



Artcore



HOLI HAI!



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**UNIVERSITY OF
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Format





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HOLI HAI EXHIBITION
May 2023





Artcore International Residencies

In 2018, Artcore made a decision to provide a special opportunity for artists in the UK to work and learn together with artists from different countries. We wanted to encourage a cultural exchange where artists could collaborate and share their experiences internationally. The first residency took place in January 2019, during the lively and colorful kite festival of Uttarayan/Utran in India. This residency was a great success and inspired us to plan more residencies, specifically during festivals when people and communities gather to celebrate their traditions and culture. These festivals blur the lines between art and craft, creating a vibrant and inclusive atmosphere. As we have been part of such an environment, we have personally experienced the joy of people coming together, the beauty of ancient traditions, the excitement of costumes, and the delicious food that brings everyone closer.

Therefore, we planned two more residencies: one during the spring festival of Holi in India in March 2023, and another during the Maiwoche festival in Osnabruck, Germany (Derby's twin city) in May of the same year.

All of these endeavours reflect Artcore's core values and are deeply embedded in our culture. We strive to infuse the spirit of togetherness into everything we do.

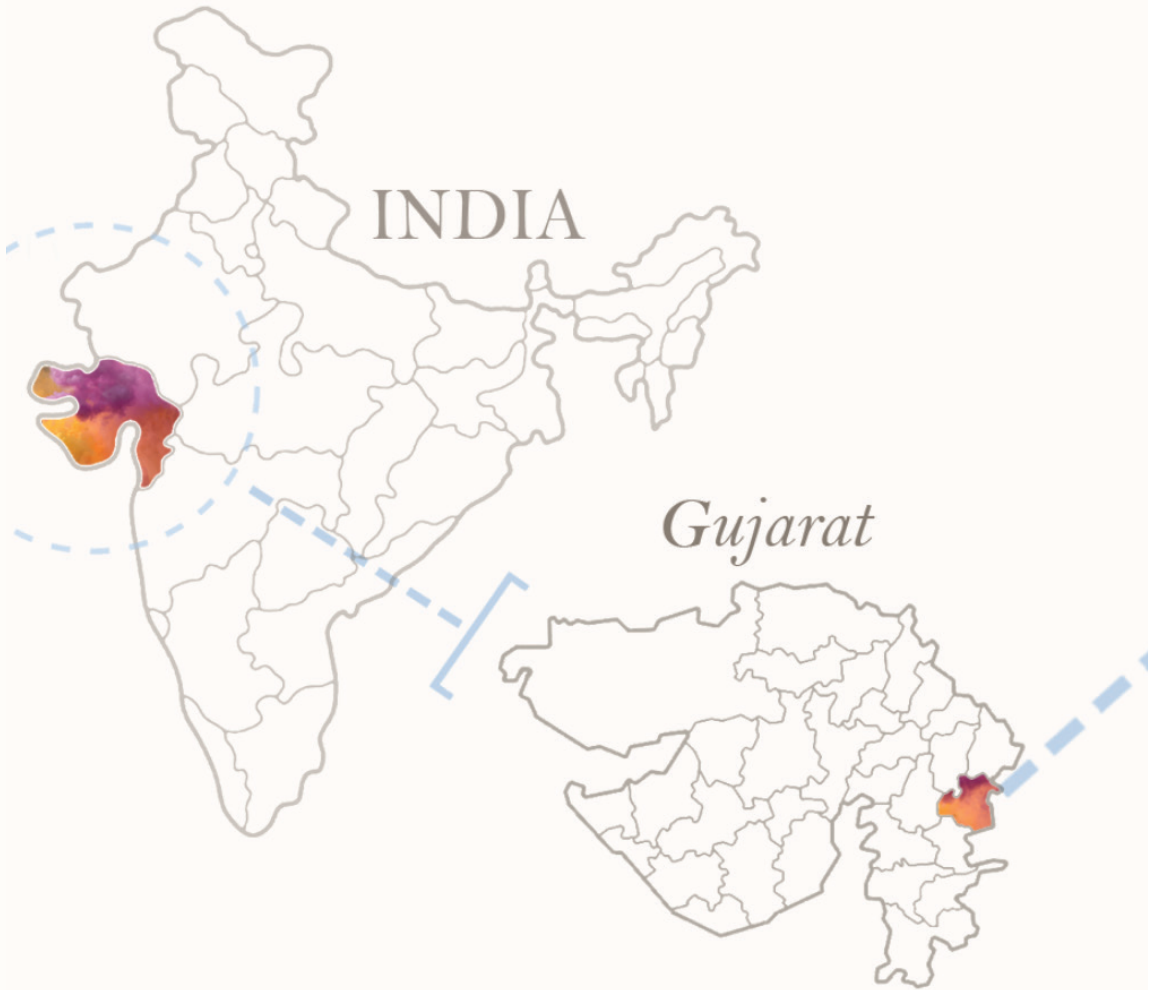
At Artcore, we are dedicated to providing emerging and talented artists with the opportunity to travel, explore, and meet artists from diverse cultures. Through these experiences, we aim to inspire them to create artwork that is influenced by the visual richness they encounter and the emotions they feel.

