Strange Encounters

An Investigation of Graphic Design-produced Artifacts that Discuss Hybrid Embodiment of Indo-Canadian Identity.

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Abstract

Postmodernism has been important in acknowledging the many forms of "otherness" that emerge from differences in subjectivity, gender, race, class, temporal and spatial geographic location and dislocation. This has become a topic of interest among graphic designers as they explore design's relationship with culture. This thesis explores the use of graphic design to produce visual artifacts that discuss hybrid embodiment of Indo-Canadian identity. Cultural identities are represented as competing against one another, which results in recognizing one another as strangers. Multiculturalism and the migrant perspective are always constructed by proximity between strangers. Using hybridity, Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of a "third space" identifies a metaphor for the space in which cultures meet. Where communication, negotiation, and translation bridge societies, a new space emerges. This thesis employs the interventions of "the third space" to negotiate a meeting space with strangers. The project prepared during this thesis, *The Avatars*, represents an alternative way of seeing migrant perceptions of displacement, temporality and belonging.

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Introduction

This thesis, "Strange Encounters,"[1] examines the relationship between graphic design and proximity between strangers. The concept of "strange encounters" denotes the relationship between strangers, embodiment[2] and community. The purpose of this thesis is to explore graphic design in order to produce visual artifacts that discuss hybrid embodiment of Indo-Canadian identity. By articulating and enunciating cultural hybridity, this project aims to comprehend the rhetoric of the evolving cultural identities of multiculturalism and migrant experiences.

The politics of cultural identity is constantly debated, and cultural identification is a factor of representation. In his article "In and Around: Culture of Design and Design of Cultures Part I," Andrew Blauvelt cites French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who states that images and symbols for representational identification cannot be isolated from images and symbols of the represented identity.[3] The ways in which culture is represented conditions how it is perceived. This dilemma of cultural displacement is a result of contestation that happens between the predefined cultural identity and that of the new environment.

This thesis is an opportunity to engage critically with complex ideas of identity through the practice of graphic design. If cultural identity is a form of representation, how can graphic design contemplate its role in contributing to cultural identity? How can one recognize the importance of cultural motifs, patterns, images and icons of

1. The title is taken from Sara Ahmed's book: *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality,* which has been a great source for this thesis project.

2. Sara Ahmed, *Stranger Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 47. The experience of embodiment is always already the social experience of dwelling with other bodies: "To be embodied is to be capable of being affected by other bodies."

3. Andrew Blauvelt, "In and Around: Cultures of Design and the Design of Cultures Part I," *Emigre* 32 (1994), accessed August 2, 2014, http://www.emigre.com/Editorial.php?sect=1&id=23.

a particular culture within a multicultural society? In today's multicultural society, different heritages are adapted and borrowed. Indian images—of Hindu gods (Fig. 1), patterns and *Devanagari* fonts (Fig. 2)—have been appropriated in western countries. Transferring visual vernaculars such as artifacts, styles and traditions across cultures requires adaptation to the new environment. How can a graphic designer translate cultural vernacular across many cultures as a way to negotiate representation of a meeting space between strangers?

Fig.1 Designer Unknown, Advertisement for *Free Solstice Celebration* poster, Rockland, Maine, 2014

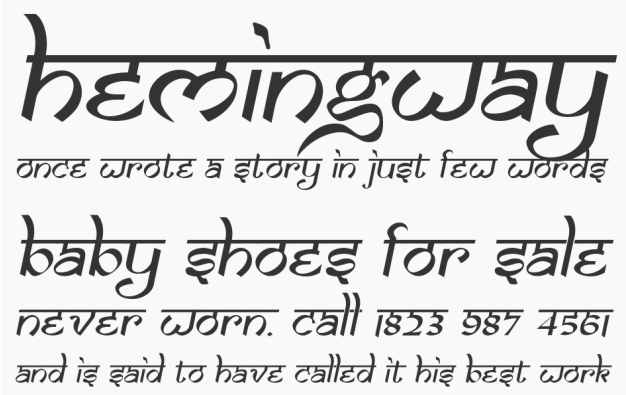

Fig. 2 Titivillus Foundry, *Samarkan* font is a decorative font that employs the visual language of Devanagari letters, Montreal Quebec, 1993

Design's global engagement continues to focus largely on facilitating the flow of images and consumer goods across continents, without consideration of larger political and social effects. By communicating with different cultures and subcultures, designers and corporations expand their audience base by marketing messages to a specific regional or ethnic groups. How can graphic design contribute to different ethnic cultures in multiculturalism without being used solely for corporate exploitation? This thesis examines how design, as a medium, attempts to establish relationships with individuals with whom it seeks to collaborate—populations that are culturally others or strangers.

A Concern for Graphic Design in Multiculturalism

Changing Nature of Graphic Design Practice

The way in which graphic designers work is changing. Owing to the information revolution's influence, Katherine McCoy states in her essay, "Graphic Design in a Multicultural World," that the advancement of technology allows designers to communicate with subcultures.[4] This multicultural society is a mosaic, with its own set of values. In highlighting the evaluation of post-modernism, Jeff Keedy's essay "Zombie Modernism" states that postmodernism exercises a positive influence, as it concerns difference, the difficulties of communication, the complexity and nuances of interests, cultures, places and the like.[5] Keedy points to David Harvey's statement that post-modernism has been particularly important in "acknowledging the multiple forms of otherness as they emerge from differences in subjectivity, gender, race, class, temporal and spatial geographic locations and dislocations."[6] Interaction between different cultures, identities and locations have increased due to advance-ment in technology and migration. This interaction has wrought new forms of cultural mixing.

Modernist designers sought out universal design solutions in order to solve universal needs across cultures. "Form follows function" is based on standardized processes, modular systems, industrial materials, and the machine aesthetic. Design is recognized as a product of mass production and communication. Now, new forces

4. Katherine McCoy, "Graphic Design in a Multicultural World," In *Design Studies: Theory and Research in Graphic Design*, edited by Audrey Bennett, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), 202.

5. Jeffery Keedy, "Zombie Modernism," In *Texts on Type: Critical Writings on Typography*, edited by Philip B. Meggs and Steven Heller, 2nd ed. (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 161.

6. Ibid., 161–162.

are breaking up mass society and the mass-production economy.[7] McCoy argued that for visual communication to survive, its practitioners had to adapt languages by moving toward audience's characteristics and culture's:

> We must understand each of our audiences. We must understand their values. We must speak and read their language, even in the literal sense, such as Spanish or Braille. Specialized audiences often communicate in vernacular languages or technical jargon. Rhetorical styles vary radically from low-key to in-your-face, from colloquial to formal. This is true for visual style languages and symbolic visual codes as well. If we are to create meaningful and resonant communications, we must give appropriate new character to a more varied, idiosyncratic, and even eccentric graphic design expression.[8]

For example, diverse selection of magazines cater to the values of subcultures. Magazines such as *Hinduism Today* and *Nirali* reflects the identity and interests of Indian migrants all over North America. Specialized audiences posses specialized knowledge not shared by others.

7. McCoy, "Graphic Design in a Multicultural World," 202.

8. Ibid., 203.

Graphic Design and Hybridity

In "Hybridity Happens," an article which expands on her previous writing, McCoy explains that she has "come to value diverse cultures of visual and verbal languages" adding that, "The globalization of contemporary corporate design is a dull contrast to the vernacular vigour of indigenous, local, and special interest subcultures."[9] She argues that designers must support local cultures by practicing audience-oriented design, acknowledging a hybrid sense of culturally identified audience. McCoy celebrates the local and vernacular as a means by which to protect the cultural resources of under-represented minorities and indigenous cultures, and as a means of resisting cultural imperialism and consumer monoculture. She expands on ideas of technology and history as factors that aid in rethinking and contributing to the design profession. Communities that were distant from one another are now able to come together due to global communications. Communication technology unites people together through the Internet and targeted communications media and channels, including specialized magazines, cable TV, and music. While earlier waves of immigrants tended to shed their home country's traditions and language as quickly as possible, new arrivals to the U.S. and Canada more often insist on preserving their traditions and language. This global political trend promotes cultural groups defined by ethnicity, language, and religion, and these subcultures share interests and values that include political views. The energy of cultures and subcultures connects members that share values, interests, lifestyles, and symbols, providing them a sense of belonging in a complex world. In favour of interaction among cultures and subcultures, McCoy argues for the idea of cultural hybridity. She states that cultural hybridity supports continuous adaptation, which is essential for the multicultural world.[10] McCoy further asserts that within a global environment, cultural communities are living networked organisms that are continuously moving.[11]

9. Katherine McCoy, "Hybridity Happens," In *Emigre* 67 (2004): 39.

10. Ibid., 43.

11. Ibid., 44.

What is concerning about McCoy's strategy is that her rhetoric appropriates a key concept of hybridity, an idea drawn from postcolonial and diasporic cultural studies, in a distorted manner. Karen Fiss, in "Hybridity, Hegemony and Design in a Globalized Economy" criticizes McCoy's vision of audience-specific design, harnessing the energy of different cultures without considering the political or economic implications of such collaboration.[12] Fiss accuses McCoy of "cloaking her brand-experience strategy in the language of political activism."[13] Fiss states that when hybridity does not emerge from political complexities and a brand of a particular community, it can be nothing more than a pastiche in the service of brand. The concept of cultural hybridity used for this service does not concern cultural sustainability. Fiss points to an essay published in Steven Heller's *The Education of a Typographer*, in which Michael Schmidt wrote that:

> Localization will not sustain culture, individuality, or custom in the face of expanding capital, service, media and trade conglomerates. Localization is, in fact, a tool of exploitative globalization in the hands of free and unchecked markets.[14]

McCoy's encouragement of designers to "let their audience point them to new hybrid sources of graphic expression" does not concern cultural production by subcultures, but rather what is targeted at them.[15] Working this way would only reinforce the old model of projecting fetishism and exoticism onto different ethnic cultures and subcultures. Though Fiss agrees that the concept of cultural hybridity can be employed in graphic design, she presents an alternate to McCoy's strategy. Fiss states that hybridity is important in "addressing questions of location and politics within the context of internationalism" and "not to infiltrate another culture."[16]

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12. Karen Fiss, "Hybridity, Hegemony and Design in a Globalized Economy," In *Design and Ethics: Reflections on Practice*, edited by Emma Felton, Oksana Zelenko and Suzi Vaughan (London: Routledge, 2012), 46–47.

13. Ibid., 47.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

Theories on Representation

Who Needs Identity?

The process of identification is constructed upon a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group. To comprehend these discourses it is important to observe concepts of identity according to deconstructive critique.[17] In Jacques Derrida's theory, deconstruction asks how representation inhabits reality[18]—How does the external image of things define their internal essence? The deconstructionist approach puts key concepts "under erasure,"[19] which indicates that they are no longer serviceable—or "good to think with"— in their originary and unreconstructed form. Since they have not replaced another way of thinking, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them. In their deconstructed forms, they are no longer operating within the paradigm in which they were originally conceived. Identity is such a concept, and it operates "under erasure." This idea cannot be thought of in its former ways; without it, certain key questions cannot be considered at all.[20] The concept of identity is comprised of sets of these problems, and their solutions lie in the centrality of the identity's agency and politics. Stuart Hall refers to "agency" as the position of a person's consciousness. By "politics," Hall means both the significance in modern forms of political movement of signifier "identity," and the politics of location. Hall agrees with Foucault and states that what we require is "not a theory of knowing the subject, but rather a theory of discursive

17. Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 1.

18. Ellen Lupton and Abbott Miller, "Deconstruction and Graphic Design," In *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 3.

19. Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" 2.

