

Sancintya Mohini Simpson

# **BLOODLINES**

5 - 22 SEP



*Bloodlines tells the untold stories of women taken from India to South Africa as indentured labourers. Bloodlines remembers these women, and the generations that follow. Through video and painting, Simpson gives place to narratives of intergenerational trauma and survival, while forging processes of healing and remembrance.*

**Wednesday, 5 Sep, 6-8pm**

Opening night  
Performance, Cleansing Ritual with Sancintya Mohini Simpson, Isha Ram Das and Indarami Simpson

**Saturday, 15 Sep, 2-4pm**

Artist talk, Sancintya Mohini Simpson with artist and curator Shivanjani Lal  
Healing through Writing Workshop, facilitated by poet Mindy Gill with Sancintya Mohini Simpson

**Wednesday, 19 Sep, 6-8pm**

Panel Discussion: How Can We Heal?  
Led by Sancintya Mohini Simpson with Eric Bridgeman, Katina Davidson, Léuli Eshrāghi and Chantal Fraser

*For my mother*

*Sancintya wishes to thank Indarami Simpson,  
Ben Leadbetter, Isha Ram Das, Hannah Donnelly,  
Kalyani Mumtaz, Kimba Thompson,, Kyle Weise,  
Ryan Presley, Shivanjani Lal, Manisha Anjali,  
Léuli Eshrāghi, Jenna Baldock, Chantal Fraser,  
Eric Bridgeman, Katina Davidson, Mindy Gill, Judy  
Watson, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Savannah van der Niet,  
Louis Lim, Monika Correa, Callum McGrath,  
Next Wave, Blak Dot Gallery, Metro Arts, Australia  
Council for the Arts, Arts Queensland, Brisbane City  
Council, and all her family and friends who have  
supported her during this journey.*

***Sancintya respectfully acknowledges and thanks the Traditional Owners of the  
unceded land on which she lives, works, and travels through.***

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson's** practice examines the complexities of racial and migratory experiences within Australia. Informed by her heritage as a First-Generation Australian of Indian-Anglo descent, Simpson's work often focuses on her own family and community's experiences—unravelling the untold stories of an existence on the periphery. Through painting, photography, video, performance, prose, and sound, Simpson's work creates conversations and tells stories to critique contemporary Australian culture, and colonisation's problematic histories.

**Shivanjani Lal** is a twice removed Fijian Indian Australian artist and curator. Her history is shaped by the Kala Pani [Black Waters]. She is from the indentured labour diaspora of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. She works across mediums to explore her dislocation that seeks to account for memory, erasure, healing, and the archive. Her work is for the women in her family.

**Manisha Anjali** is an Indo-Fijian poet and performer based in Melbourne. She writes and performs poetic works about love, death and the afterlife. She is the author of *Sugar Kane Woman*, a collection of poems about the dreams and hallucinations of exiled Indo-Fijian women.

**Léuli Eshrāghi** [Āpia, Leulumoega, Si'umu, Salelologa, Najafābād, other ancestries; Pronouns ia, ū or any others] is an artist, curator and writer, grateful to live on Kulin Nation territory. In performances, installations, writing and curatorial projects centre on embodied knowledges, ceremonial-political practices, language renewal and Indigenous futures throughout the Great Ocean.



## Words by Shivanjani Lal

*We are mirrors.  
You and Me*

Our stories are echoes from different oceans, different continents. Sharing a history both our own and both lost.

We have locations somewhere in South India, where we might be from... it is possible we could even be from the same village.  
The same gaon.

Our bodies reflecting another time, another India.

*Bloodlines* by Sancintya Simpson is an exhibition which centres the stories of the women of indentured labour, her family like my own were Girmityas, people that were coerced, tricked and chosen by colonial enterprise. Who were taken to far-off lands to do the bidding of Empire.

Our families traversed the Kala Pani [Black Waters] in opposite directions, hers towards Africa, mine towards the Pacific. New lines were created, old ideas were unmade. We worked on cane fields and dreamed of our home, our mother country, India.