Warm Regards,
Ruchita and Zahir Shaikh
CEO & Artistic Director
Artcore



Holi Hai!

The Holi Hai! Residency was held in India and the UK in the first half of 2023. The partnership between Artcore and FORMAT International Photography Festival supported the creative collaboration and exchange of 2 UK artists and 1 Indian artist working in lens-based and related media. The selected artists undertook the two-week residency in India, before travelling to Derby, to install the exhibition here in May 2023.

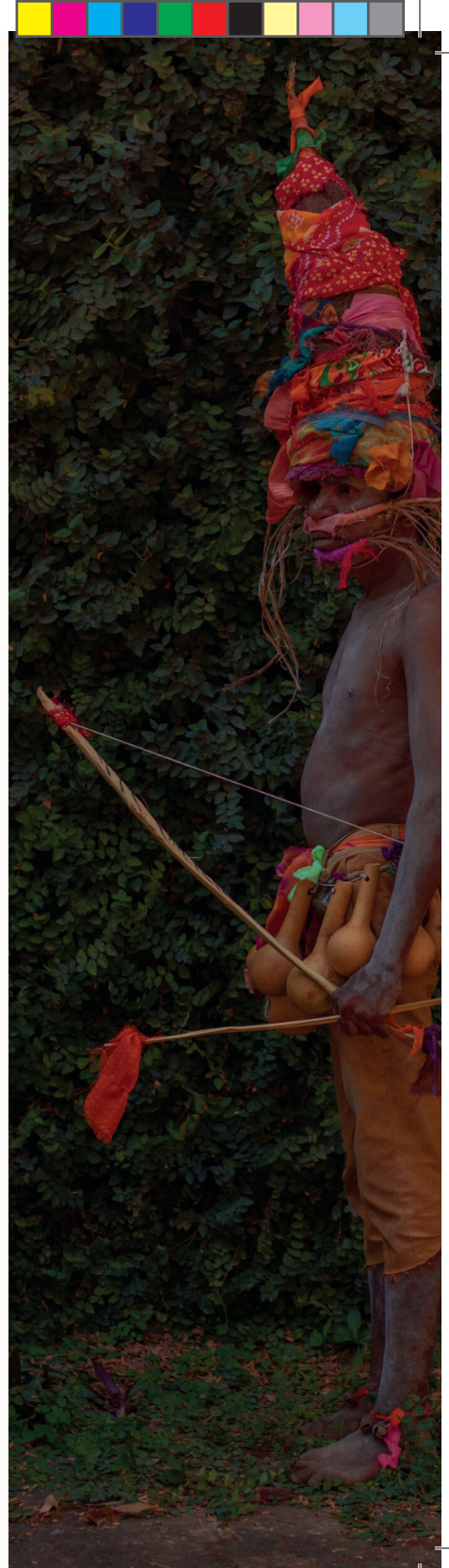


The Holi Hai! Residency was held in the picturesque Chhota Udepur district of the western-most state of Gujarat in India. This area is the home of the vast indigenous community of Rathwa tribals, where Holi is their most important festival and is celebrated across their villages for almost ten days. It offered amazing opportunities to create lens-based artworks.



The community celebrates the festival through numerous large and small fairs where tribal families, dressed in their best clothes and jewellery congregate to enjoy themselves; participating in community song and dance, playing the flute, shopping, eating from food stalls and so on. The villagers reach the fair, almost dancing their way from their village; it is a sight that has to be seen to be believed! However, with the entry of technology in tribal areas, some of the traditional tribal ways of life are giving in to the ways of the urban mainstream.

Our Residency artists visited rural fairs, attended the community lighting of the Holika fire, met local residents and were invited to their homes where they saw Pithora wall paintings, visited the Museum at the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, interacted with contemporary Indian artists at the Art School at M S University of Baroda, celebrated the urban version of Holi-Dhuleti by greeting each other with coloured powders, and wandered around the 15th century UNESCO World Heritage Site of Champaner-Pavagadh, in the Rathwa neighbourhood.





The Festival of Holi, celebrated joyously across India, marks the end of winter and the arrival of spring – a happy re-birth.

Today, the walls of the Artcore Gallery come alive with the colours and crowds, drums and dances, sounds and songs, bright sunlight and clear night skies of the Holi Festival in India!



Ancient Customs seen through a Modern Lens

It is always fun working with the Artcore team. It was some 7-8 years back that we sat amongst the daffodils one cool April evening and discussed art projects for the future. Zahir was keen to bring the garba to the open plaza of Derby. Sure, I said and in the September of 2018, we did just that!

Next, it was Uttarayan and we took British artists to fly kites in the Indian skies. Creating an art project around the ancient festival of Holi celebrated by tribal and mainstream communities, followed almost naturally.

And so here we are with what three British and one Indian artist produced after an exhilarating Residency, staying in the tribal hinterland, following the uncertain ritual/fair schedules of when it would start and in which village. And I must say, it is quite considerable.

The journey begins with an in-depth interview of contemporary artist-photographer Prof. Jyoti Bhatt, who has photographed the region and its people and fairs in the 1970s-80s, goes back to the ancient wall painting tradition of Baba Pithoro, whom the Rathwa tribal community of this area worships, and moves ahead into the present as these communities celebrate the burning of Holika on the full moon night in the month of Phagun according to the Hindu calendar, a signal for the various fairs to begin in the villages across that district.



