield or Mount Stuart in the context of Scotland. And I think I read this morning that you you've had one of the residencies at Mount Stuart, where you've been working again outside and working through play and improvisation. Can you tell me a little bit about that kind of opportunity? I sometimes have a sense that residencies come with strings attached that aren't very well explained in advance of an artist turning up. And what I hear in conversation with artists is often [that] it's an open offer which is the one which is the most useful, is the most generative, is the most genuine.

HR: Yeah, Morven [Gregor] who runs the Mount Stuart residency was very, very open. Because it was an emerging artists residency especially, I don't think there was a huge, huge [expectation], it didn't feel like there was strings attached. It was really my space, my pace that I can go at, and what I wanted. You know, would there be a work which came out with it? Which would kind of benefit me as well because I am kind of early on in my stage of my career, there wasn't that kind of access. And I would go talk to her and just tell her what I'd been up to. And she seemed to be really happy in the sense that I'm making progress or making connections with things. Or even though the event wasn't as well attended as I'd like to but she seemed really happy. I think she enjoyed watching the process of

coming into the Isle of Bute, [seeing] what did I kind of contact with, and then what I did I end up creating at the end. I think that was actually a really nice experience. Because, you know, I got my accommodation free, it paid for my time. I just had to live there and you know, kind of think about how I would want to create work. And also at the very end of it, it made me really realise, 'okay, if want to work a very socially engaged way, I realise I'm gonna need a lot more time, you know, to really contact community'. And that was very beneficial for me to learn as well. Yeah, I thought that was a very supportive space. And I wish there was more spaces like that for emerging artists, because I think we need to contact these spaces with a very open ended institution or the person who's running it, for our practice to kind of emerge and be explored, but still have an outcome which is going to satisfy us as well as the institution as well.

SG: I suppose as well as a kind of ecology there's the economy of outputs, [where] I suppose organisations of different kinds, if they're in receipt of public funding, feel a sort of pressure directly or indirectly, to make choices where there will be something they can show at the end of it. Like, 'look, we spent the money appropriately'. [And doing so] when that fixation on a concrete outcome isn't necessarily productive, or isn't necessarily the thing that's needed when it comes to supporting the development of an artist..

Before we started the recording, we were chatting a little bit about BUZZCUT and thinking about that as an organisation which is involved in artist development, but it's also running regular events, or has run regular events: a festival programme, and [events such as Double Thrills at the CCA]. Could you tell me a little bit about that relationship, of coming and working with them as one of their emerging artists?

HR: Yeah, I felt like before I met BUZZCUT, I felt like I didn't really understand the industry at all. And I also felt like I was very naive, in a way. BUZZCUT, I think, really, really took me on and listened to maybe what I'm interested in. And they actually helped me write my first Creative Scotland application. And I genuinely thought within, five years of my practice, I've been doing different residences or whatever, I'd have a track record of being able to do something like that. BUZZCUT has been incredibly

helpful in that sense and trying to.. just through conversation and through kind of teaching you the kind of practicalities of.. for example, I look at that Creative Scotland application is maybe like a token for freedom. Like, if you have a practice and something that you're really interested in, you can kind of physicalize it, kind of maybe make outcomes, which will do justice to you, you know, you're the one who is setting these kind of tasks, and then allowing you to I don't know, fulfil that. I just felt when I met BUZZCUT they really helped. They just listened to me and made me realise, okay, these realities are real, you should put these into writing, and then get something out of it and be able to kind of like source.. It just felt like it was very practical advice, but in a way, it was just justice to you.

Because I didn't know what a producer was, for example, in my work. I was like 'what's a producer?' You don't learn about these things in art school, and you probably pick these things up as you go along. So I had to learn about certain kinds of things, or how to professionalise a practice and they helped me do that in a way which doesn't feel like I'm making compromises. Because I think certain artists, maybe like myself, maybe we can be seen as a romantic: we do things because, you know, we maybe work from a heart in a sense. But that feels like if you're gonna go into institutions, you do need to maybe make compromises [with] them. Maybe I'm too idealistic to say this, but I felt like when I met BUZZCUT, I realised I actually don't need to make heavy compromises to who I am, what my practice is, I can actually just give a platform. That felt like a really liberating thing to do.

