

stuff

Areez Katki on queerness across histories and cultures

Andre Chumko, March 2021



Areez Katki has always had a fascination with the implicit, coded lines of communication between queer artists across history and cultures.

Building on those codes with his first solo show in Wellington, *History reserves but a few lines for you* explores ideas of queer intimacy, craft traditions and the complexities of the migratory experience through a series of embroidered textile-based works.

“It comes back to the title – it’s quite a mouthful, but it’s a direct quote taken from a translation of a poem by [Egyptiot Greek poet] Constantine Peter Cavafy,” the Pōneke-based queer artist said.

Written in 1918, *Caesarion* was gifted to a queer friend of Cavafy’s. Katki drew parallels in Cavafy’s “looking back” to his Grecian homeland, having grown up in Alexandria, with his own life. Katki, who now lives in New Zealand, was born into a Persian Zoroastrian family in India.

“Looking for homeland isn’t necessarily about national identity,” Katki said. “It [can be] more to do with queer identity.”



The literary references speak to Katki's recent completion of a Master of Creative Writing from Victoria University of Wellington's International Institute of Modern Letters.

But Katki's work also references queer artists like Ocean Vuong and David Hockney, the latter of which referenced Cavafy's poem in his own art.

"[I'm a] chink in a long chain of queer artists who have referenced previous generations," Katki said.

His new exhibition brings together various "homo-sensual" work of his which has been on display in previous shows around Aotearoa, alongside new work.

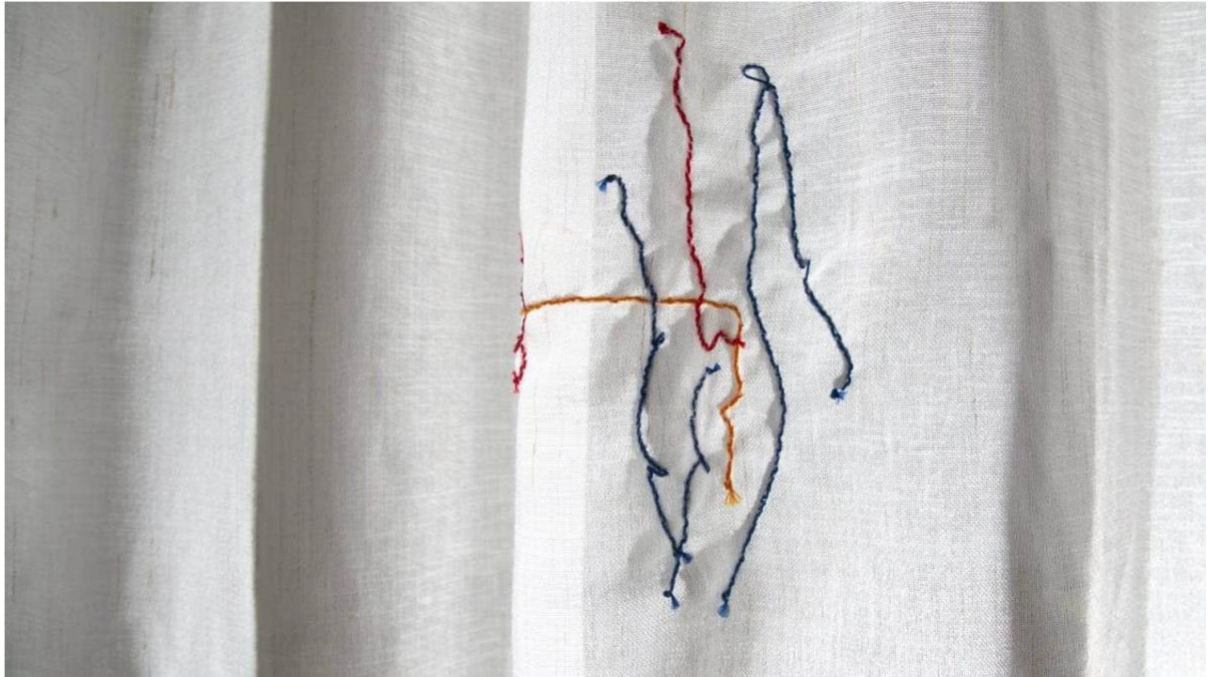
The first piece visitors will experience is a crack on the ground that's been filled with glass beads which Katki inherited from his great-grandmother.

Like the beads, many of the aspects of the show have been passed down – the handkerchiefs, the embroidery techniques, again weaving the inter-generational notion through the space.

Embroidered on the textiles are various queer scenes, including nude bodies and body parts, as well as imprints of "memories" of objects and people.

"Cloth itself is very well-known for retaining memory – stains, creases, marks, tears, punctures ... [these works] bring forth to the surface queer moments in history ... Moments of queer history often happen in places that are invisible from the public eye," Katki said.

Textiles, Katki says, see the most intimate parts of life – "they're the closest thing to human skin".



“There’s a sensuality that comes from looking at a textile that was once touched and intervened by the human hand, and considering how it was handled or folded or held against the body.”

“The queer narrative and identity often gets pushed aside or marginalised in wider hetero-patriarchal media. What I wanted to do was ... explore the gentler, more intimate and domestic aspects of queer life.”