Prayer became the language that told us about our home and our exile.  
We lost language, but gained song.

We gave our bodies to the cane fields, so we could feed the Empire sugar.  
We lost our bodies, we lost our sweetness, we lost our home, and we lost our place in history.

*Bloodlines* attempts to memorialise and archive the histories of our communities. Using the stories of women to document grief and reclaim it for a community in trauma. Using the language of miniature painting enlarged and centring characters on the fringes of this traditional style, Simpson remakes our archive and presents our histories in context. Retelling the story from the gaze of the unknown she holds space for the

women in our community. Allowing them to exist, allowing us to exist.

In the video works Simpson uses her and her mother's body's to remind us that these histories have not passed but rather that they still exist, and they exist in their bodies, in our bodies. Across the screens we are met with the gaze of both mother and daughter amongst cane fields. A song echoes through the work, reminding us of both what is lost to us, and what we have held onto to keep going. This action of holding on, through gaze and through song is not about perpetuating an idea of history, rather it is about laying it open and allowing this history to live.

*Bloodlines* by Sancintya Mohini Simpson is a reclamation of history, of allowing a story hidden from view to become visible. It is my story, it is our mother's story, it is the stories of our grandmothers and our great grandmothers. It is not about holding on to pain, although that it is there, it is about witnessing survival, and the strength of holding space for our own.

Thank you my sister, my mirror, for holding space for this story, our story.



They bled, like I bleed, the same



## Jawani by Manisha Anjali

### i. A JAWANI SUCKS ON A WILD FRUIT

I am a bloodstain on a banana leaf.

cut me like a murgi  
skin me like a bakri

cover me with a banana leaf  
a bloodstained cloth  
twigs  
flowers  
seashells  
sindur  
trash  
in one thousand pieces  
in the coolie lines  
in front of the Sun.

I am a bloodstain on a banana leaf.

remember me when you think of salt.

## ii. A JAWANI SUCKS ON A WILD TONGUE

*I did not emaciate myself by monthly fasts by the course of the moon, nor by detailed observances. Owing to my bad deeds in former lives I got a woman's body which is a source of great misery.*

*The woman who despises her husband & thinks about another will be cut at the silk-cotton tree.*

*She who steals vegetables becomes a peacock;  
perfumes, a musk-rat; honey, a gad-fly; flesh, a vulture; salt;  
an ant.*

*She who steals betel, fruits & flowers becomes a forest-monkey.*

*She who steal shoes, grass & cotton are born from sheeps' wombs.*

*She who abandons her own husband & runs after another man becomes a flying-fox, a house-lizard, or a kind of female serpent.*

*The mother of one returning from hell is regarded on the first day as an outcaste woman*

*on the second as the murderer of a Brahmin  
& on the third as a washerwoman.*

- GARUDA PURANA, the holy book

*A cut across the back of her neck four inches into her spinal column  
a cut across her left cheek  
a wound across the back of her right ankle opening the ankle joint*

*a linear bruise across the back six inches long*

*the muscles at the back of the right leg were missing.*

*her two front teeth were missing.*

*her tongue was missing. her hair was on fire.*

*her heart & tongue are creator organs. her hair was on fire.*

*-NOTES FROM THE MURDER OF SUKHRANIA, 9 JUNE 1909*

## iii. A JAWANI SUCKS ON A WILD FLOWER

the flowers of worship

they sway from side to side

her hair

it grows

all the way to her feet

it grows

down the coolie lines

it grows

down the sugar plantations

her hair

it grows

covers the sugar sky

wraps the sugar moon

& the sugar milky way

it grows

around the neck

of the kulumbaar

who unravelled her petticoat

in front of the Sun

the flowers of worship

they sway side to side

her hair

it grows

down down down

to the bottom of the ocean

down down down

to where the bones of her children dance.