While tipping its hat to the three Britishers walking these ancient landscape, Holika decided to bring in some rain on that evening (it never rains here in March!), hoping to make them feel a bit at home! I hope you enjoy this exhibition as much as the Artcore team enjoyed putting it all together!

Sandhya Bordewekar Gajjar
Art Consultant and Curator





Meet the Artists

Nikki Culley



Manchester- based artist Nikki Culley is film photographer and black & white darkroom printer. Her main interest in photography is creative storytelling and the chemical methods and physicality of making photographs. Nikki enjoys black and white darkroom printing where she is able to experiment with the manual process of developing each photography outcome. Most of her work holds themes of love, loss and discovery. Culley is proficient in portraits, landscape and still life photography.



Masood Sarwer

Masood Sarwer is an Indian-born visual artist and documentary photographer. He focuses on the ecological, social, and contemporary issues of the Murshidabad district region where he grew up, highlighting the tensions surrounding identity, gender, human rights, and climate emergency. Sarwer has won several prestigious awards, including the Global Prize “Photography 4 Humanity” in 2022 and a scholarship from VII Academy. His work has been exhibited at the United Nations General Assembly gallery in New York and the “Right Here, Right Now Global Climate Summit” at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Huw Davies



Huw Davies is a filmmaker, photographer and curator. His work has included commissions for many national and international agencies and broadcasters and shown at festivals in competition in over 30 countries. He co-founded the Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival (BFMAF) and was its inaugural Artistic Director from 2004 – 2009. Over three decades he has held teaching, research and senior leadership positions at several universities in the UK, USA and China and is currently Professor of Lens Media at the University of Derby.

Phil Basi



Philip Ranjit Basi is a multi-award winning Series Producer /Director with thirty plus years of professional works centred around music, arts, documentary, factual, and entertainment production. Having worked for both ITV & the BBC, he has been responsible for thousands of hours of published TV from across the world. He is currently Programme Leader in Media Production at the University of Derby.