And I'm glad that I met BUZZCUT at that stage, you know, being two years out of art school or something, and they were able to just support me and show me, okay, this is how you run, or this is how you go. And this is how we support yourself, too. And I just, I just needed someone to maybe listen to me and tell me how to do that, but also support me and help me find other opportunities, which will then be the right platform for my voice, as opposed to.. I know, I've picked up around me that maybe certain artists work in a specific way to satisfy an institution. And I think Glasgow's a rich enough scene where I don't think you need to compromise that much. I think it's pretty diverse enough, I think you're maybe you're quite lucky to be an artist, because when I did my exchange in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I realised this is really not, this isn't a super diverse, versatile art scene. It's very different, I actually really appreciated [it in a] completely different way. But I realised,, I think

Glasgow is a great place to be. I think BUZZCUT's a really fantastic organisation to have helped me at that stage of career. Sorry, I went around quite a bit.

SG : No, that was so helpful and it was so interesting as well - both what you were saying about really practical or pragmatic advice about kind of going 'this is how you apply for funding' but then also thinking that if you maybe come from an art school background, there's a sort of system there which has to do with galleries and maybe having an agent which is very different from one which is around a live event ecology or economy.

HR: You're totally right, like, I didn't know how you would work, like, yeah, with an agent, or wherever. And we did learn things about risk assessments and then, you know, writing a statement, having portfolios, and I learned how to do that. But then working with a producer or whatever, I had no idea what that was. They were really helpful in that way.

SG: I have this ongoing conversation with other artists, but also with, with folk at Creative Scotland about how institutions [and] how funding bodies support artists, or make their funding structures accessible to artists, particularly when it comes to people who are working experimentally or working with multiple art forms. And I know that in other places in the UK, that the way you identify what you're up for, and practices can be really expansive. Like, there's a big long list and you can tick live art whereas that's not really an option in Scotland. And that there is a sort of structure where you do need to sort of locate yourself as someone who wants funding from the dance pot, or from the theatre pot of money or from the visual arts pot. And I get a sense both from artists but also maybe from people working within Creative Scotland, a sense of a bit of frustration with that. That on the one hand, there's this really welcoming offer, there's this promise or the potential of a promise to say 'we will support a really broad range of practices'. And then quite a small 'c' conservative structure, which you then have to engage with anyway to get the money. And I don't know if that's.. I've said quite a lot there. I don't know, if you've had an experience of that of when it comes to that practical bit of filling out the paperwork and feeling 'how do I narrate or shape my practice so it's intelligible to this framework?'

HR: Yeah, like, I think I remember ticking a few boxes. I think we ticked dance, we ticked a few things in the box. There was kind of a lottery in terms of who's your assessment officer at the end, and then who.. Because I know, when I got it, I got it under dance and multi art form, no multi art form, and then dance in brackets. And then the officer relating to [...] my application ended up being a dance officer. And I think that's because maybe if you look at my track record, maybe it's about the application, I have a Bharatanatyam background. And one of my residencies was with going to be with Dance Base. And part of the practice is very movement based, maybe the folio looked like the body was quite present. And then there's a bit of movement around there. Maybe I ended up getting categorised into that. So maybe what I had to do was.. I spoke about my practices: what it was. And I don't want to, we didn't change that bit around.

What I found really interesting [in] the Creative Scotland application was the first question, question 1a or something, was like, that's where the art is. That's what Karl was saying to me, that's where the art is. That's where you can talk about the conceptual stuff and everything after that is all practical stuff. And that's where.. I have dyslexia [so] it takes me a while to write things, and things which are very pragmatic.. it just gives me a massive headache. He really helped me write that. But in a way, it's not like I'm twisting my words to fulfil that. One thing I didn't like about the, you know, the application is I need to have these kind of public sharings as public outcomes. And sometimes I don't know if I'm at [that] stage, because I think I am quite precious about when I want to maybe release a certain kind of work, or maybe how I want to frame it. Because that feels quite hurried to me. And I think that part of the application process of writing felt like, I don't about know that. Because I think there's a part of me, which is quite introverted. And I felt that might feel that maybe I'm putting a spotlight on me a bit too soon, when I'm not maybe ready to reveal the work in itself.

So I found that part of the application to be very new, and to be also quite strange. But I guess that makes sense [to] the norm of the application, and therefore that's when you kind of need to be like, okay, so at the end of Dance Base, usually at the residencies, we normally do a public sharing anyways. So that's when you will kind of have to twist and maybe say, even though I'm working in a group, I

might have to talk about how this will be apart from my own practice. So you do need big up yourself, in a sense, which kind of feels like it's a bit too... it feels like it could be just a bit much. And I think you can be very sincere. And the first question after that, you need to just really kind of punch through. And you're like, wow, I don't know, I just found that very strange. But I think that's probably the norm of the application world, I think.