With calloused palms and brown skin

## 'O suka na aumaia o Papālagi / Sugarcane brought by Foreigners Léuli Eshrāghi

TOLO ZUCKERROHR

The Deutsche Handels und Plantagen-Gesellschaft established plantations at Vailele, Vaitele and Mulifanua on 'Upolu island in the Sāmoan archipelago in the Gregorian mid-1800s through early 1900s. Vailele, flying waters, Vaitele, large waters, Mulifanua, land's end in gagana Sāmoa. Eating cacao seeds fresh from the pod, smelling freshly harvested vanilla and chewing purple sugarcane after school on the slopes of our ancestral mountain Vaea are childhood memories. But realising that these are altered lands, waters, skies through German and American plantations and ongoing colonial impacts on Sāmoan health, governance and futurity is a later consciousness. If we don't name the fa'ato'aga, plantations, that replaced temple sites dedicated to our Indigenous religion and ancestors as foreign impositions, what kind of erasure are we perpetuating?

Displacing Indigenous polities, territories and kinships with beyond-human relations, Euro-American planters, missionaries and traders devastated lands waters skies misnamed as Queensland (I honour Australian South Sea Islanders descended from huge numbers of relations enslaved from many nearby archipelagos), Fiji (I honour Fijians descended from huge numbers of relations enslaved from across South Asia but particularly the south), New Caledonia (long live Kanaky where Javanese, Tahitian, Berber, Vietnamese histories of plantations and mines are not yet well known), New Britain (Gunantuna and Baining worlds as German then Australian colonial outposts), Philippines (ongoing Spanish then American colonial impacts) as well as Sāmoa (before German and American colonial borders on bodies minds hearts rivers hamlets caves and seas) and Hawai'i (Ka Pae 'Āina Hawai'i before Protestant American waves of invasions through to militourist present and sovereign futures).

KŌ  
SUGARCANE

Turning to the erasure of Indigenous peoples rendered as black across the shores of the Great Ocean, I want to emphasise the divisive and subordinate realities that Western socio-political constructions of hierarchy, access and visibility continue to inflict on us today. Kanaka 'Ōiwi and African American poet and artist Joy Enomoto situates her critique of hesitation or condemnation of the Black Lives Matter movement in Hawai'i in genealogical time as well as late 19th and early 20th century variations in behaviour by the ali'i, chiefs and rulers, and maka'āinana, farmers and workers, as their islands came under American occupation. Joy corrects our understanding of Blackness, as first and foremost in the Great Ocean, associated with incredible power and presence. The lynchings, enslavement, police killings and genocidal raids of Black peoples echo on every shore, then as now. In reminding us that our most sacred genealogical and intellectual texts place us in an ever-expanding Blackness related to all kin, Joy jolts us back from within the target practice of the racist conception of ranked hierarchy made up by Europeans in a faraway place.

Pō, the deep rich Blackness found at the bottom of the sea and from which all life begins. Pō is the night and the realm of the gods. Mai ka pō mai – of divine origin. One of Maui's fiercest chiefs, Kahekili, tattooed half of his body black just like his namesake the god of Thunder. Pā'ele kūlani – the chiefly blackening. Pele is the chiefess of both sacred darkness and sacred light – 'O Pele ia ali'i o Hawai'i, he ali'i no la'a uli, no la'a kea. We did not begin by fearing Blackness, but by revering its power, its sacredness, and its importance to our origins and our strength.

Why and how are we coloured in these ways? How much have we been whitewashed by Euro-American desires to remove us when seen as stains, with 'Polynesians' closest, 'salvageable', to whiteness and desirability, only to also be, as with all of us Indigenous peoples of the Great Ocean, too dark, too black, 'Melanesian', too exotic, too erotic, too loud, too sensual, too much, too small, 'Micronesian', for Western understanding. Are we who have been racialised as brown and black all around the world, as mixed and native, not all descended from the same ancestral beginnings in Blackness-from-which-comes-all-creation too? The efficiency of settler coloniality and its desires for subjugation, destruction and ever-expanding consumption are incredibly contingent on anti-blackness as the foundational wound meant to separate us from each other, from our inherited kinships and genealogical temporalities.