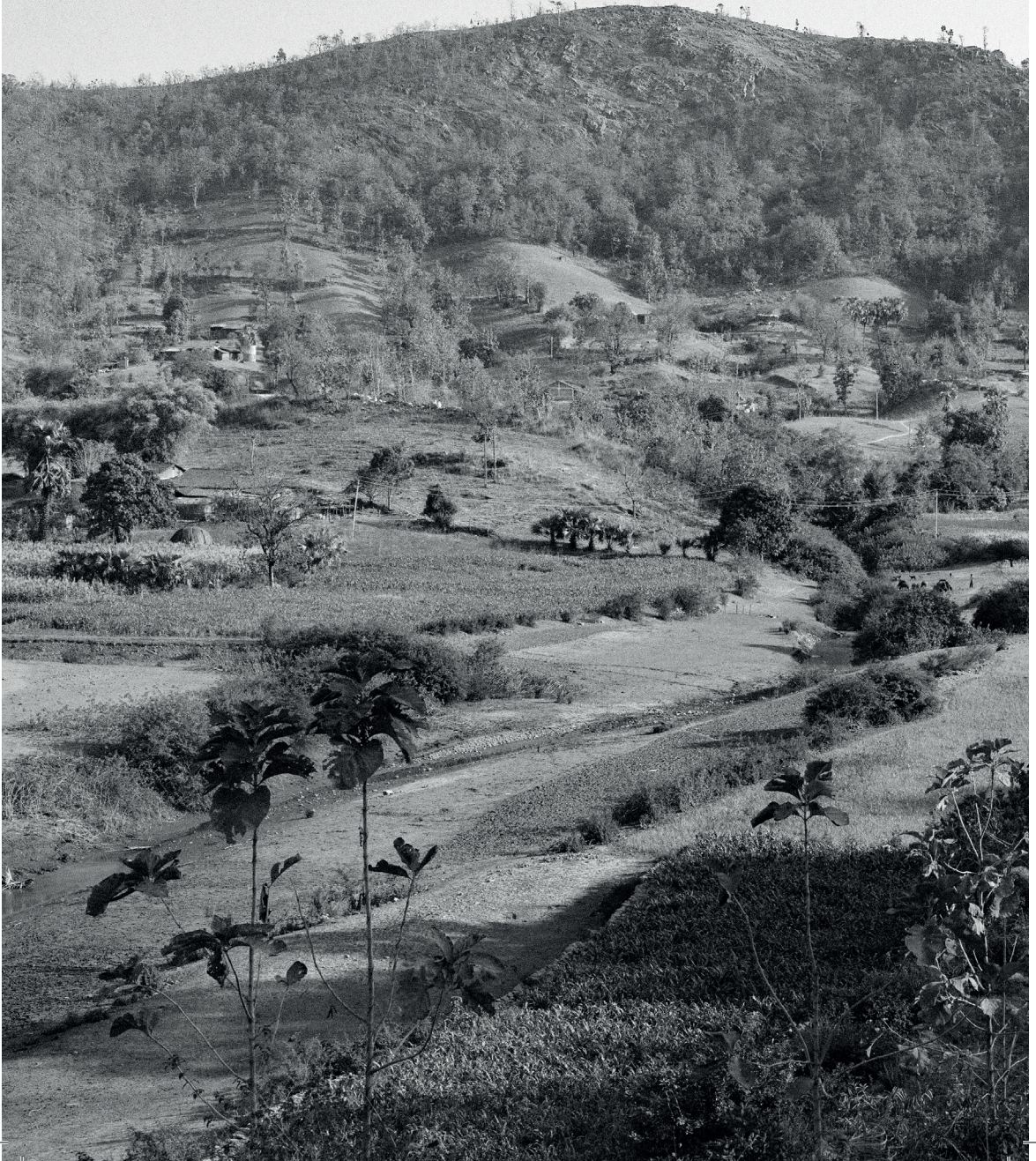
Nikki Culley

Holi Land

After a two and a half week residency in rural Gujarat, and seeing so many things, it was the incredible landscape that stayed with me the most. The long solitary roads were dotted with mango trees, palash blossom and palms, and seemed to go on forever, winding through the land, as we spent time during the days and evenings in search of photographs. The narrow tarmac tracks weaved for miles, in and out of large areas of forest with floors littered by huge crumbling ochre leaves from the previous season, before unexpectedly giving way to vast open valleys of crop fields and Rathwa dwellings backed by hazy distant ridges.

The land, I came to understand, is also central to the culture and daily life of the Rathwa tribal communities. It is used for farming which is traditionally relied on to make a living and is also at the heart of rituals and creative practices that centre around encouraging healthy soil, good seasonal weather and a prosperous crop.









These photographs I made share the story of the Holi celebrations within the Rathwa tribal communities in remote communities in rural Gujarat. There are some parallels to the celebrations in the cities, with the renowned wet and dry festival, street parties and throwing of brightly coloured powders. We headed out to take photographs during golden hour one evening, spotted by two local people leading the way on a motorbike, and came across a road block of a large group of noisy Rathwa boys in the middle of an open landscape, celebrating Holi! with brightly coloured powders all over their faces, hands and clothes.







But in these rural areas outside of the cities, the Rathwa Holi! festivals are not organised events, with loud speakers, organised activities and street parties. They are an array of market stalls set up on Rathwa land and in fields, selling rafts of brightly coloured decorations, balloons and fabrics. There are endless, towering lines of harvested bamboo sticks being cut to size for eating and crushed ice lollies dipped in bright juices sold from wooden carts. And there are local street performers wearing hand-made tribal headdresses made from rough twisted fabrics with bells and other adornments worn on the body.





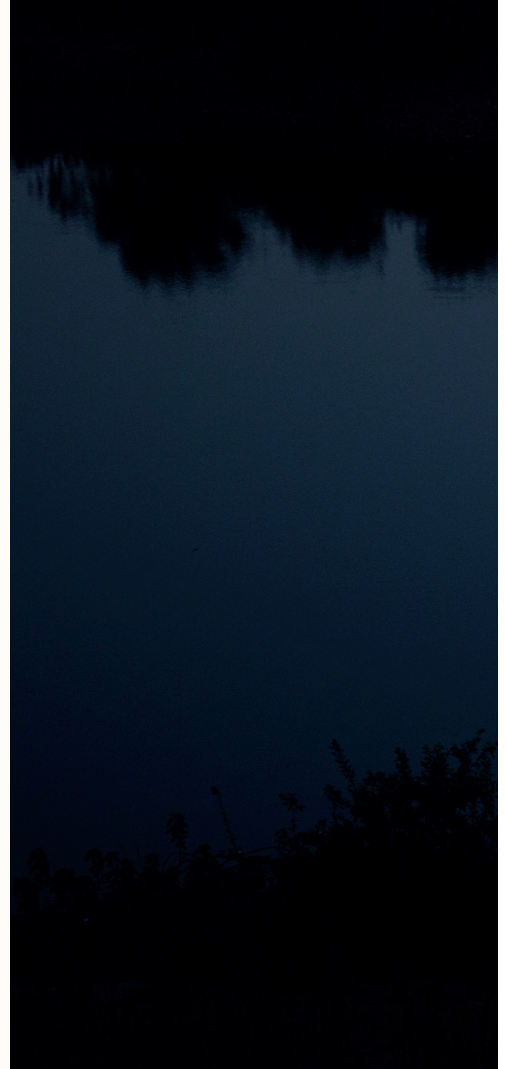


Masood Sarwer

Chorus: a whisper to the land

The concept of place is multifaceted, encompassing both our presence and disappearance, with a divide separating the two. Within this divide, undocumented threads of transition intertwine, stitching together the memory of identity.

For the Rathwa tribe, inward migration is a solitary journey seeking refuge from the erosion of their basic sense of identity caused by the onslaught of modernity. As the importance of ancestral knowledge is challenged and forgotten, uncertainty plagues their once-story-filled traditional lands.









Post-independence India has seen indigenous communities continually struggling against encroachment on their land, water, forest, language, culture, and identity. The Rathwa tribe, one of Gujarat's most populous tribes, faces thousands of challenges to preserve their distinct culture, language, tradition, and way of life.