20. Ibid.

practice."[21] He further states that the body is constructed by the intersection of a series of disciplinary discursive practices.[22]

Whether directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, deconstruction has influenced graphic design. For example, Jan van Toorn's series of calendars for the printing house Mart Sprujit (Figs. 3–6) reminds us of the complex, contradictory,

Fig.3 Jan van Toorn, designer, May/June—Women of Amsterdam, from *Mart Sprujit* 1972 Calendar, 1972

Fig. 4 Jan van Toorn, designer, June—Glamour, from *Mart Sprujit* 1972 Calendar, 1972

troubled nature of the contemporary world. Van Toorn's 1972 calendar shows black and white portraits of female shoppers in an Amsterdam street market, colour photos of women in bras and corsets from underwear catalogues, couples, children, glamorous media images of women; actresses; softcore pin-ups; hair models; underwear models; celebrities; politicians; clergymen; crowd scenes; protestors;

21. Ibid.

22. Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" 11.

fugitive American activists and soldiers.[23] The calendar's images are taken from magazines of the period, and interrogate ideas of identification, culture, politics and representation. The calendar poses questions about the relationship between the photos. For example, on the June page (Fig. 4), images of woman are in a grid system. Those images appear to be cut in straight lines. One image of a woman wearing

Fig.5 Jan van Toorn, designer, July—Politicians, from *Mart Sprujit* 1972 Calendar, 1972

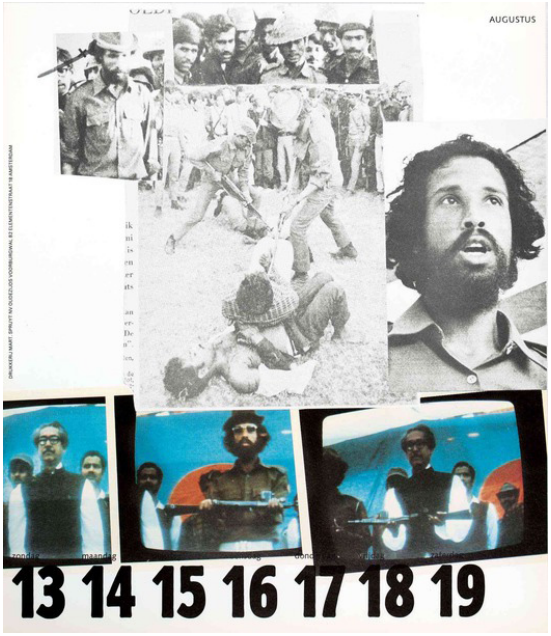

Fig. 6 Jan van Toorn, designer, August—Bengali guerrillas killing prisoners in Deca 1971, from *Mart Sprujit* 1972 Calendar, 1972

a large hat is larger than the other and appears to be teared. Why is that image different from the others? Why are these pictures in their particular configuration? The calendar provides material for inquiry but no particular answers. In this, Van Toorn draws attention to his role as a producer of meaning. Cultural identities are represented as competing against one another, which results in both a positive and negative experience. Acknowledging graphic design as one tool of the capitalist

23. Rick Poynor, "Jan van Toorn: The World in a Calendar," *Design Observer*, May 23, 2012, accessed January 11, 2015, http://designobserver.com/article.php?id=34388.

market functions not only to sell commodities, but also to reproduce the ideological underpinning of capitalism. The graphic designer must understand the role of the designed image in society.

The Construction of Cultural Identity

Identity can be experienced as a "production": never complete, always in process, and always constituted. This view, however, complicates the very authority and authenticity to which the term "cultural identity" lays claim.[24] Hall proposes that cultural identity be recognized as a matter of becoming, as well as of being. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories, and like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation.[25] Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and within, narratives of the past.[26] The colonial experience, whereby the colonized were positioned and represented as inferior, was due to the effects of imposed cultural powers by Europeans. The colonized were constructed as different and "other" within categories of Western knowledge. As Hall explains, Europeans had the power to make the colonized population see and experience themselves as "Other." The relationship between the European and the "Others" was commonly depicted in dual positioning: "West was superior to East, white to black, civilized to crude, cultured to uneducated, sane to insane, healthy to sick, man to woman, normal to criminal, more to less, riches to austerity, high productivity to low productivity, high culture to low culture."[27]

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24. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

25. Ibid., 225.

26. Ibid.

27. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* (Oxford: Polity Press,1987), 120.

And it is in order to intervene within this system of representation that Edward Said proposed a semiotic of "Orientalist" power. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that the way people in the West discussed the Orient developed a set of discourses to form Orientalism. Those discourses set up a superior Western self in relation to an inferior non-Western other. The conceptual category of "the West" i.e. the Occident, was viewed against the concept of the "Orient" and the Orient came to signify all that the West was not and some of what the West actually desired.[28] Orientalism is a creation of Western psyche that unleashes power; it is a measurement for oppression and dominance over the Other. This reaction to cultural diversity in the colonial period led to division and oppression, and can still be identified today as part of current ideology in certain political and social circles.

Recognizing and Identifying Strangers

Cultural identity from this perspective is not a fixed essence, and is always constructed by a respective positioning. It is a construction of memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.[29] To understand identity formation, cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Sara Ahmed argue that we think of identities as similar but different. Cultural diversity in colonial oppression created discontinuity in identity formations.[30] Examining cultural similarities and differences allows for cultural identity continuity. Sara Ahmed describes interaction between "Others" as "strange encounters;" Ahmed suggest that we need to consider how the stranger is "an effect of process of inclusion and exclusion."[31] The stranger is the one we simply fail to recognize, anybody whom

28. Ziauddin Sardar, *Concepts in the Social Sciences: Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 3.

29. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 226.

30. Ibid., 227

31. Ahmed, 6.

we do not know. The question of "how do we identify a stranger," challenges the assumption that the stranger is somebody whom we have already recognized the very moment they are "seen" or "faced" as a stranger.[32] The stranger's identity becomes a form of recognition. We recognize somebody as a stranger, rather than simply failing to recognize them as such. Incorporation and expulsion constitutes the boundaries of bodies and communities.[33] Homi Bhabha suggests we can only conceive identity as the logical term of relations between cultures.[34] Bhabha states that the enunciation of cultural difference complicates the division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address.

Concern about Cultural Identity Politics in Graphic Design

Debates over how graphic designers can redefine their profession's boundaries and better position themselves at the intersection of diverse cultures and markets have been fuelled by the conditions of globalization. This discourse has an underlying utopian impulse: it maintains the belief that "design can and should contribute to bettering the world."[35] Numerous books and brand experience strategies have been developed to aid designers in communicating with audiences from different ethnic cultures. One such resource, Ronnie Lipton's *Design Across Cultures: How to Create Effective Graphics for Diverse Ethnic Groups*, promises to help designers connect with every market. The book illustrates case studies commissioned by large corporations such as McDonald's AT&T, and Volkswagen, within a subsection of topics such as

32. Ibid., 21.

33. Ibid., 6.

34. Homi Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 55.

35. Karen Fiss, "Eating the Other," *Print Magazine*, LX, 1 (2006), 57.

"driving the diversity theme," "hot art & Afr-icons," and "more than just Kente."[36] The author informs the reader (presumably Anglo-American) about ethnic vernacular, value and culture in stereotypically perceived notions; appropriating cultural sensitivity for the sake of consumers to be exploited.

As an example of Lipton's exploitative practices, the way that the Namaste.com/ EthnicGrocers.com advertisement (Fig. 7) showcased the genius of integrating an Indian American culture is concerning. On the centre of the grid is a large image of the vibrant neon lit signs of Times Square, shown amidst the bustling movement of New York City's yellow taxi-cabs. In the foreground are two women of Indian origin, dressed in ethnic attire. Lipton rationalizes this image of two woman painting henna in the middle of Time Square as the space where the "West meets the East as a woman appears to be sitting for an application..."[37]

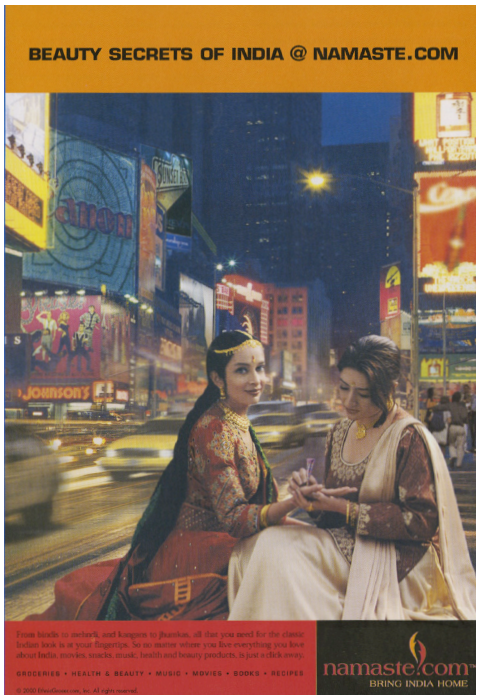

Fig.7 Arati Nath, art director, *Beauty Secrets of India @ Namaste.com* advertisement, Admerasia Inc., 2000

36. Ronnie Lipton, *Designing Across Cultures: How to Create Effective Graphics for Diverse Ethnic Groups*, edited by Clare Warmke (Cincinnati: HOW Design Books, 2002), 94.

37. Ibid., 158.

This print advertisement's concept of placing the vernacular of "Indian-ness" in the foreground of New York City promotes an idea of cultural displacement. In the literal sense, the two models appear to be sitting in the middle of Times Square, noticeable as ethnically different, exotic females. This advertisement is intended for Indian Americans or Indian migrants living in America, as per the copy which reads:

> From *bindis* to *mehndi*, and *kangans* to *jhumkas*, all that you need for the classic Indian look is at your fingertips. So no matter where you live, everything you love about India, movies, snacks, music, health and beauty products, is just a click away.

This advertisement appropriates cultural displacement and migrant experience to exploit the Indian American market. Lipton's rationalization of this image as the space where the "West meets the East as a woman appears to be sitting for an application…" is a form of continued notion of Orientalism. The strategic positioning of the women can represent them as submissive; sitting on the ground of Times Square. Though the advertisement was meant for the Indian migrant, it employs power struggle between displaced locations and cultures; a continuation of colonial exoticism of Indian-ness.

An extreme example of what can be termed "cultural cannibalism" was apparent in design work created for Jean Paul Gaultier's Spring/Summer 2005 fashion line (Fig. 8).[38] Gaultier presented his collection with the opening title "La Venus hottentote," evoking the name, "The Hottentot Venus," under which a South African woman, Saartjie Baartman (Fig. 9), was exhibited as an exotic sexual curiosity in Europe from 1810 to 1815. After her death at 25, Baartman's body was dissected and her genitals preserved in a jar "for science" at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris.[39] Baartman's figure fuelled racialized stereotypes of black sexuality. Gaultier's reference revives colonial fantasies of Africa to establish an essence of primitive eroticism.[40] American writer and cultural critic bell hooks described this appropriation of foreign cultures as "eating the Other," whereby the primitive is stripped of its negative connotations and becomes a desirable

38. Fiss, "Eating the Other," 60–61.

39. Ibid., 60.

40. Ibid.

Fig. 8 Website design for Jean Paul Gaultier's Spring/Summer 2005 fashion line

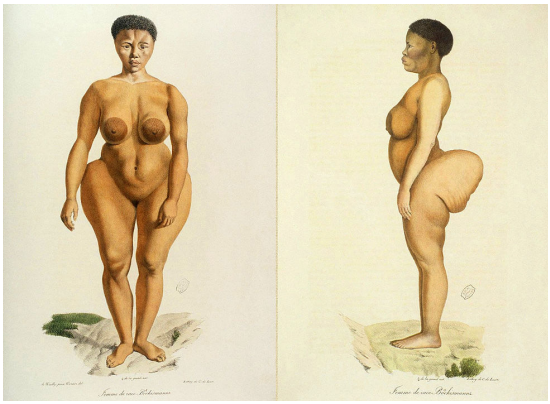

Fig. 9 Illustrations of Baartman, from *Illustrations de Histoire naturelle des mammifères*, Paris, 19th century

quality.[41] Eating involves consumption: one swallows, digests, "farts" and "shits"—one takes in and lets out. The food eaten is partly incorporated into the body.

The photograph of Kim Kardashian published on the cover and pictorial of *Paper* magazine's winter 2014 (Fig. 10), which features her nude buttocks with the caption: "Break the Internet," can be seen as another form of "eating the other." The photograph was criticized as "just provocation and bluster" without context

41. bell hooks, "Eating the other: Desire and resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21.

Fig. 10 Cover design, Kardashian photograph for *Paper* Magazine, New York City, November 2014

and reasoning.[42] The photograph fuels fascination of Kardashian's "exotic" butt. Kardashian's photograph continues to appropriate colonial fantasies of exotic and different body which can be seen similar to that of Baartman's exhibition. Whereas Baartman was ridiculed for her different features, Kardashian's butt is glorified. This fascination of large butt is an appropriation of colonialism for capitalist market's desire. Ethnicity and racial difference within commodity culture "become spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is main-stream white culture."[43] In other words, ethnicity becomes constructed as the "exotic" through an analogy with food: black people are spicy and different. The white consuming subject is

42. Brian Moylan, "Kim Kardashian's Butt is an Empty Promise," In *Time*, November 12, 2014, accessed January 13, 2015, http://time.com/3581618/kim-kardashian-butt-paper-magazine-empty-promise/.

43. bell hooks, "Eating the other: Desire and resistance," 21.

invited to eat the other, to take it in, digest it, and "shit the waste."[44] The exotic and strange foods are incorporated into the bodies of Western consumers as different, but assimilable. The act of consuming objects and images that come from strange places, or that are narrated as coming from strange places, are clearly separated from simply being strange. The consuming subject is approximating the smell or look of strangers is clearly not the stranger,[45] Ahmad explains that this proximity allows, rather than disallows, a distinction between one who is the consumer and one who is the stranger.[46] Global capitalism has turned old feelings of supremacy into longings for contact with "others" and their exotic appeal. This drives the desire for cultural appreciation through cultural appropriation.[47]

Graphic design and advertisements as tools of capitalism function not only to sell commodities, but also to reproduce the ideological underpinning of capitalism. In creating work within a global context, it is vital for designers to be aware of the exploitative practices of transnational corporations.