Karl's case, when helping me write this application, he said, you've got three opportunities, you've got BUZZCUT, Dance Base and Tramway, you know, you're applying for a lot of money. You know, you need to also show the fact that as an emerging artist, you've got three institutions who really want to work with you. So really show [those] aspects - that you know, you are deserving of that money. That is something where.. it's a question of self-worth, but then you have to really shove it in [their] face. That's something that you do. I guess that's normal CVs and application writing anyway. So I guess that's when the art world feels quite corporate, I guess, when you're writing that application.

SG: I think there is always this sort of demand or necessity to promote yourself or oneself. And maybe promote yourself in a particular way. And my experience has always been [about] trying to find that sweet spot between being confident or assertive about a piece of work without feeling like I am bending over backwards or twisting it to say what I know the funders want to hear. There's always a balancing act, because.. I don't know that there would ever be a pure, quote, unquote, articulation of a project, because it's always been unfolding in a particular context.

HR: Did you want to speak more about the kōlam project and the visual arts aspect? Or is that something you'd.. ?

SG: Yes, if you could tell me a bit more about that project, that would be that would be perfect.

HR: Because that project, I was supposed to work.. because originally, I was thinking about how to create a socially distanced project and, or socially distanced live performance. I was thinking about ground patterns, and how, you know, we're having these arrows which are forcing the way that we

move and kind of keeping [to] these two metre markers. So originally, the kōlams was an idea to create, like a beautiful way of guiding people into space which doesn't make you feel, you know, like it's too prescribed, or maybe quite clinical in that sense. So I started to make kōlams on Ravenscraig because it's one of the highest.. it's one of the most contaminated sites in Europe: it's the biggest brownfield site. And it's amazing, because you got all these baby silver birches coming through these cracks. And when you know.. I've now got some of the contamination maps, and you know how contaminated some of these spaces are but you see so much life kind of thriving. I just found that amazing. And also, being an architecture student previously, was always really attracted to things like green architecture or organic architecture.

And I remember, I was told that was kind of wrong, and you really have to work in this kind of postmodernist clean, sharp lines way. But if you kind of observe the world around you.. I always remember there was this project I was doing. I was observing [how in] some old buildings you go to, you get like little trees or greenery growing just through any cracks of a building. I just felt like the way that we build is very hostile to our environment. And that project going out and making these kōlams made from bird seeds and grains, is like the way that you can kind of nourish that crack and like, bring more life, because I'm interested in 'how can I create like an interspecies alliance?' I really love.. there's a guy called Timothy Morton and he's quite radical in the way that he thinks about a non-object ontology and how we really need to look at these kind of multi-species kind of realities and how to look at these spectral realities. And I find that I really think that is the way to go but I think to completely embody that is actually quite a difficult process, almost even condition yourself.

So making the kōlams just felt like a really simple way of maybe bringing life to a crack and maybe listening to soil because there is this way of when you start to identify plants, and also look at the way a plant grows, you'll start to understand why soil is, you know, birthing that plant. You know, what's this asking for? And if for me to form the alliance, can I listen to that soil and be like, 'okay, you need more life here so maybe I'll bring something to kind of bring you that more life'. And I felt like that even though it's a visual work in itself, the act is the act itself, I think, or making that decision could also be

that kind of marker. If I had to turn a lens on and be like, 'This is a work', as opposed to 'this is maybe what I want to do.' Maybe that's the performance aspects of it in a way.

But I felt like there was something really.. that's the beginning of some form of an alliance I can have with soil. For example, I'm doing a course online. And I've actually applied - I don't know if I'll get it - to do a Master's in soils and sustainability, because I want to learn more about ecologies but I also think I need to have that scientific brain on me, because even though I don't think that's the right, you know, I don't think that is the absolute answer, I do know, artists do immediately objectify, that's something that we do do for that kind of aesthetic experience. But I'm also wondering, okay, if I have that artistic brain, that scientific brain, and maybe I kind of look at things in an intuitive sense as well, it could form my relationships with working out in landscapes and seascapes [to become] a lot more richer, and maybe a bit more meaningful. So the Kōlam.. I think it's just a very simple way to, to maybe start that alliance. For example, when I was doing this course I learned about, you know, dandelions, dandelions have a tap root, and their leaf structures are in a spiral, and that actually protects soil from the beating sun.