While they have transitioned from a history of hunter-gatherers to farming and rural occupations, the Rathwa people still try to hold on to their old traditions amidst modernity. Festivals remain the only gateways to honour their traditions and cultures through the gaze of identity.



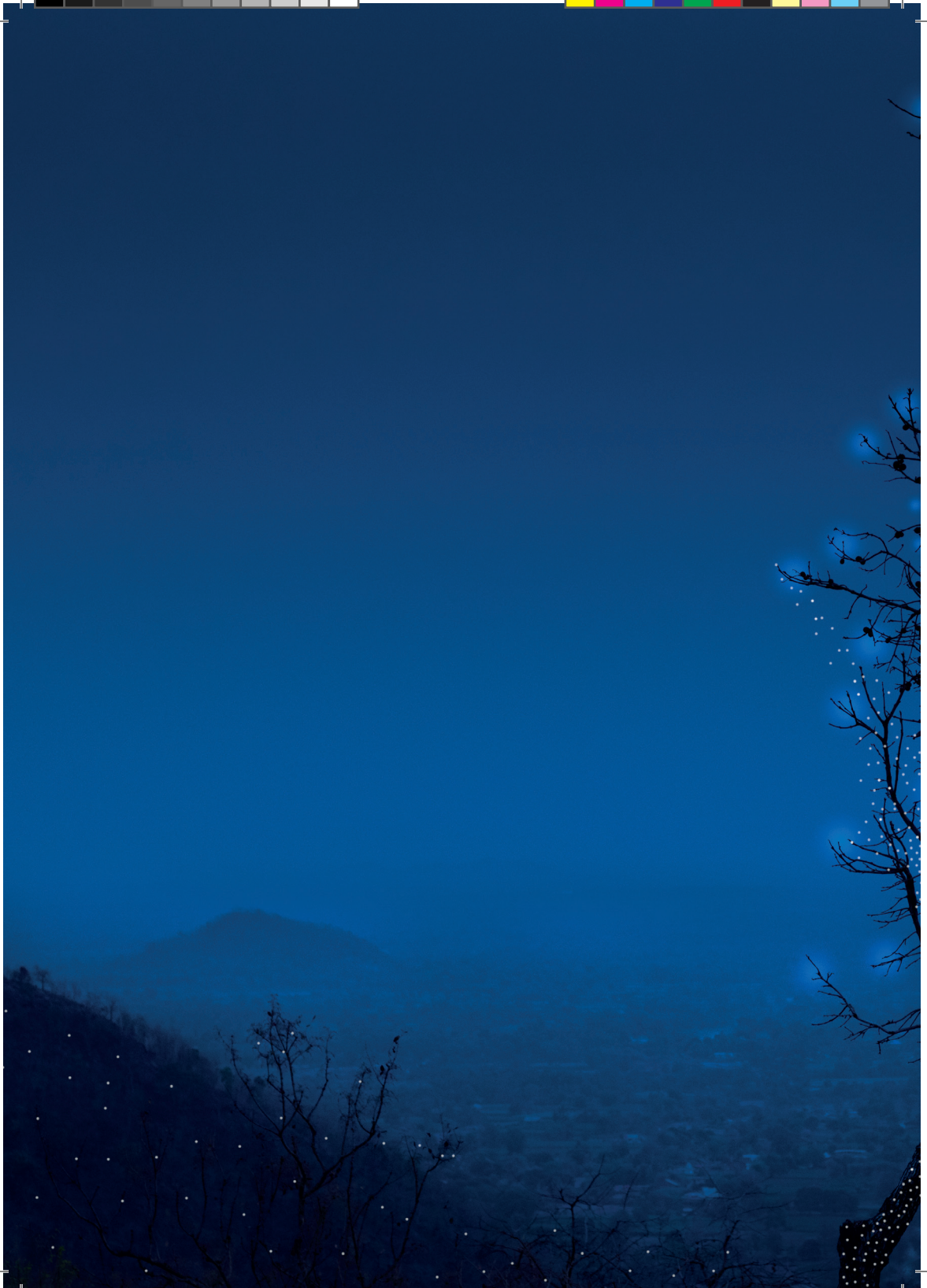
This struggle for agency and acceptance in modern society erases and alters the Rathwa tribe's identity perpetually, with some voices rising as others fade away. The present times are regenerative spaces of creation and renewal, but as the community experiences a loss of sacred connection to the earth, ancestral oral stories risk being lost forever.





The work intends to preserve the essence of these stories, weaving through the traditions, cultures, and identity of the Rathwa people. By unearthing the threads of collective reimagining of human tales and re-centering present land stories, it hopes to transcend borders, boundaries, and binaries.