44. Ahmad, 117.

45. Ibid., 118.

46. Ibid.

47. Blauvelt.

Theories on Cultural Hybridity

The Concept of Hybridity—Proximity of Strangers

The concept of hybridity has been applied to biology, ethnicity, and culture. Hybrid denotes a fusion, a blending of two entities to produce a new original. In biology, the concept denotes an offspring of two animals or plants of different races, breeds, varieties, species, or genera. The extension of hybrid's definition for use in the social field can be "a person produced by blending of two diverse cultures or traditions."[48] Canadian immigrants, or children born to immigrant parents may represent these hybrid selves. The mixing of peoples of different origins is as old as the history of humanity, but the term acquired recent relevance in connection to the imperialism and contemporary globalization. As theorist Jan Nederveen Pietrese says "… it is not mixing that is new but the scope and speed of mixing."[49]

Cultural hybridity stems from the notion that we must think of cultural identities as based on difference. Being different does not necessarily entail that one is better or superior to the other. Discriminatory and celebratory reactions to difference result from diverse conceptions of identity.[50] The sense of difference challenges notions of fixed binaries, which stabilizes meaning and representation, and shows how meaning is never finished.[51] Without relations of difference, no representation could occur. The essentialist position of identity and culture attempts to preserve a homogeneous

48. "hybrid," *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, 2015, accessed January 14, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hybrid.

49. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 110.

50. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 194–195.

51. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 229.

essence. A non-essentialist attitude is, however, a conception of culture as a continued process and as a heterogeneous combination of discursive practices. An essentialist concept of culture leads to the creation of social, cultural and racial barriers, while the non-essentialist concept allows for blending and crossings. If cultures have stable, discrete identities, then the division between cultures can always become agonistic. Such barriers are arbitrary ideological formations: metaphors, discursively constructed. Avtar Brah defines such borders as:

> Arbitrary dividing lines, that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others: forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is fear of the self: places where claims to ownership—claims to "mine," "yours" and "theirs"—are staked out, contested, defined and fought over.[52]

Hybridity problematizes boundaries.[53] The borderline subverts the concept of an essential purity. Hybridity implies "openness, adaptiveness, flexibility, contradiction and irony."[54] Hybridity thus relates to postmodernism, which also employs concepts of "difference, repetition, the simulacrum, and hyper-reality" to destabilize other concepts such as "presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty and the univocity of meaning."[55] In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha's introduction begins with Heidegger's definition of a boundary: A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greek recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presenting.[56] A boundary stresses the idea that what exists

52. Brah, 198.

53. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 54.

54. Eve Stoddard and Grant H. Cornwell, "Cosmopolitan or Mongrel? Créolité, hybridity and 'douglarisation' in Trinidad," In *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1996): 338.

55. Gary Aylesworth, "Postmodernism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2013, accessed September 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/postmodernism.

56. Homi Bhabha, "Introduction," In *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

between settled cultural forms or identities—identities like self and other, stranger and friend—is central to the creation of new cultural meaning. It suggests that the proper location of culture is in-between the overly familiar forms of official culture.

Homi Bhabha's Third Space—Negotiating the In-between

In most of his works, Bhabha considers the interrelations and interdependence between colonizers and colonized. In "The Other Question," Bhabha proposes the colonial discourse as an apparatus that turns on the recognition and denial of racial/cultural differences.[57] The objective of colonial discourse, says Bhabha, is to view the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.[58] The social categories exerted on the colonized imprints imaginary conditions that collide with their own, and displaces the disjunction. This encounter eventually creates a new "hybrid" expression of cultures and of belonging, which in turn challenges the beliefs and experience of the colonizers.[59] Whereas one theory would give the colonizer dominant power, Bhabha proposes an alternative context to the interaction between colonized and colonizer. Bhabha argues that colonial and postcolonial cultural systems and statements are constructed in a "liminal space," the "Third Space of Enunciation":

> The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such

57. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," In *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 100.

58. Ibid., 101.

59. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," In *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1999), 371.

> an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing unifying force, authenticated by the originally Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people.[60]

In an interview titled "The Third Space," Bhabha explains that "this third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom."[61] The notion of hybridity concerns the idea that in any particular political struggle, new sites are always opened up. Referring new sites to old principles limits participation of the newness fully, productively, and creatively.[62]

Bhabha strongly urges negotiation, for negotiation is what politics entails. Bhabha further states that we negotiate even when we don't know we are negotiating. We are always negotiating in any situation of political opposition or antagonism. Subversion and transgression are negations. Negotiation is not only a form of compromise or "selling out." All forms of political activity, especially progressive or radical activity, involve reformations and reformulations.[63] In history, these changes are called "revolutions": critical moments of reforms and reformulations. Subversion refers to a process by which the values and principles of a system in place, are contradicted or reversed. The artist Jean-Michel Basquiat used social commentary in his paintings to subvert power structures and systems of racism. Basquiat's paintings conjure various media and are typically covered with text, codes of all kinds—words, letters, numerals, pictograms, logos, map symbols, diagrams in a poetic graffiti style. bell hooks states that Basquiat's paintings confront us with "the naked black image."[64] In Basquiat's work, flesh on the body is almost always falling away. There is no "fleshy"

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60. Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," In *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 54.

61. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 211.

62. Ibid., 216.

63. Ibid.

64. bell hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-membering Basquiat," In *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 32.

black body to exploit in his work, for that stereotypical body attached with oppressive connotation is vanishing. Those who long to be seduced by that black body will not find them in Basquiat's works. For bell hooks, Basquiat's "Riding with Death," (Fig. 11) haunts and lingers:

> Evoking images of possession, of riding and being ridden in the Haitian *voudoun* sense—as a process of exorcism, one that makes revelation, renewal and transformation possible—I feel the subversion of the sense of dread provoked by so much of Basquiat's work. In its place is the possibility that the black-and-brown figure riding the skeletal white bones is indeed "possessed."[65]

Basquiat's style asks for negotiation: to know his working is about knowing yet the work resists "knowing."[66]

Fig. 11 Jean-Michel Basquiat, artist, *Riding with Death*, acrylic and crayon on canvas, 249 x 289.5 cm, 1988

65. Ibid., 41.

66. Ibid., 28.

Political negotiation is an important issue for it is a distinctive method of negotiation. Hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new "alliance" formulates itself. New situation may demand translation of one's principles—to rethink them and extend them.

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*—The Power of Text

Bhabha writes that "Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture—and the people—as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life."[67] One of Bhabha's examples, developed at length in "How Newness Enters the World," is Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, which successfully expresses the concept of hybridity within a minority discourse. *The Satanic Verses* explores both the Indian British migrant experience and the status of cultural and religious origins and authorities. Whatever the controversies surrounding the novel, it offers narratives of "Englishness" that is revised and rewritten.[68] This is an extremely difficult novel to introduce to individuals with limited knowledge of cultural and religious understanding of Islam. Within the novel's multiple stories and styles, the anchoring narrative tells the story of Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, who, at the novel's outset, fall from a destroyed jet towards the sea, singing competing verses in an ongoing contest between good and evil. The two characters from that moment begin their metamorphoses: Chamcha transforms into a "goatman" and Farishta into an archangel. The novel's other main plot is "dreamed" by Farishta, and tells the story of Mahound, based on the seventh-century foundation of Islam. Bhabha sees the novel's multiple narratives, and the real-life violent reactions towards the novel and the

67. Homi Bhabha, "Dissemination," In *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 225.

68. David Huddart, "The Nation," In *Homi K. Bhabha* (London: Routledge, 2006), 112.

author, as evidence of the uncertainty of in-between, hybrid identities. Writing about the novel and its reception in *Artforum*, Bhahba comments:

> What the book uniquely reveals is a life lived precariously on the cultural and political margins of modern society. Where once we could believe in the comforts and continues of tradition, today we must face the responsibilities of cultural translation. In the attempt to mediate between different cultures, languages, and societies, there is always the threat to mistranslation, confusing, and fear.[69]

For both Bhabha and Rushdie, hybridity is not something to be simply celebrated in a magical multiculturalist re-invention of "tired national" traditions, but a difficult, agonistic process of negotiation. In the aftermath of the controversy surrounding the novel (following its release, the book was banned by various countries, and Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* against Rushdie), Rushdie wrote of his wish to celebrate "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas politics, movies, and songs."[70] The novel's multiple narratives mock, subvert and destroy the many fictions of pure identity that the main characters Farishta and Chamcha encounter. The novel alludes to the migrant culture of "in-between," the minority position, and dramatizes the activity of culture's untranslatability; in so doing, it moves the question of culture's appropriation beyond the assimilationist's dream, or the racist's nightmare.[71]

The Satanic Verses was crucial for the development of this thesis and its visual artifacts. It is an example of art that questions the powers that regulate traditionalism and containment of difference. The novel employs the concept of hybridity as way of critically examining the changing world around us.

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69. Homi Bhabha, "At the Limits," In *Artforum International* 27.9 (1989): 12.

70. Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith," In *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), 394.

71. Homi Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World," In *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 321.

Visual Artifact in Response to Theories

Visualizing Hybrid Forms of Indo-Canadian Culture

One of the artifacts created by this author in tandem with this thesis paper is a series of hybrid creatures—*The Avatars* (Figs. 12–25), which are metaphoric representations analogous to the embodiment of Indo-Canadian identity.

The classification term "Indo-Canadian" can refer to Canadians of Indian subcontinent origins, children of persons who emigrated from South Asia to Canada, or people of Indian origin who have Canadian citizenship.[72] Identification as Indo-Canadian is a hybrid, whereby the individual shares elements of Indian and Indian-Canadian cultures. Bhabha states that immigrants possess traces of their original, "parent" culture. The new culture that develops must therefore be "bafflingly alike, and different from the parent culture."[73] Bhabha, in referring T.S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), states that in this form of "newness," culture-sympathy and culture-clash appears.[74] This partial culture is "the contaminated yet connective space between cultures," and acts as "in-between" cultures, where we might notice similarities and differences. The concept of a hybrid culture can be examined as a negotiation between cultures. In this sense, hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another.[75] This contact creates a cultural mix, and one can view Indo-Canadian—as an identity and culture—as a hybrid.

72: Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations Amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 236. The term "Indo-Canadians" came into use in the 1980s as a result of the Canadian government's policy and ideology of multiculturalism.

73. Homi Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 54.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

Fig. 12 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Sleeping Beauty and Sri Andal, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 13 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—The Flash and Lord Vishnu, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 14 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Captain America and Lord Krishna, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