And then, so I was like, Oh, I actually, there's different ways you can actually read a plant in terms of the environment that is in and that's because I'm doing an ecology based course, which is kind of teaching me how to see things from that perspective. I really appreciate those kinds of perspectives. So that helps me inform maybe some of the decisions that I'm making within these environments, which I know it's not gonna probably hurt them as much. I feel like I want to have that sensitivity. So that kōlam is a way of maybe trying to bring that sensitivity. And it's also really awesome. When I go there, the next day, some things have been working, especially sunflower seeds are gone the next day. So it's nice to just kind of create something which can be quite pretty, but at the same time, it nourishes. I feel that it's very powerful. You know, like there's something [which] can suit the artistic eye in a way, but it also doesn't leave a burden on the landscape. I always remember when I was an architecture student, we had to draw these diggers, that you're gonna dig into the ground, and then you're going to pour cement and so it just feels awful. Surely, there's a way that we don't need to disturb the soil that much.

And now it feels like I'm working in a sense, where, you know, like, especially when you are that heavily institutionalised okay. Okay, that's probably the way it needs to be. I'll listen, you know, tutors are right. You know, architecture, academia is right, probably. But then I think even for myself, there was something right to that thought that I was having that, you know, that the way we build is actually really toxic. So that project comes from a combination of maybe ideas and thoughts I've had in the past, which I've maybe really cared about. And yeah, it's just, it's just been a really nice, simple way of working about how to maybe be of assistance and also encourage more life in these areas, and I'm still learning about different millet seeds. Because I actually worked for the Woodland Trust part-time but I work in events and fundraising and kind of more community engagement. But I work with colleagues who have wildlife and conservation backgrounds and environmental science background. And some of them they're so passionate about what they talk about, they tell me all these things that they're learning, or I'll ask them questions, and I learned so much from them, so much from them. Especially someone like myself.

This landscape isn't indigenous to my parents. So I've never had like.. going outdoors is something which is teaching me a lot because when you go out - because even in the conservation background that is least ethnically diverse, after farming sector in the world - because we have such urbanised backgrounds [and] urbanised childhoods that going out into these landscapes, they are so new to us. I learned so much about tree identification through my job. I've learned about certain native species I wouldn't have known about, again through my job. And again, I had to ask my colleagues more questions like, what is this animal? You know, because I just don't know about these things. I felt like that's a very white thing to do, going out into the countryside or camping and stuff like that [is] something I kind of picked up maybe from my white mates. I didn't pick this up from my family. But my mum comes from a family where.. we come from a farmer's background. I grew up in North Glasgow in a high rise flat that was full of plants because she lived in her garden, she basically gardened everyday back in Sri Lanka, before the Civil War happened [and] she had to leave. Her relationship with plants is so important too. I noticed that with a lot of Sri Lankans because I grew up within the kind of Sri Lankan diaspora in Glasgow as a kid because I now live in Motherwell. I live with

my family now. We moved to Motherwell because Glasgow was a pretty.. well, where I lived in Royston was very dismal. It is a concrete playground.

For my mum to have a garden, again, was so meaningful to her and she grow.. they're not native, and I know my colleagues would be like, 'Why's she not growing native species?' but to her, that's home, you know, it's the way she can create home. I think she's been or having that background, it's been really formative to my practice, and you know, what I need to kind of learn about to integrate myself into the landscape and find that sense of home. Because I know this landscape isn't indigenous to me is something which learning about it kind of transforms me and root me a bit more deeper. I think that's, that's something which I think is maybe also one of my main drivers as well. So I was talking to my mum, I'm making these kōlams, but they're not geometrical. They're not the way, you know, they're supposed to be because kōlams traditionally were made from rice flour to bring ants and birds, you know, at the footstep of your door, and [to] bring all this community of different species and show that respect for them.

But, you know, nowadays, kōlams are just made from any coloured.. you don't use food anymore, they'll just use powders which are just very coloured and just go for the aesthetic experience of colour. And I really wanted to go back to 'how can I find colour through like red milley and white millet?' And bring in hemp seeds and bring in different types of foods and greens, which kind of evoke natural colours, but at the same time, it is food, it feeds, and then maybe the form it takes will dance and move around to those cracks. So it's a way of listening to what's on the ground. I'm moving away from a tradition here. But that, you know, there's parts of my heritage, which I still do carry with me, but I try and articulate it in a different way.