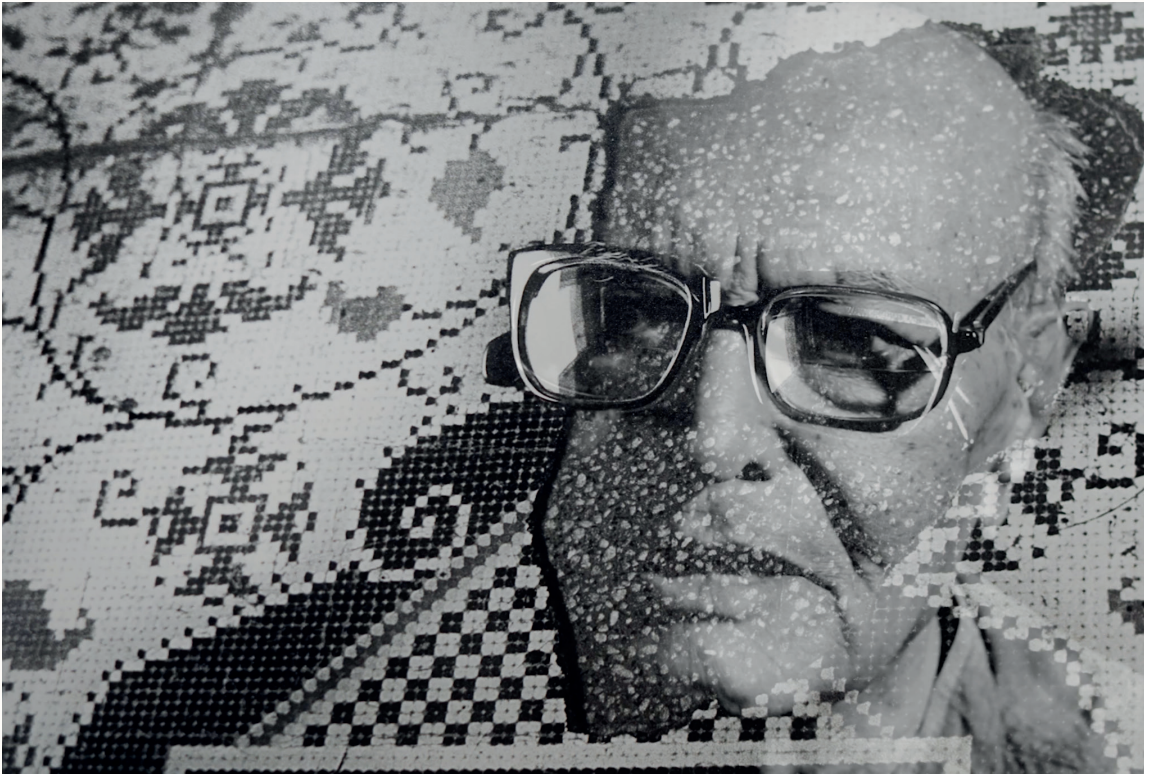








The cartilage of indigenous history is both precious and perishable, with millions of people losing their ancestral narratives in translation and displacement. The remaining punctuated and fractured stories are passed down through generations, but as the generation crosses the river again, these stories risk being lost forever.



LAKHARO OF LIGHT

(16 Mins, 2023)

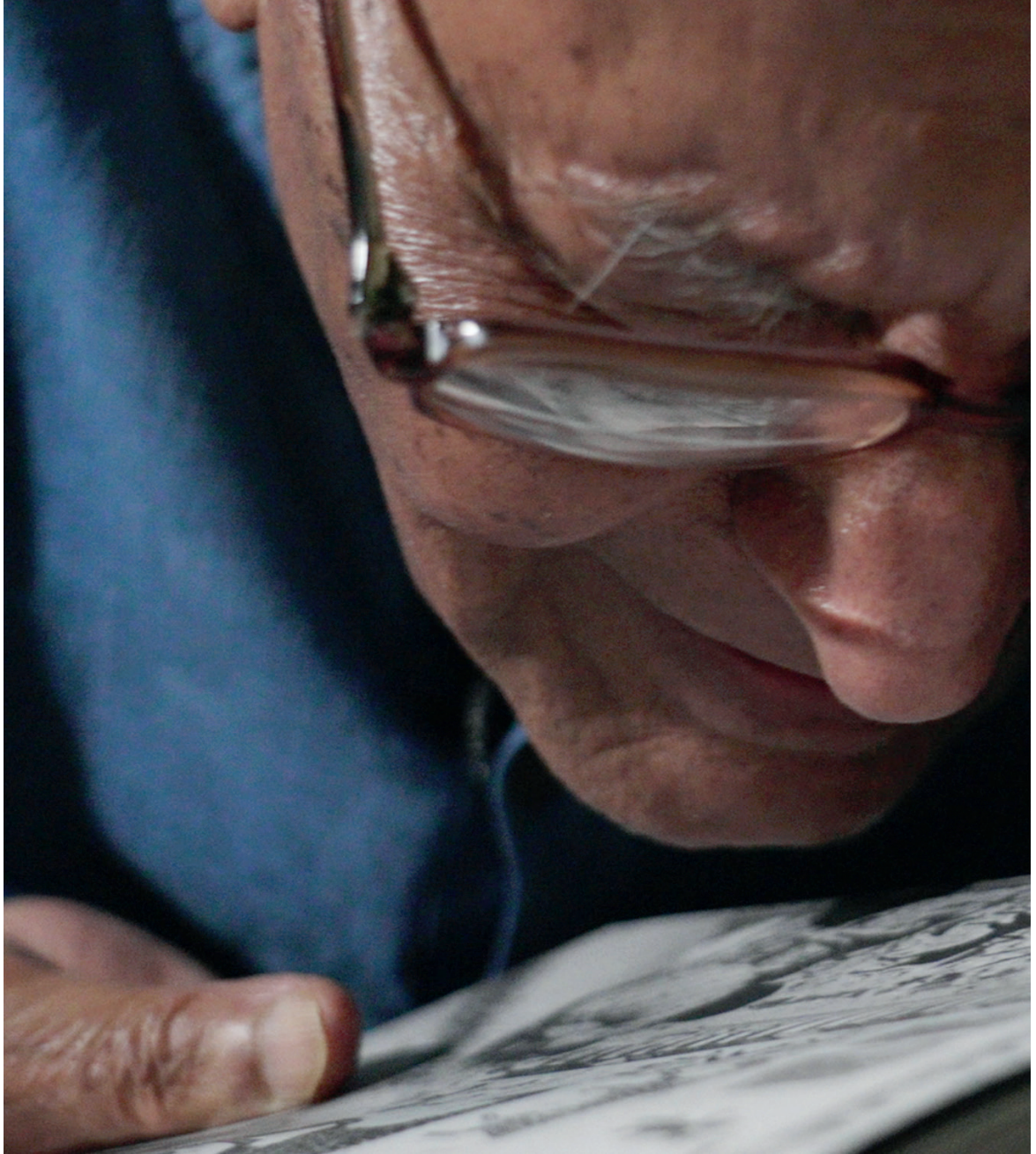
A Film by HUW DAVIES & PHILIP RANJIT BASI