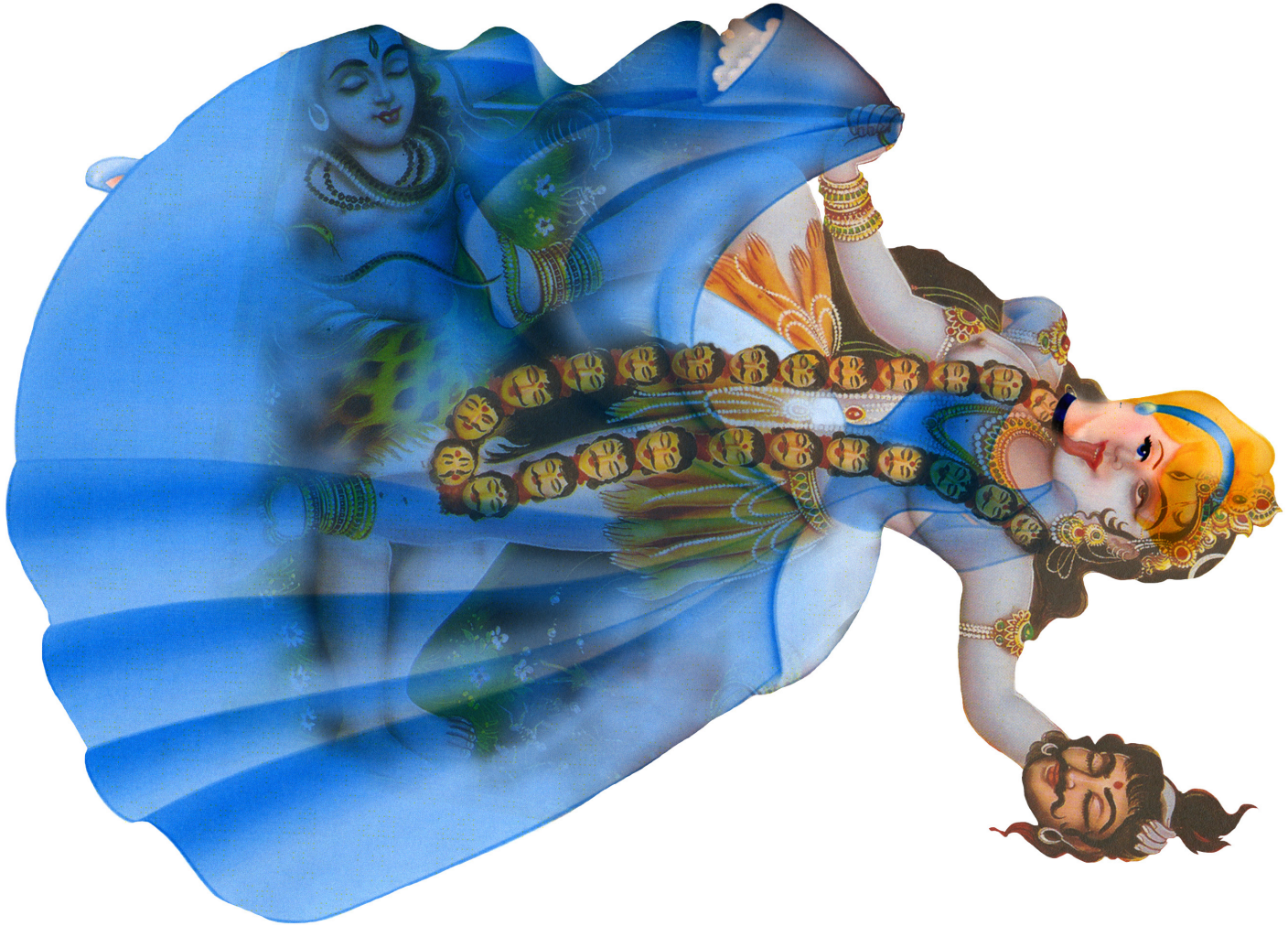

Fig. 15 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Cinderella and Sri Kali, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 16 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Little Mermaid and Sri Sarasvati, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 17 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Snow White and Sri Durga, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 18 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Thor and Lord Murugan, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 19 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Winnie the Pooh and Lord Ganesha, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 20 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—The Beast and Lord Brahma, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 21 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Wolverine and Lord Narasimha, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

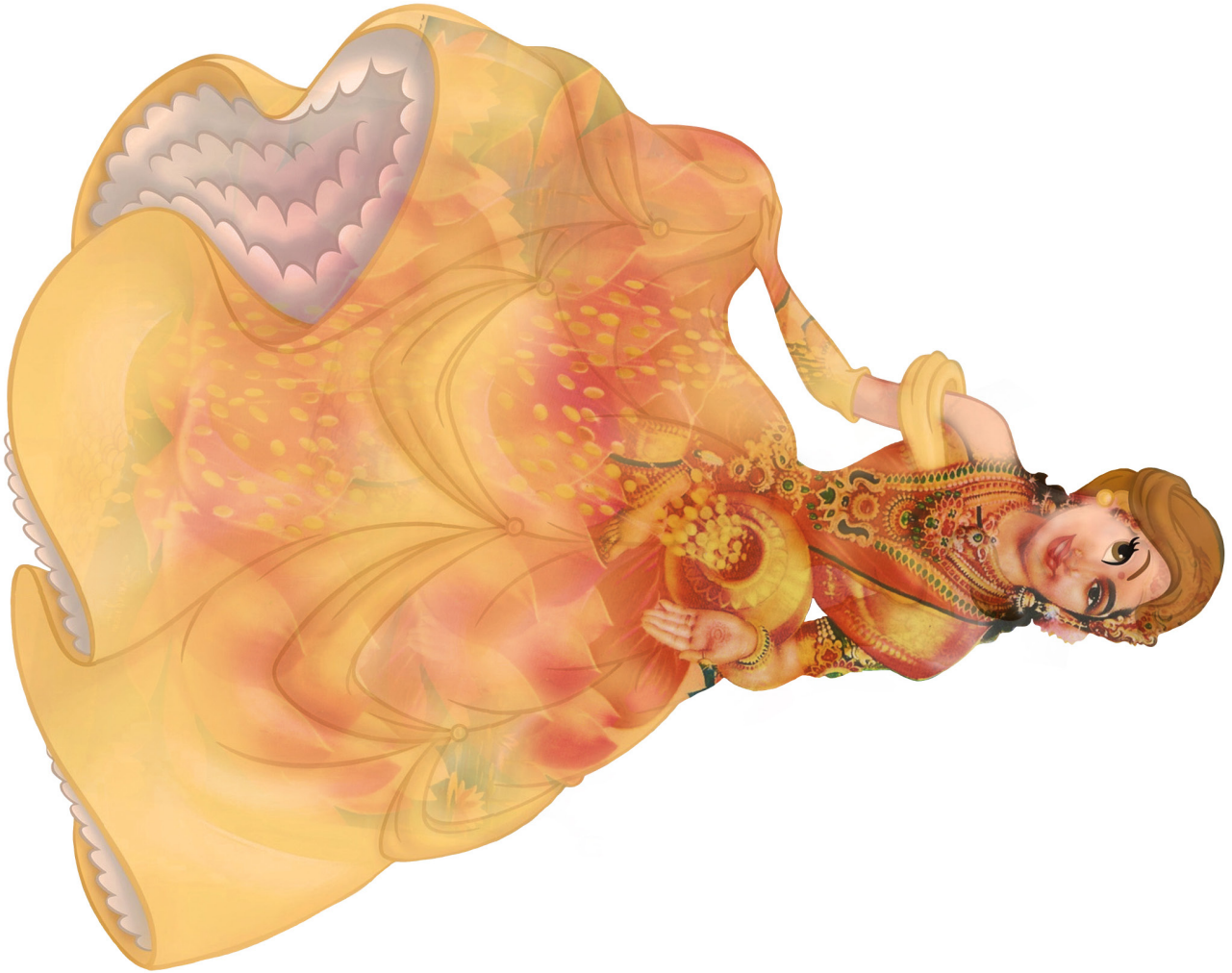

Fig. 22 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Belle and Sri Lakshmi, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 23 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—The Arrow and Lord Rama, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

The Juxtaposing Characteristics of *The Avatars*

The Avatars are a series of hybrid creatures, mongrels,[76] mutations, or combination of strangers, which depict negotiation of their prescribed representation. Their visual representations suggest a sense of transitioning and morphing into a singular entities. Though they appear autonomous, they are in fact an amalgamation of what are two or more former entities. What is important in hybridity is not the original moments, but rather amalgam, which emerges from the previous. These avatars are visually recognized as single-bodied creatures yet the visual system of overlapping images suggest translucency when one perceives independent forms in the same place. The use of translucency invites the viewer to read the collaged images; the embodiment of an in-between space. The images' composition and arrangement also aid in recognizing *The Avatars* as single-bodied creatures. Images of the former characters are purposely selected in similar dynamic posture and gesture, thus enabling them to become recognized as a single entity.

At first glance, the iconic characteristics of *The Avatars'* former "original" form are identifiable. The representation of Spiderman's webs (Fig. 24), his hand gestures as he projects his webs are visible. On the same avatar is a shirtless blue body, adorned with brown beads, and long locks of messy hair that extend below the shoulder. In place of a head, where one expects to see the masked face, with curved and repeated lines that represent a spider web, is a visible blue face. In the areas where the two bodies overlap, translucent fragments of another character are visible. On this avatar's chest and shoulder, one sees the translucent forms of Spiderman's costume. On another avatar (Fig. 25), the viewer sees Superman's iconic "S" in the diamond shape on his chest; his red cape, and blue and red costume suggest it is the "man of steel." On top of Superman's costume are pearl necklaces, jewels and green silk fabric wrapped around his waist. He has animalistic features—a long tail with a bell attached at the

76. "mongrel," *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, 2015, accessed March 11,2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mongrel. A synonym for hybrid, "a bastard, a monstrous production of two plants of different species."

Fig. 24 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatar*—Superman and Hanuman, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

Fig. 25 Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *The Avatars*—Spider-man and Lord Shiva, digital collage, 44 x 62 in, January–February, 2015

end, and the facial representation of a monkey. These different features are reflective of Hindu god Hanuman's representation.

On one hand, *The Avatars* make use of comic-book vernacular and children's cartoon characters from Western pop culture while on the other hand, *The Avatars* depict Indian Hindu gods and goddesses. These juxtaposing vernaculars from distinct cultural contexts meet in their hybrid embodiment. In this embodiment, the boundaries that contain static identities are dissolved. Attempting to visually read *The Avatars* forces one to negotiate these juxtaposed identities. *The Avatars'* construction asks questions of their configuration: Why are they in this mongrel mutated form? What is their relationship to one another? Cultural identities are represented as competing against one another, and as a result the hybrids are recognized as either contesting or harmonious in their embodiment. Bhabha notes that differences in writing or écriture contribute to the difficulty in cultural enunciation of cultural texts, or systems of meaning.[77] This difficulty has less to do with what anthropologists describe as varying attitudes to symbolic systems within different cultures than with the structure of symbolic representation. The difficulty in reading the content of the symbol or its "social function," is due to the structure of symbolization.[78] Bhabha further states that the difference in language is crucial to the production of meaning, and ensures that meaning is never simply formal, technical, and transparent. The difference of cultural symbolism make the images' meaning difficult to read if one is not receptive to differences of cultural enunciation.

To understand *The Avatars*, one needs to forgo traditional representations of being an Indian and a Canadian. *The Avatars'* bodies are never complete; they are in the process of "becoming" their new embodiment, and "destructing" their former selves. In "Creation of the Sacred Image: Apotheosis and Destruction in Hinduism," James J. Preston claims that sacred images in Hinduism are temporal, incomplete, and inadequate as a full expression. The sacred images of Hindu gods are constructed

77. Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," In *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 156.

78. Ibid.

according to systematic rules, and then are infused with sacrality and kept "alive" by highly controlled behaviours intended to retain the "spirit in matter."[79] The process of constructing sacred images, and the process of their destruction, reveals something intriguing about human religion. The destruction of the sacred image is as important as its creation; it is a powerful act of imagination that challenges us to ask why humans must insist that the invisible must be made visible. In *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, Diana L. Eck states that Hinduism is an imaginative, "image-making" religious tradition in which the sacred is seen as present in the visible world—the world we see in multiple images and deities, in sacred places, in people, in every locus of Indian life.[80] The behaviour Indians exhibit towards sacred images is brought to their immigrant land and changes accordingly upon interactions with new experiences.

The superheroes are representations of "godlike" presence in American "material" popular culture. Their images are produced in similar quantity as those of the Hindu gods—in product packaging, films, posters and whatever corporations can exploit in their trademark. Though the superheroes of *The Avatars* can be perceived as American, they have roots in every country, where, around the turn of the twentieth century, the comic industry expanded from publication newspaper and strips to circulation in collections and serials. Canadian culture, so close in proximity to the United States, is heavily influenced by American superheroes. Today, comic studies have been integrated into many university programs of world literature, and represent a form of storytelling art rooted in trans-cultural imaginations. Superheroes and comic books have become synonymous with the experience of westernization.

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79. James J. Preston, "Creation of the Sacred Image: Apotheosis and Destruction in Hinduism," In *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India*, edited by Joanne Punzo Waghorne, Norman Cutler and Vasundha Narayan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 9.

80. Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), 10.

Flesh of Gods, Flesh of Superheroes —The Embodiment of *The Avatars*

The graphic narrative of *The Avatars* present bodies moving through time and "space"[81]—gods and superheroes, Indian and Western, sacred and popular, high and low, past and present. Considering how the bodies of *The Avatars* relate to and interact with each other and the world around them shapes the viewer's perception of time, space and causality. In "Space, Time and Causality in Graphic Narratives: An Embodied Approach," Karin Kukkonen notes that to some extent, the embodied approach inverts the Kantian perspective that time and space structure human experience, and proposes that these concepts arise as a consequence of readers' experience.[82] The narrative of *The Avatars* needs to be examined not as objective. Rather, they need to be examined as properties related to the physical resonance of mixing two former bodies into one self. To a large extent, perception is formed by how we view the space around us. Kukkonen points to Alva Noe's statement that perceiving is an activity of exploring the image to understand the ways in which composition affects one's sensory relations to things.