SG: I need to go and sit and think about what it means [to call something] a native plant and what it means when..? Yeah, I don't even know.. like that a non-native plant is.. encounters a different.. Yeah, I'm pausing because I don't have [the right] language for it maybe.

HR: Yeah, for example, when I when I brought my mum over to visit me on the Isle of Bute, she loved the Isle of Bute. She said, 'as soon.. whenever I crossed the ferry..' she feels like this wash over her. I think it's because it's a small, small, small community, it was actually quite a big island. But you know, it kind of evokes maybe that it's more green, you know. But then on the estate, you have rhododendrons, which are from the east, which are very invasive here. We have big rhodes, pink, or blue flowers. And I can see like, especially her walking on that estate, you've got that kind of hybridised Scottish and maybe Sri Lankan landscape there. I was looking at these plants. And I'm like, yeah, she comes here and no wonder she really finds it interesting because or she really likes it, because there is that kind of [sense of how] both landscapes [have] really interacted with each other here, obviously, by like, these kind of colonialist, estate owners being like 'well I'm going to show off our travels', and they're bringing these plants over.

So I know what kind of comes from that horrible background. But it's also quite fascinating to be in that landscape because I was living on the estate and I'd be walking around these kind of trees. What I ended up drawing ended up being about the movement of trees. I really liked the way trees move, I find them really, really, really fascinating. But yeah, I can see that with my mum, she was really happy being on the estate. And I want to read more about invasive species because one of my mates was telling me invasive species aren't actually that bad. But then I know I'm working in conservation, like it's something in Woodland Trust sites, you just get decimated, like they need to not live. They can't be here. But then I was thinking of you know, birds are carrying the seeds when they're migrating and then if they do their jobbie and they're gonna probably sprout that Rhododendron. We just accelerated it. So that's something I still don't understand yet.

But having a foot in the artistic world also having a foot into the conservation world is something I actually want to keep going because I'm learning about, you know, how woodlands exist in a very practical manner. I think that's also really important to my practice - actually, that part time job which I didn't want because I had to [work] with fundraising, that's also quite performative in itself because I have to talk to folks and see what they're all about, which I do quite enjoy most day, some days it can be quite hard. But I'm learning a lot, and so that's really starting to inform my experiences of, you

know, how I maybe would interact with these landscapes. Maybe what questions I'm having and the doubts that have too.

SG: That's all so really interesting. That joint background as a working artist, and kind of going..

HR: I don't think you can work in the arts full time. Having Lucy as a mentor at Dance Base, asking her seriously, like, how do you survive? Could you ever be full time? And she's one that actually encouraged me to maybe think about investing skills in another sector, but in a way so the art can really be, [so] I don't need to compromise art, or put too much pressure on the art so I have to fulfil institutions to get more opportunities, or get more funding. Working a couple of days a week for the Woodland Trust is nourishing me financially but also at the same time, I'm learning a lot - I've learned so much from working in this job since March 2019. And I've learned so much about native Scottish landscapes. I didn't even know there's quite a number of conservation charities that buy up land and rewild them, like I just did not know about that world at all. So I'm learning so much, and I really value that.

But I also think that maybe in a practical sense, do I have a double lifestyle, always finding work somewhere else? So I can keep the art as with real intention is possible, and still be able to get part time income from that, but also get some part time income from my other jobs I do? I actually still don't know how people, who artists can do it. I feel like you really need to be of a certain.. well before maybe mid career.. I don't know. Is that the only stage where you get to that stage of being an artist? But then I'm also starting to think, because I really did enjoy... one thing I liked about being an architect student was I knew I can help people, I can build homes. But I also am very interested in ecosystem restoration and maybe at the end, I'm actually thinking that both careers might actually overlap. And maybe choreography will be restoration, you know, how do we move and respect these spaces, but move in a way that we can start restoring our landscapes and have them to be completely biodiverse as they really should be.

Live Art in Scotland – Hamshya Rajkumar

So I don't know if I actually would be an artist forever. I'd actually like to see at one point, both careers overlap. It's going to take years, but I think this is actually what I want at the end of the day, because when I look at maybe older artists who have maybe tracked for a long time, I feel like 'is that something I want when I get into my 60s or 70s, to want to be working as an artist?' You know, I don't think I would like to do that, I think I'd like to combine both and evolve them together, perhaps.