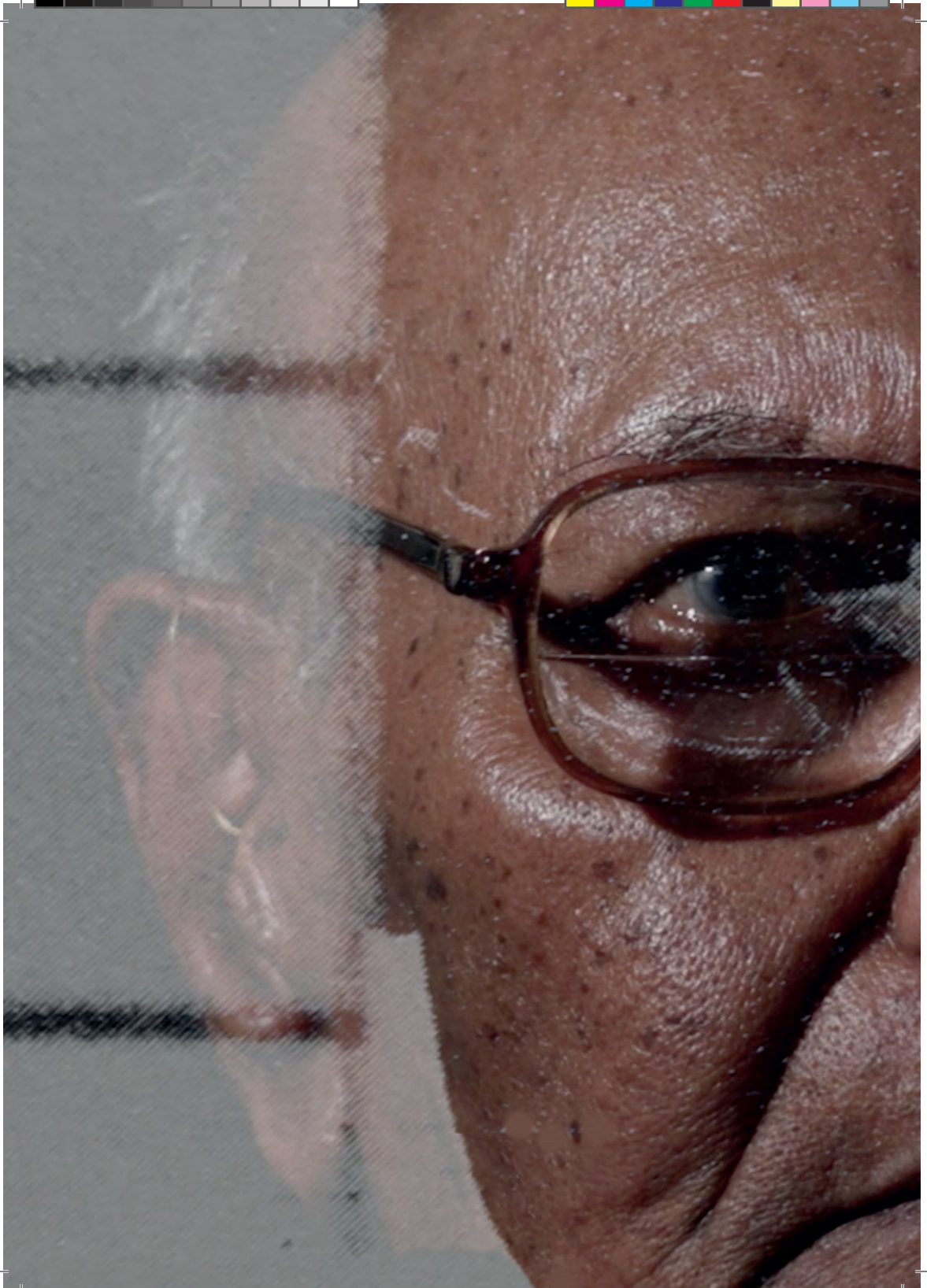
A film portrait of the renowned Indian artist and photographer Jyoti Bhatt. Since the mid 1950's Bhatt has documented the rural communities of Chota Udepur in the State of Gujarat, Northwest India. This work has provided the inspiration for his painting and printmaking, as well as creating a unique record of the changing traditions and indigenous lifestyles which are rapidly giving way to the urban mainstream. Now in his late 80's and with his eyesight failing, Bhatt reflects through his sketch books and contact prints to comment on his eclectic practice and how that fits into the shifting nature of the photographic medium.