Considering the composition of *The Avatars'* bodies in relation to one another, readers get a sense of how to perceive the story around them. When the "original" images of represented bodies overlap, *The Avatars* appear to be harmonious with their two former selves. In contrast, some of *The Avatars* hint at a contested interaction of former "original" images. Though *The Avatars* are still images, they evoke a sense of movement. Motion seems to be transferred from one body to another because of the

81. Marie-Laure Ryan, "Space," In *Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmid and Jörg Schönert (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2012), accessed March 14, 2015, http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/space. Jurji Lotman argues that "the language of spatial relations" is a "basic means for comprehending reality." He showed that in literary text, spatial oppositions such as valuable-non-valuable, good-bad, accessible-inaccessible, or mortal-immortal. Most fundamental human experience consists of apprehending oneself as a body located in space.

82. Karin Kukkonen, "Space, Time and Causality in Graphic Narratives: An Embodied Approach," In *Narratologia: From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noel Thon (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 49.

movement's spatio-temporal unity, perceiving a causal relationship being established. Spiderman's legs seem to exert forces of balance, and Lord Shiva (even though sitting crossed-legged) appears to respond to the balancing on one foot. This perception, Kukkonen describes, is part of our "body schema," that is, the ways in which our bodies shapes our perceptual field, integrates sensory information about our bodies moving through an environment, and information about our posture and movement. Image schemata, like "balance" relates to our immediate bodily experience of the world. When we see a perpendicular composition in an image, with clear horizontal and vertical lines, it relates to our bodily experience of being perpendicular (due to gravity), and we view the body of *The Avatars* as "balanced."[83]

The medium of collage is also intrinsic to the depiction of hybridity, and represents an alternative way of seeing the Indo-Canadian identity. *The Avatars'* incorporate image reproduction of characters that are familiar and different. The gods and superheroes are products of mass printing. One does not need to travel far to encounter Indian gods. Their adoption by global culture has seen Krishna and Kali appear on CD covers, diaries, websites, clothing, and fashion accessories. The superheroes and princess are part of the Hollywood popular material cultures and thus their images are mass reproduced. In this way, the Hindu gods can be seen as popular images that represent India or Indian-ness. The mass consumption and presence of superheroes gives them the power to be seen as gods of Hollywood material culture. Through juxtaposing one element to another, the images make us rethink the significance of all familiar images. *The Avatars* appear estranged, otherworldly, in-between the possible and the impossible or unlikely, and in a space between real and simulated. By its nature, the collage becomes an interpretation—an expression of opinion. In "Collage Now: The Seamier Side," Laura Hoptman argues that collages' interpretative qualities make them "uniquely suited to the job of bringing the world and its cultural efflorescence into close proximity, with no burden to mimic reality or impart truths."[84] *The Avatars*,

83. Ibid., 52.

84. Laura Hoptman, "Collage Now: The Seamier Side," In *Collage: The UnMonumental Picture* (London: Merrel, 2007), 11.

in expressing the duality of Indian and Indian-Canadian identity, become a form of strategy, resistance to the world they confront. Difference and similarities of images asks us to imagine them in an alternative way.

The Avatars as an Alternative Way of Seeing Indo-Canadian Identity

The Avatars have a sense of originality. The meaning of the original work no longer exists in what it says uniquely, but rather in what it is uniquely. An image's meaning changes according to what one sees immediately beside it, or what comes immediately after.[85] Images reconstruct meaning against each other's symbolism through comparative analysis. Comparative analysis of symbolism, such as Jungian theory, help explain the symbolic mechanisms by which images work in the mind.[86] Using comparative analysis of symbolism, *The Avatars* become an alternative way to view the interaction between Hindu gods, comic-book superheroes, and Disney Princesses as a metaphor of Indo-Canadian identity.

While one recognizes the positive contribution of multiculturalism in producing cultural diversity, theorists and writers such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, bell hooks, and Sara Ahmed emphasize the importance of cultural differences for notions of hybridity. Multiculturalism is an attempt to both respond to and control the dynamic process of articulating cultural difference, demanding a consensus based on a norm that cultivates cultural diversity.[87] For Bhabha, the liberal relativist perspective of cultural diversity is inadequate, and does not

85. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 29.

86. Steven M. Leuthold, "Art and Religion in Intercultural Contexts," In *Cross-Cultural Issues in Art* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 75.

87. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," 208–209.

recognize the universality and normative stance from which it constructs cultural and political judgments.[88] Ahmed describes multiculturalism as the proximity of strangers. The strangers are not simply those already recognized as out of place; rather, in a multicultural nation, strangers have a place. Ahmed argues further that multiculturalism can involve a double and contradictory process of incorporation and expulsion: it may seek to differentiate between strangers whose appearance of difference can be claimed by the nation, and those whose differences may be dangerous to the well-being of even heterogeneous nations.[89] The proximity of strangers requires constant adjustment and transformation.[90] With the notion of cultural difference, Bhabha positions himself within liminality—the in-between, productive space in the construction of culture as difference or otherness.[91] However rational one is, it is very difficult, and even counter productive to try and fit together different forms of culture, and to pretend they can easily coexist. *The Avatars'* embodiment creates a sense of uneasiness and contestation: some appear as though they are tearing from one another's opposing strangers—as if they are in forced embodiment.

The Avatars are not about seeing the Western or the Indian selves, but rather seeing a unique in-between space of negotiation—a Third Space. Bhabha notes that this Third Space intervention makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process; it destroys mirrored representation, and reveals cultural knowledge as continuous, integrated, open, and expanding code.[92] Such intervention challenges our sense of "the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the original Past, and kept alive in the national tradition of the People."[93] *The Avatars'* enunciation displaces the narrative of Western's perception,

88. Ibid., 209.

89. Ahmed, 95.

90. Ibid., 10.

91. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," 209.

92. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," 156.

93. Ibid.

which Bhabha—pointing to Benedict Anderson—so perceptively describes as being written in homogeneous, serial time.[94] *The Avatar* as a metaphor of Indo-Canadian identity asks one to re-examine their own perception of the migrant stranger.

Through the use of space, time, and causality in *The Avatars*, the images depict what Lawrence Barsalou calls "situated conceptualization." Kukkonen references psychologist and cognitive scientist Lawrence Barsalou in pointing out that we process concepts not as abstract, detached combinations of features, but rather as "agent-dependent instruction manuals" to run an embodied simulation.[95] These embodied simulations are tied to the context of particular situations, which include the objects and agents involved, actions and bodily states, motivations, emotions, and cognitive operations, and often settings. In "situated conceptualization," thinking about concepts like "dog," "truth," or "chair" (Barsalou's examples) means placing ourselves in a situation with them. The embodied situations evoked by *The Avatars* places the images in the situation of the Indo-Canadian self, whereby the migrant experience is understood as a perception. Migrant individuals perceive notions of "difference" in the new environment, but are those "differences" analogous to the Canadian experience? Seeing and reading images in the migrant's perspective, one can experience a sense of double embodiment. Reading the images of *The Avatars* in terms of a situated conceptualization brings the formerly individual (gods and pop characters) together in analysis; embodiment and composition contribute to creating an embodied simulation of the migrant experience. Indo-Canadian identity is continuously changing and *The Avatars*, as a metaphor of migrant experience, represent such interaction of time, space, and causality.

94. Ibid.

95. Kukkonen, 60.

Conclusion

Articulating and enunciating concepts of cultural hybridity in graphic design not only helps to comprehend the evolving cultural identities of multiculturalism and migrant experience, but also promotes alternative ways of representing in-between cultural spaces. How can visuals discuss complex ideas of identity, difficulties in translating vernaculars—images, patterns and symbols across cultures, and negotiate representation of a meeting space between strangers? All of these questions highlight postmodernism's concern for difference, difficulties in communication, and complexities and nuances of interests, cultures, and place.

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address.[96] In signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated, and translated in the name of tradition; it is draped in the guise of a pastness that is not a truthful sign of historical memory, but rather a strategy in representing authority over certain cultural groups. This conception undermines the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons by questioning the sense of authority in culture, demanding that we rethink our perspective on the identity of culture. The concept of cultural hybridity employs postcolonial theories to alternatively view the past to represent a new perception of the present. Bhabha refers to Mikhail Bakhtin who states:

> Hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented... But is also double-languages; for in it there are not only two individual consciousness, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio- linguistic, consciousness, two epochs... That come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance... It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms... Such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly

96. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," 156.

> productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new "internal forms" for perceiving the world in words.[97]

In *The World, the Text and the Critic,* Edward Said states that it is in culture that we seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases belonging to, or in, a place—being at home in a place.[98] Said further states that culture is something that one possesses, and, along with that proprietary process, culture designates the boundary in which concepts of what is culturally extrinsic or intrinsic come into forceful play. Discussing "culture in graphic design" and "graphic design in culture" allows design to encompass multiple ways to engage in the production of discourse in formal development.

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97. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 58.

98. Edward Said, "Introduction: Secular Criticism," In *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 8.

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Appendix

Fortunes of Misfortunes

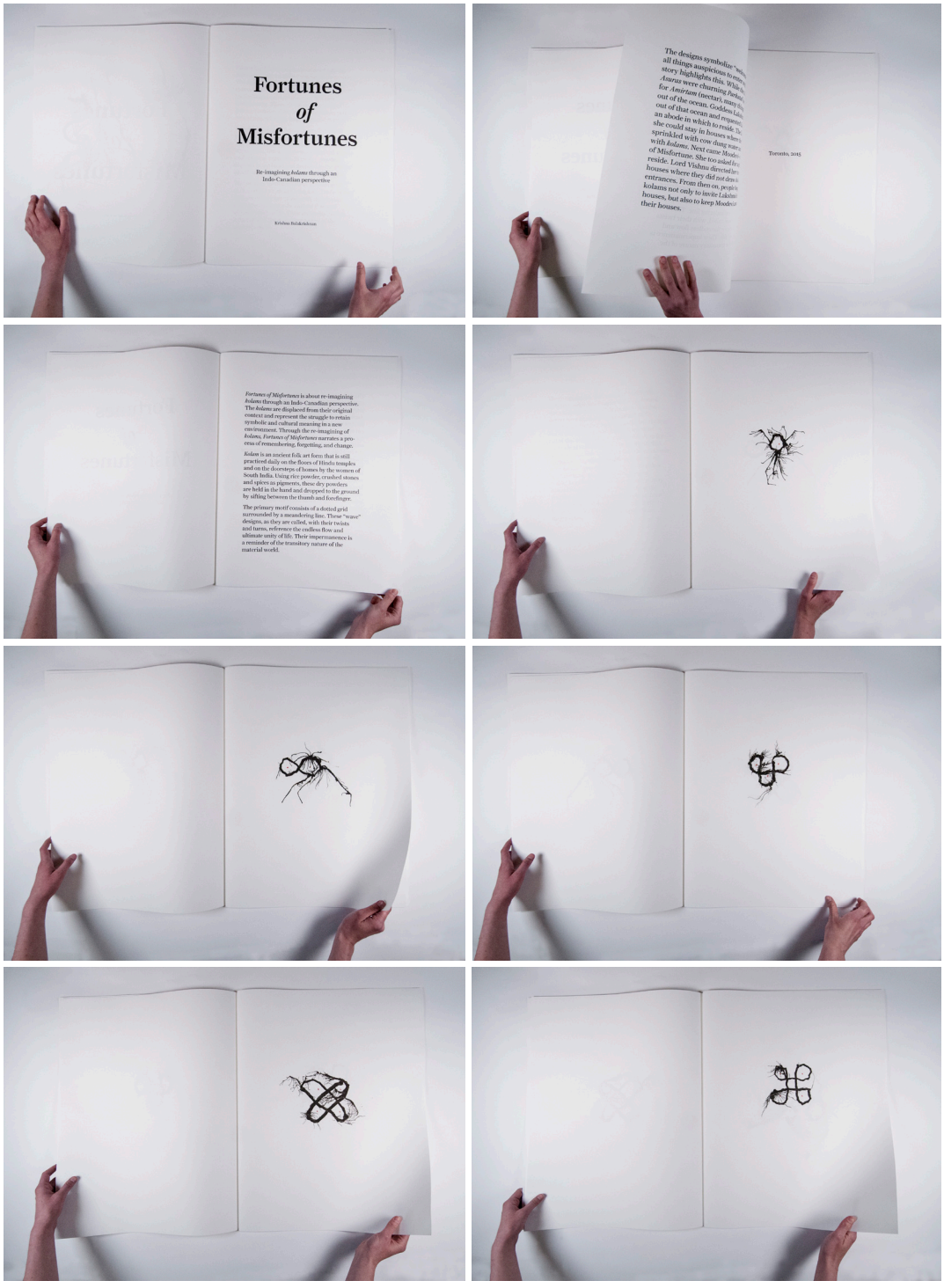
Fortunes of Misfortunes is about re-imagining kolams through an Indo-Canadian perspective. The *kolams* are displaced from their original context and represent the struggle to retain symbolic and cultural meaning in a new environment. Through the re-imagining of *kolams*, *Fortunes of Misfortunes* narrates a process of remembering, forgetting, and change.