*1 Joy Enomoto, 2017, "Where will you be? Why Black Lives Matter in the Hawaiian Kingdom", on Ke Ka'upu Hehi 'Ale, 1 February 2017, accessed March 2017, <https://hehiale.wordpress.com/2017/02/01/where-will-you-be-why-black-lives-matter-in-the-hawaiian-kingdom/>*

CAÑA DE AZÚCAR  
CANNE À SUCRE

Recently I visited northern Cuba, whose name is disputed between Taíno terms cubao, abundant fertile land, coabana, great place, and ciba, cave/stone/mountain. Aware of nearby Ayiti/Quisqueya (Haiti, Dominican Republic) and Boriquén (Puerto Rico), I was humbled to tread in this land where Columbus first arrived in Taíno territory in Gregorian 1492, bringing colossal genocidal campaigns first to their bodies, lands, waters, skies, histories, knowledges, and then onward to us everywhere else. 'Ulu, breadfruit, was widely spread by British colonisers as a staple food for enslaved Africans from myriad originating Nations, languages, bloodlines, particularly in the Taíno and Arawak peoples' islands, later named Antilles or Caribbean. 'Ulu is close kin to many of us Indigenous peoples of the Great Ocean. As are talo, taro, niu, coconut, and many other medicinal and ceremonial plants.

Foregoing the American embargo against Communist Cuba, we travelled past plantations of caña de azúcar, sugarcane, piña, pineapple, coco, coconut, café, coffee, and more. That these places resembled all those I've lived and visited in the Great Ocean is an understatement. There is a darkness to plantations that scar lands waters skies in the same economic, spiritual and corporal extraction wherever they manifest by Euro-American desire on this planet. There is a warm knowing across tropical states of thunder, lightning, rain, monsoon, in the times of cyclone/typhoon/hurricane. I think of the incredible writers who despite the centuries of enforced debt repayment by succeeding French state structures against Toussaint L'Ouverture and his heirs, have thrived in Haiti and in diaspora in Montréal, Paris and elsewhere. Of the impoverishment of land and life expectancy due to mammoth structural anti-blackness in and around the plantations in these places, in these islands dense with trauma, memory, anguish and yearning for comfort, love, joy.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

गाना  
SUIKERRIET

Subverting the race hierarchy embedded in the Rajput miniature painting genre in North India, Sancintya depicts the mistreatment of these women on the sugarcane plantations they were sent to, indicting years of shame, intergenerational trauma and cultural loss that heavily impact South Asian indenture diaspora communities today. Sancintya's recent exhibition at Blak Dot was a significant moment for South Asian diasporic artists, the most recent of many who are at home in this global Indigenous contemporary art gallery in unceded Wurundjeri Country. Manisha Anjali and Shivanjani Lal are witnesses to their Indian-Fijian histories and further diaspora into Australia, marking indenture connections as well as their experiences as peoples of the Great Ocean too.

In gagana Sāmoa, you say 'Apu Initia for cashew from India.

In gagana Sāmoa, you say Makerita for marigold.

In gagana Sāmoa, you say 'Avapui for wild ginger.

In gagana Sāmoa, you say Pua Fiti for frangipani from Viti.

In gagana Sāmoa, you say Fau for beach hibiscus.

In gagana Sāmoa, you say Teuila for red ginger.

We burn fire votives to the ancestors known and not-yet-known, to the chosen and blood lines, encased in barkcloth, at dawn and dusk, arranging makerita in circles with 'avapui, teuila and pua fiti.

We dip in vaitele, vailele, stand on mulifanua, balming our hands and feet in moegalo, lemongrass, moso'oi, ylang ylang, lega, cooked turmeric.



## **Metro Arts**

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Metro Arts and the artist acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal peoples, as the custodians of this land, recognising their connection to land, waters and community. We honour the story-telling and art-making at the heart of First Nation's cultures, and the enrichment it gives to the lives of all Australians. Always was, Always will be.

*Bloodlines was commissioned and developed through Next Wave's Kickstart Helix program for Next Wave Festival 2018.*



*Dedicated to a better Brisbane*



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