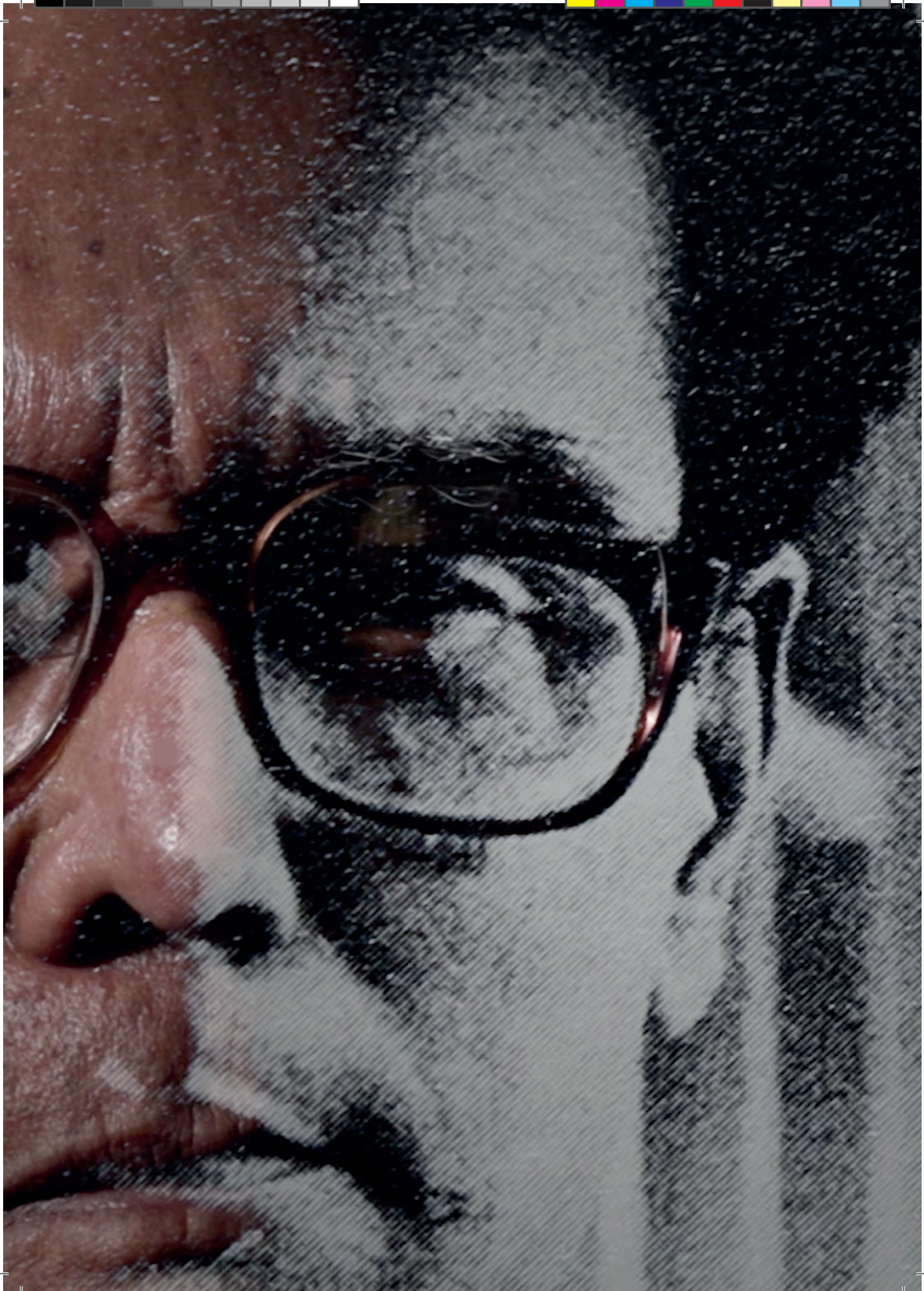
Set against the background of the Holi Hai festival celebrations, the film explores the value of the archive, ownership in terms of access and representation, and the nature of legacy. The film coincides with a major retrospective of Jyoti Bhatt's work at the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) in Bengaluru and the publishing of a monograph 'Time & Time Again'. 'LakharooofLight' was produced as part of an international residency in Chota Udepur, Gujarat, India in March 2023. It was organised by Artcore in collaboration with FORMAT 23 and the University of Derby.













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