Kolam is an ancient folk art form that is still practiced daily on the floors of Hindu temples and on the doorsteps of homes by the women of South India. Using rice powder, crushed stones and spices as pigments, these dry powders are held in the hand and dropped to the ground by sifting between the thumb and forefinger.

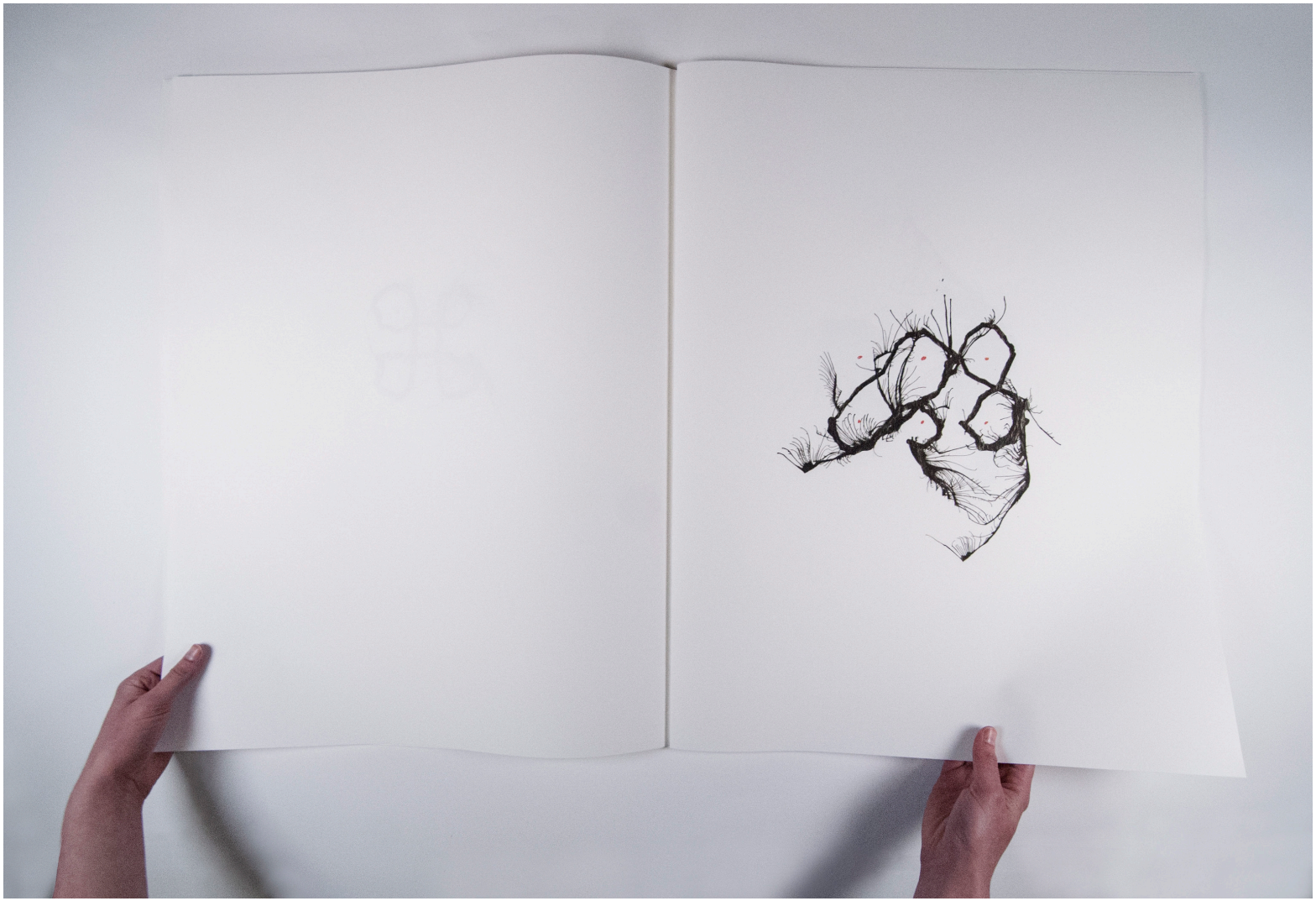
The primary motif consists of a dotted grid surrounded by a meandering line. These "wave" designs, as they are called, with their twists and turns, reference the endless flow and ultimate unity of life. Their impermanence is a reminder of the transitory nature of the material world.

The designs symbolize "welcome" and invite all things auspicious to enter within. A *Puranic* story highlights this. While the *Devas* and the *Asuras* were churning *Parkatal* (sea of milk) for *Amirtam* (nectar), many things started coming out of the ocean. Goddess Lakshmi too came out of that ocean and requested Lord Vishnu for an abode in which to reside. The Lord said that she could stay in houses where the entrances were sprinkled with cow dung water and decorated with *kolams*. Next came Moodevi—the Goddess of Misfortune. She too asked for a place to reside. Lord Vishnu directed her to stay in dirty houses where they did not draw *kolams* at the entrances. From then on, people began to draw *kolams* not only to invite Lakshmi into their houses, but also to keep Moodevi away from their houses.

Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Fortunes of Misfortunes*—cover, book, inkjet printing, 23 x 17.5 in, April, 2015



Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Fortunes of Misfortunes*—selection of spreads, book, inkjet printing, 23 x 17.5 in, April, 2015



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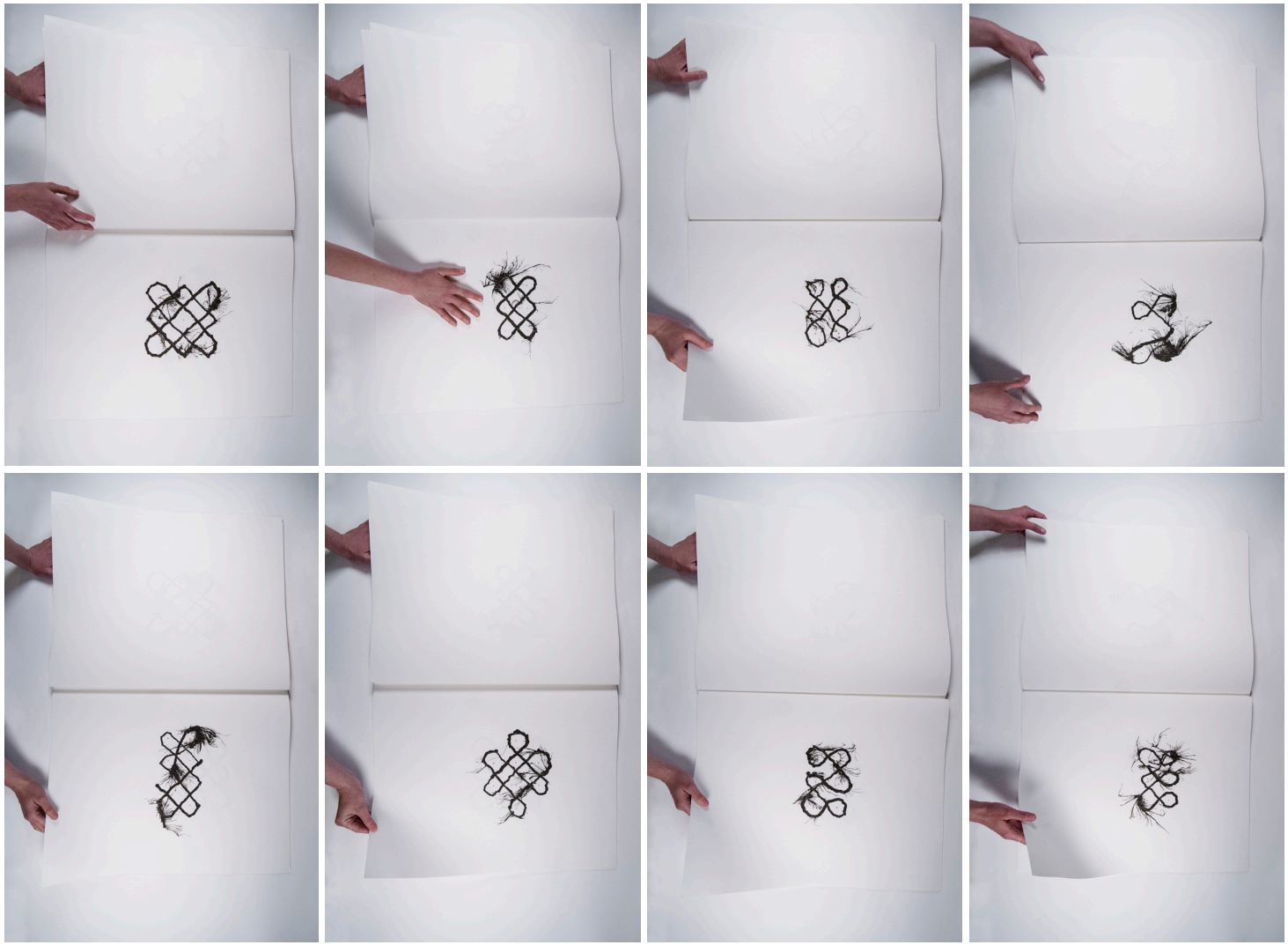

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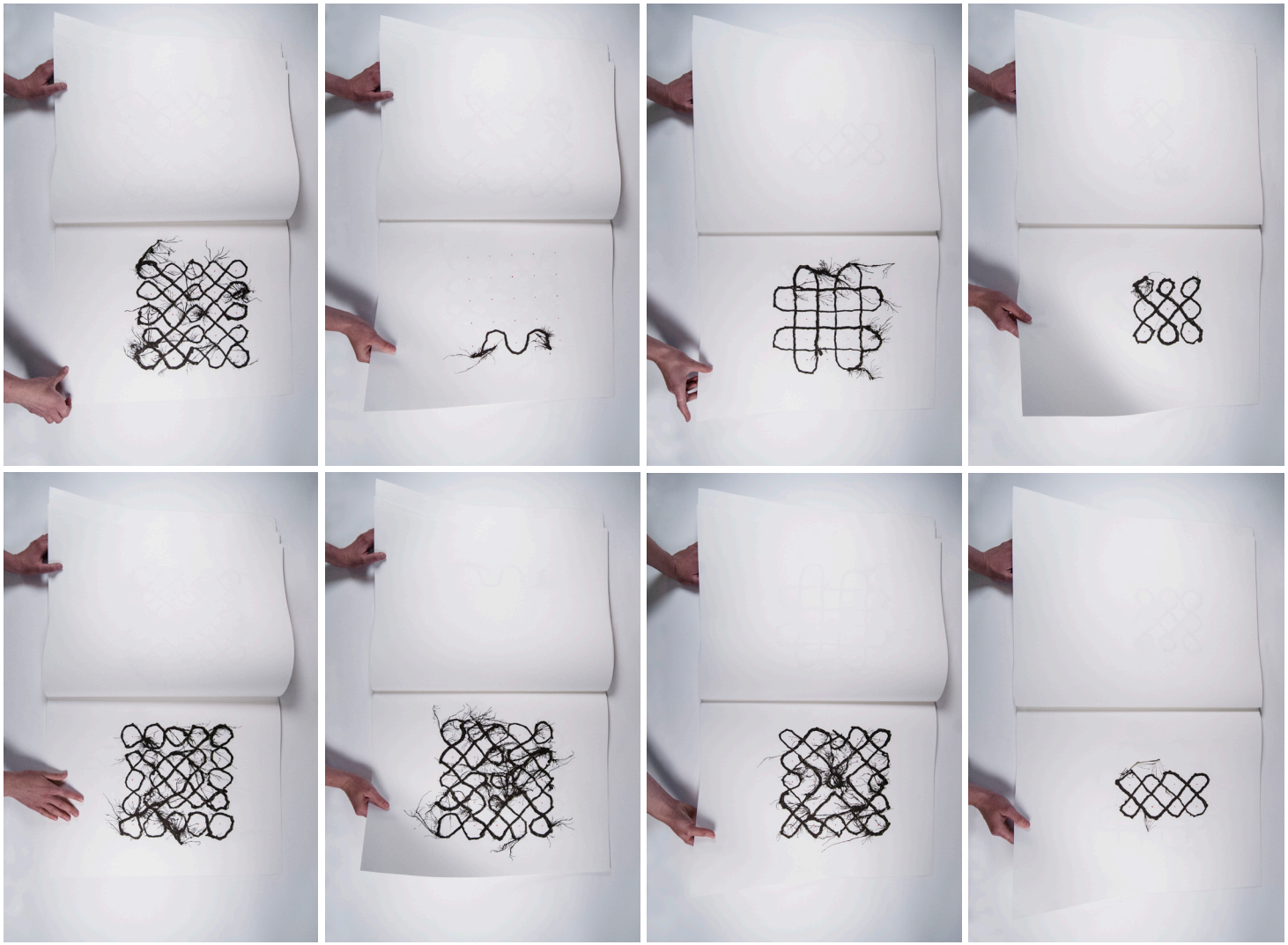

