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## From one end to the other

**Prakash Patel's warehouse studio is situated by the Whanganui River. Francesca Emms visited the painter and came away a little starstruck.**

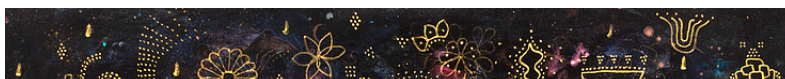
Prakash Patel is attracted to infinity. 'A thing I'm fascinated with is how you can look up in space and it goes on and on. The same thing happens when you look through a microscope and you go into things. There's actually no point where it ends, you know? The smallest particle is really mysterious because it's almost like it's going back into infinity again. So, it's like an outwards, and inwards. It's the same thing.'



A Whanganui boy, born and bred, Prakash grew up in Castlecliff. At 17 he moved away to study art, and when he returned to the river city his first studio was next to his mum and dad's fruit shop. Then he entered the Whanganui Art Review, and won. (He's won it three more times since). 'That was really weird,' he says. 'I felt really self-conscious because I didn't know the art scene, I didn't know anyone. Pretty much any time I enter, or come to an opening, I feel the same way. I just don't feel like I fit in.' It's something Prakash has been struggling with his whole life. 'I've always felt a bit out of place, just in general.'

Prakash's parents emigrated from India before he was born. He's been to visit a number of times, twice with support from Creative New Zealand. In 2006 he was awarded an artist's residency at the Sanskriti Kendra Campus on the outskirts of New Delhi. More recently he visited the State of Gujarat, near his family's ancestral origins, to study the paintings and artistic processes of the indigenous Warli people. **Waikato**

*Afterlife*, recently on display at Sarjeant Gallery as part of the Patillo Whanganui Arts Review, is a large work of fluorescent pinks and blues, and bright dots of gold on black. 'I use iridescent paint so it plays with the light a bit. I quite like that. I use glitter but I don't deliberately place it in spots, I just add it to things so that when you switch the lights, and when it's dark, there's a little pinprick of light coming from the painting. So it's like you're looking out to space.'





Prakash Patel, *Afterlife*, acrylic on canvas. Image courtesy of Sargeant Gallery, Whanganui.

The painting makes me think of dreams and space and journeys and magic and, yes, what happens when we die. 'I titled it *Afterlife*, because I recently had someone who I knew die,' says Prakash. 'It's almost about when you die, you don't really. It's not like it's the end, you just transform. So I'm thinking along those lines and how we're made up of particles and atoms.'

Prakash thinks some of his artistic ability was passed down from his dad. 'In the back of the shop he'd doodle away on bits of paper and he was actually quite good at drawing portraits. He was just copying pictures from the newspaper but he was really good, he was talented.' From his Hindu mother he got a respect for spirituality. 'I would say I'm not religious, but in a way I like religion. Religion teaches people a lot about respecting others, and respecting life, and being thankful for everything. There's something about painting that has that kind of spiritual aspect. The act of painting becomes almost like praying, or a devotion to God.'

Prakash describes his painting process as a journey without a destination. 'But something happens after a while where you start to feel like the planets are lining up and everything starts to make sense. I just feel whole and everything's connected. That's what I like. I'm always searching for that moment. When everything makes sense, and it's connected, and there's a holistic feeling.'

*Afterlife* was exhibited as part of the Patillo Whanganui Arts Review, at the Sarjeant Gallery.

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