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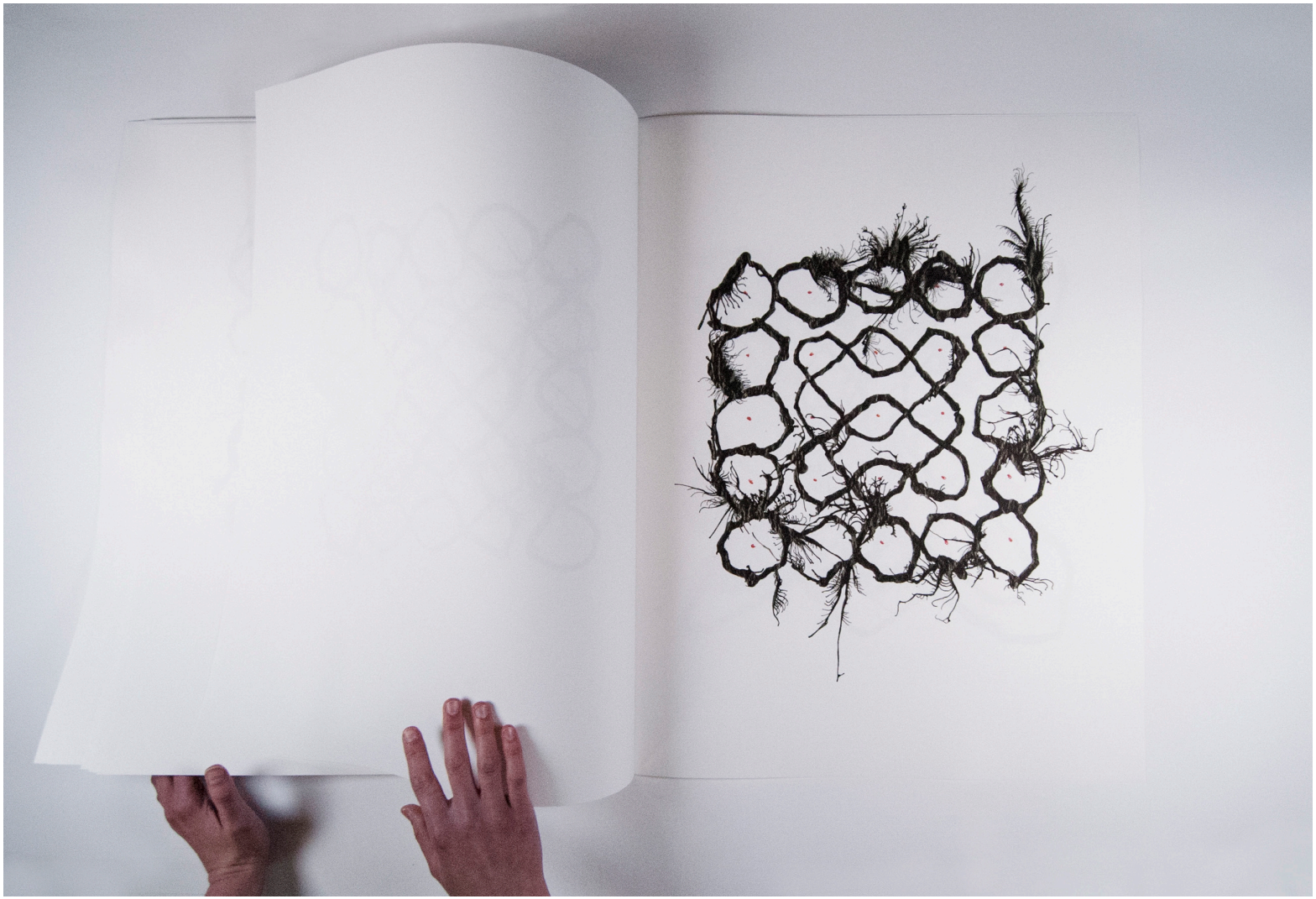

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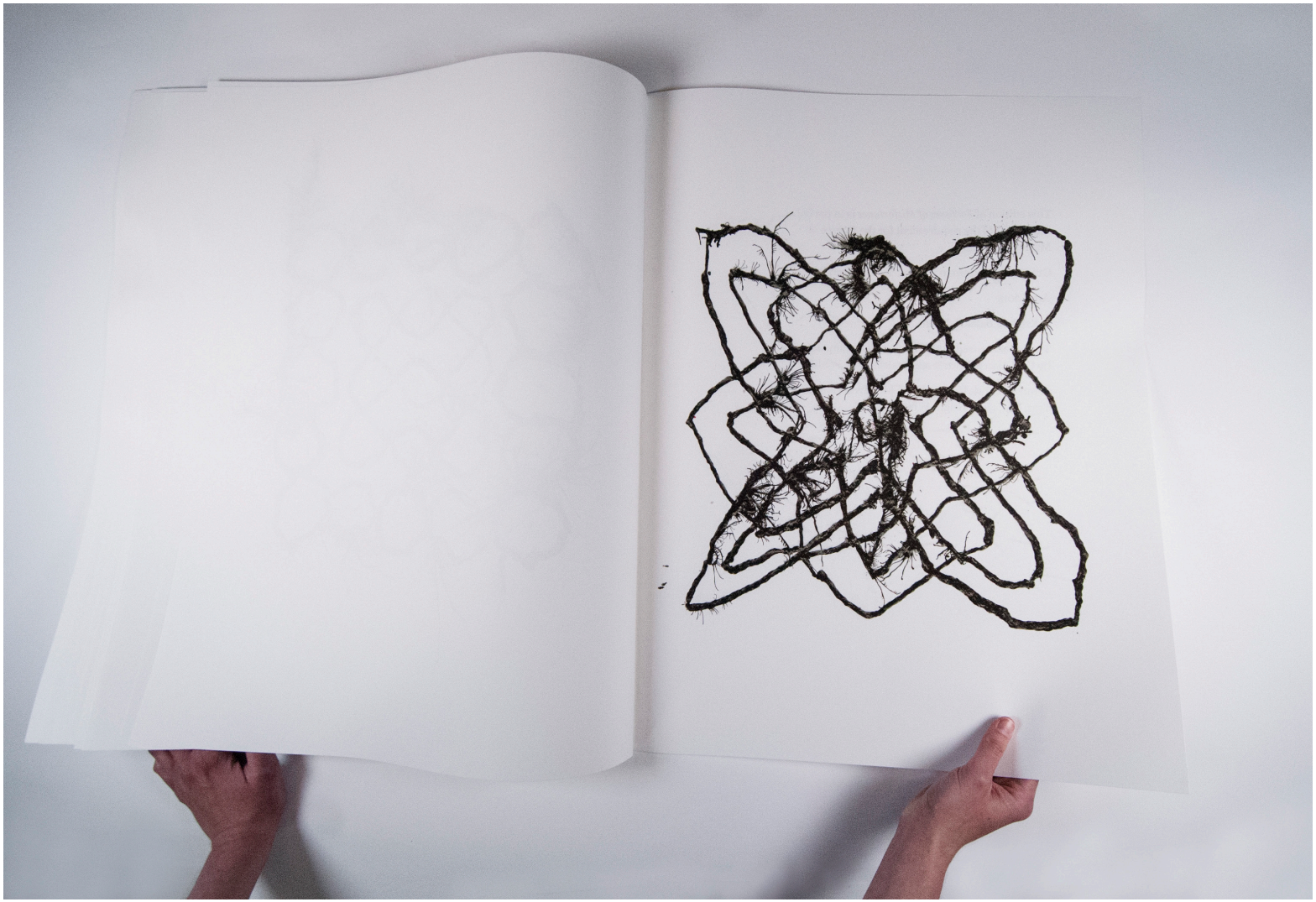


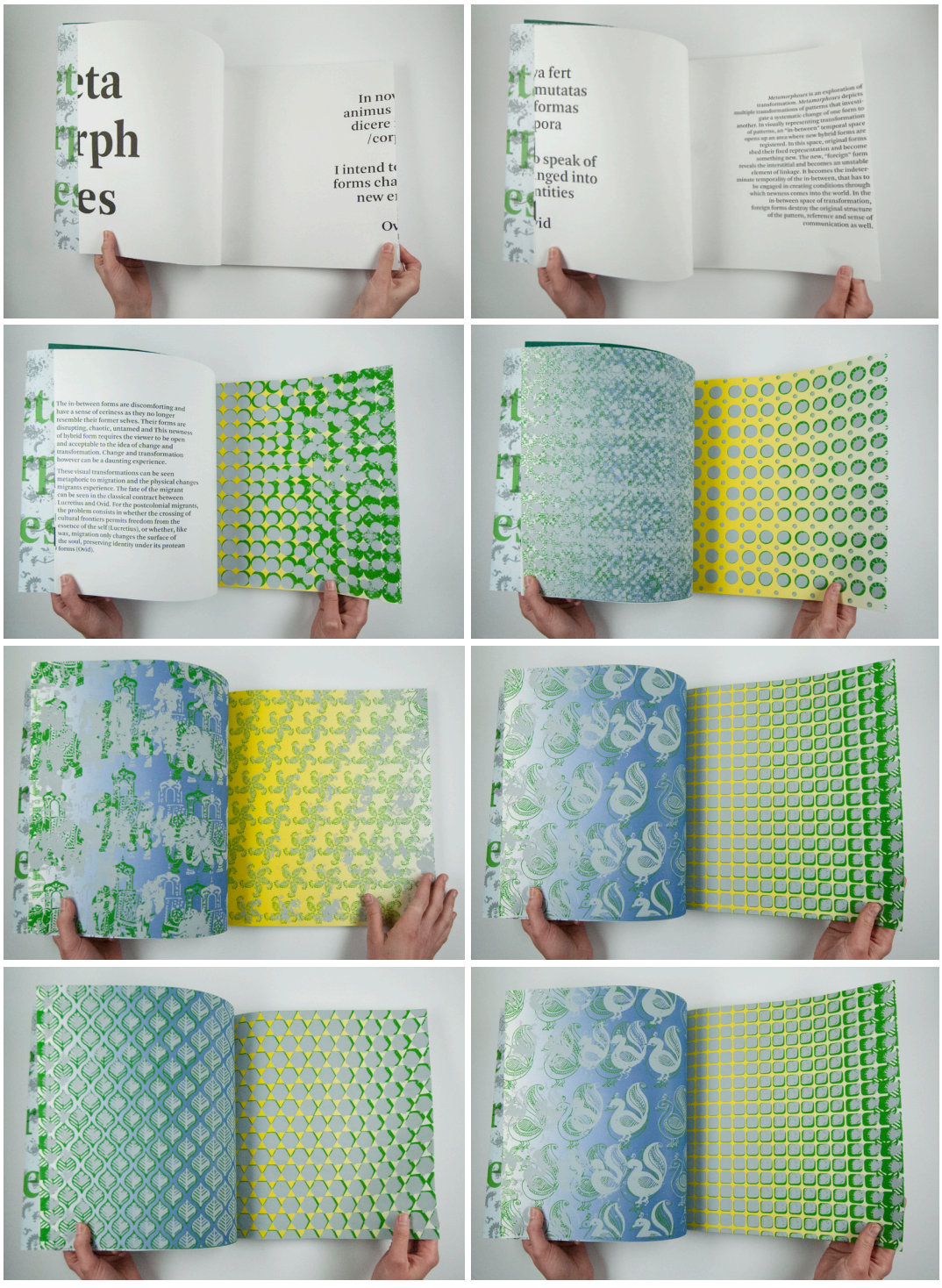
Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, ***Fortunes of Misfortunes***
—spread, book, inkjet printing, 23 x 17.5 in, April, 2015

Metamorphoses

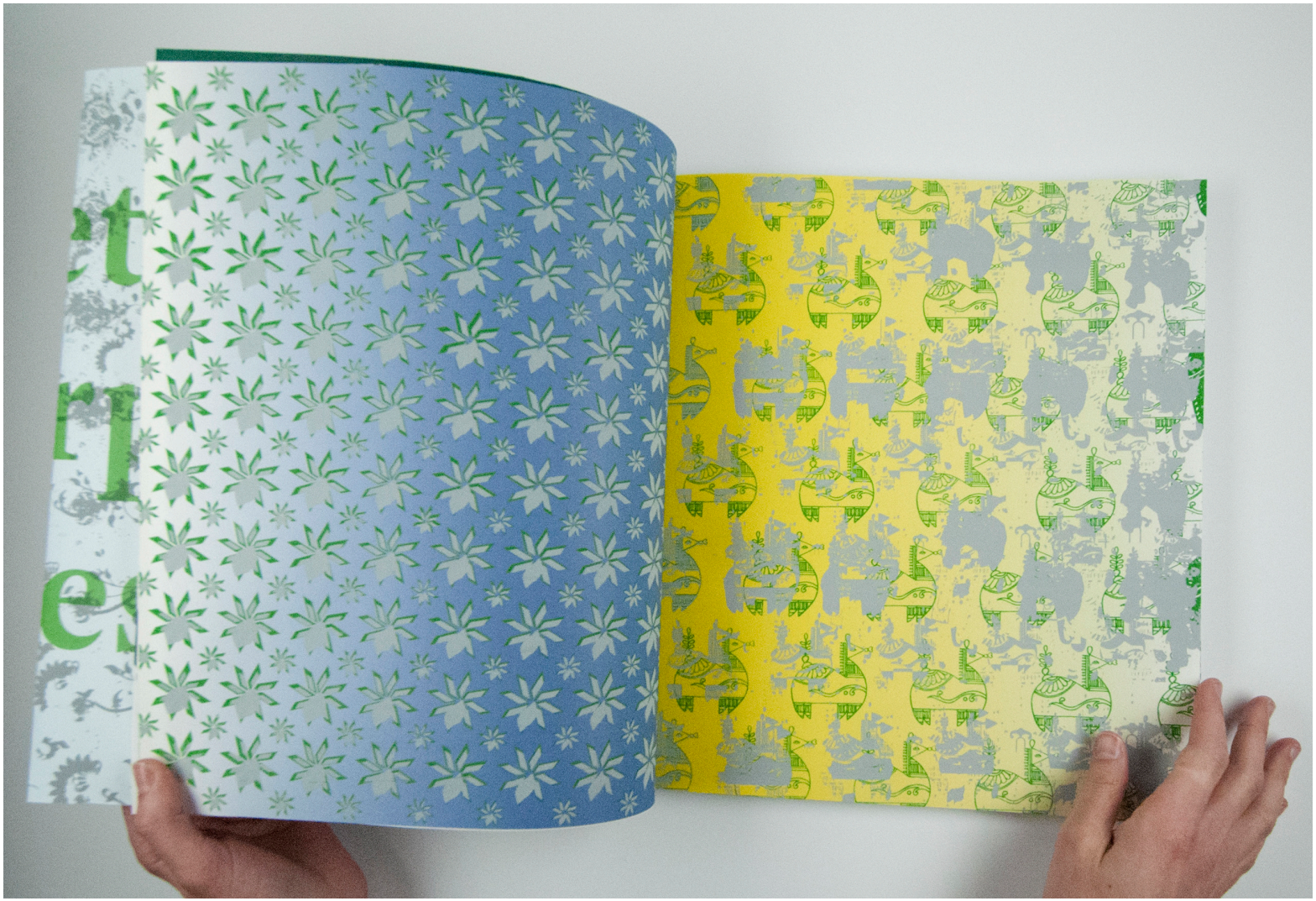
As the title suggests, *Metamorphoses* is an exploration of transformation *Metamorphoses* depicts multiple transformations of patterns that investigate a systematic change of one form to another. In these patterns, geometric patterns turn into decorative floral, animal and people motifs. In visually representing the transformation of patterns, an "in-between" temporal space opens up an area where new hybrid forms are registered. In this space, original forms shed their fixed representation and become something new. The new, "foreign" form reveals the interstitial and becomes an unstable element of linkage. It becomes the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, engaged in creating conditions through which newness comes into the world. In the in-between space of transformation, foreign forms destroy the original structure of the pattern, reference and sense of communication as well. The in-between forms are discomforting and have a sense of eeriness as they no longer resemble their former selves. This new hybrid form has a chaotic and disruptive presence and requires the viewer to be open and acceptable to the idea of change and transformation. Change and transformation however can be a daunting experience.

These visual transformations can be seen as metaphoric to migration and the physical changes migrants experience. The fate of the migrant can be seen in the classical contract between Lucretius and Ovid. For the postcolonial migrants, the problem consists in whether the crossing of cultural frontiers permits freedom from the essence of the self (Lucretius), or whether, like wax, migration only changes the surface of the soul, preserving identity under its protean forms (Ovid).

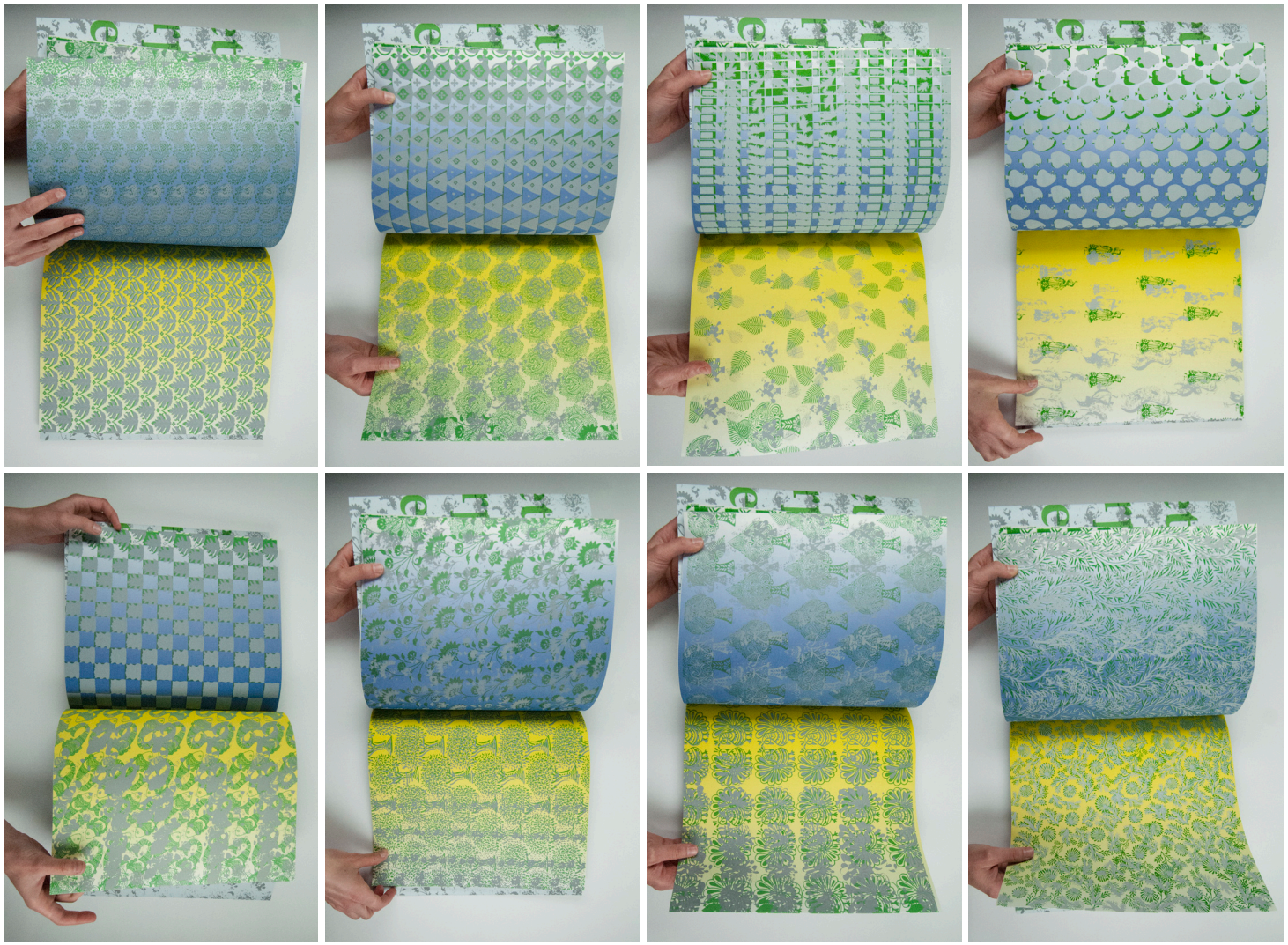
Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Metamorphoses*—cover, book, screen-printed and inkjet, 13 x 12 in, April, 2015



Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Metamorphoses*—selection of spreads, book, screen-printed and inkjet, 13 x 12 in, April, 2015

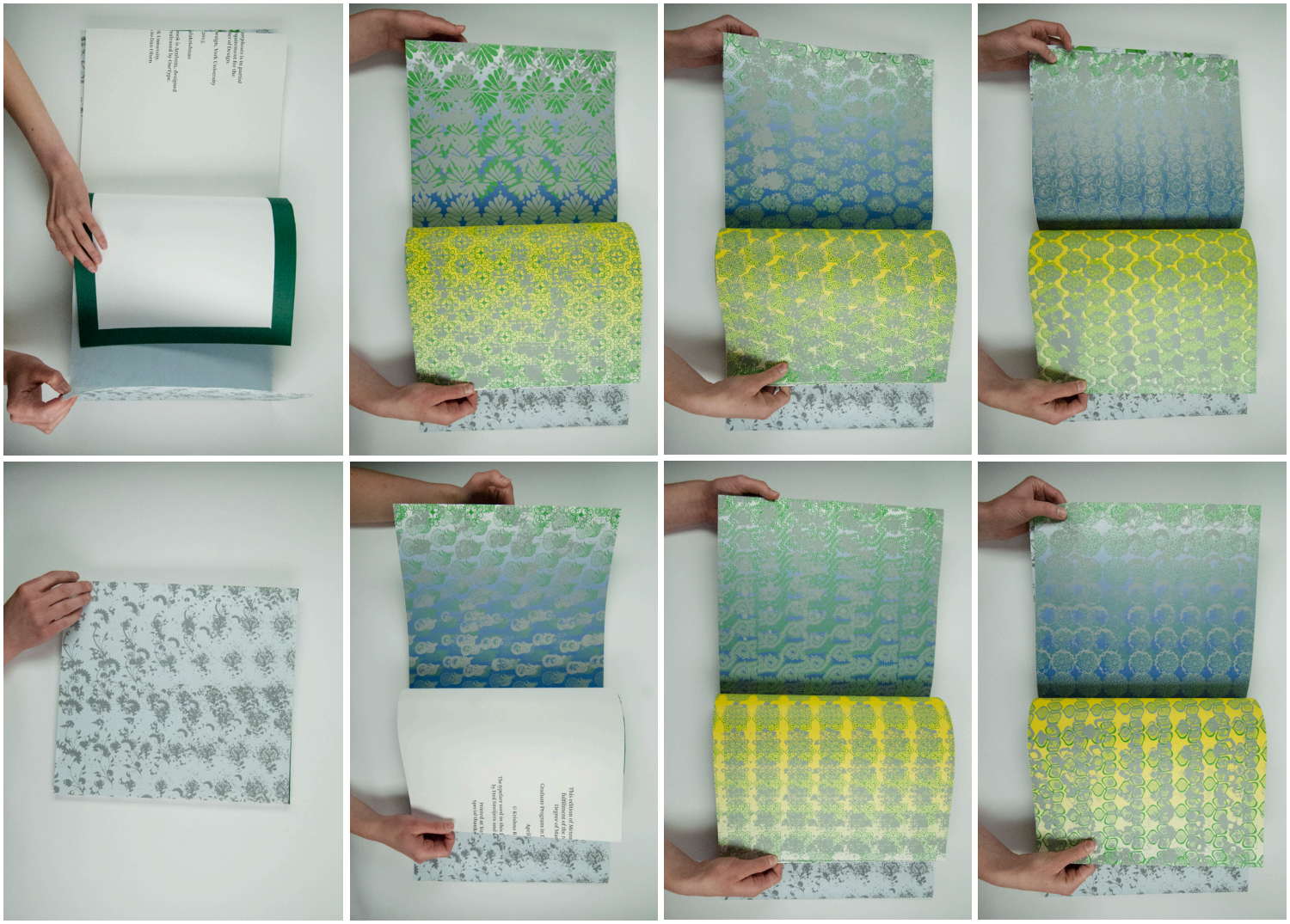


Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Metamorphoses*—spread, book, screen-printed and inkjet, 13 x 12 in, April, 2015



Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Metamorphoses*—selection of spreads, book, screen-printed and inkjet, 13 x 12 in, April, 2015

Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Metamorphoses*—spread, book, screen-printed and inkjet, 13 x 12 in, April, 2015



Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Metamorphoses*—selection of spreads, book, screen-printed and inkjet, 13 x 12 in, April, 2015

Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Strange Encounters*—thesis presentation exhibition, Samuel J. Zacks Gallery, Stong College, York University April, 2015

Krishna Balakrishnan, designer, *Strange Encounters*—thesis presentation exhibition, Samuel J. Zacks Gallery, Stong College, York University April, 2015

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