**PRESS RELEASE: 21 October 2026**

# Art Gene presents solo exhibition from Catalyst residency winner Azraa Motala

Art Gene is delighted to present *Motherland*, a solo exhibition by contemporary artist Azraa Motala. Bringing together work created over the last 10 years and recently as recipient of the 2024 Catalyst creative residency, the exhibition offers a unique chance to explore the work of this talented new voice in contemporary art.

Motala's practice is multidisciplinary, radiating out from painting into photography, poetry and text. Her work explores those landscapes which are coded as traditionally British, including the rural North, industrial towns, the countryside and textile mills, and looks at how these places hold hidden histories.

Recent works have focused on rural England and, specifically, Cumbria, especially the South Lakes where Motala found herself living during the Covid lockdowns. The body of work on show in *Motherland* draws on Motala's own experiences of living in a rural area, and her connections with communities in South Cumbria. It draws on conversations with women from all over the North West, alongside cultural food memories and the influence of a recent visit to India.

Motala's work explores how the human stories of power, class, labour and migration intersect with the way that traditional landscape painting and literature has created a particular picturesque and pastoral image of the area in the popular imagination. Bringing a sense of geography and landscape together with deeply human stories of family, motherhood, migration, South Asian culture and the North, the work explores and celebrates complexity, asking who gets to be seen, and on whose terms?

As part of her Catalyst creative residency, Motala has created a bold new painting, engaging unflinchingly with extreme right-wing responses to an Islamic Centre being built in Dalton-in-Furness, a village close to Barrow.

> "Azraa is a special talent, and as a judge on the Catalyst selection panel I was excited to be able to award her one of three £25,000 residency grants to pursue her work.
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> Azraa's residency, hosted by Art Gene, coincided with the build of a welcome new mosque, funded by and serving the community who are vital to maintaining our local NHS and other services. It has been shocking to witness the arrival of outside, far-right agitators in our otherwise inclusive and welcoming town and heartening to see them outnumbered on our streets month after month.

In this context, I'm fiercely proud to show Azraa's new work. She deftly demonstrates the relevance of contemporary art in the modern world: in *Motherland* a single picture speaks out more powerfully than a thousand newspaper headlines and social media posts. Don't miss it."

- **Maddi Nicholson, Artist and Director, Art Gene**

**Exhibition details**

*Motherland,* Azraa Motala

Press viewing day Wednesday 18 November 2026
Opening reception Thursday 19 November 2026, 6.30pm
Exhibition continues to Saturday 30 January 2027

**Note, the exhibition will be closed on Sundays and Mondays, and on Sat 5 December, and between 19 December to 4 January inclusive.*

**-ends-**

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**Notes for Editors**

There will be a press viewing day on Wednesday 18 November – please email Tessa Norton, Communications Lead, on tessa.norton@art-gene.co.uk if you would like to attend, or if you have any questions.

Azraa Motala and Maddi Nicholson are available for interviews. Please contact Tessa Norton if you would like to arrange this on tessa.norton@art-gene.co.uk. Alternatively, you can call the Art Gene offices on 01229 825085.

**Azraa Motala biography**

Azraa Motala's work aims to share narratives of historically marginalised communities, uplifting global majority people and amplifying important stories. It explores notions of identity, belonging, culture and heritage within the context of the contemporary Western space. She was awarded the Catalyst creative residency in 2024 and recent work has focused on her experiences living in the South Lakes, capturing its beauty and confronting its challenges. Drawing inspiration from the rich natural beauty of Cumbria alongside her individual perspectives as a British South Asian woman, she seeks to create a body of work that resonates with local communities and contributes to the cultural heritage of the region.

Azraa received her BA degree from the University of Central Lancashire and MA from the Chelsea College of Art, where she was also awarded the Hoyland Scholarship in 2018. On leaving university, she began working as a full-time artist: creating, curating and exhibiting. She exhibits work regularly and has shown paintings at the Saatchi Gallery, London, where she was shortlisted for the UK Young Artist of the Year Award, Tate Britain, Manchester Museum, Prism Contemporary and

in museums and cultural institutions across Lancashire as part of a major commission for the British Textile Biennial. More recently, she has exhibited at Manchester Contemporary, the Norman Rea Gallery, York, The Crypt Gallery, London, and Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, and as part of a UK-wide Artichoke Trust project. In 2022 she was awarded the University of Leicester Creative Engagement Fellowship, and her work is held in the public collections of the Harris Museum and Art Gallery and Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery.

https://www.azraamotala.com/

**About Art Gene**

**Art Gene** is Barrow's contemporary visual arts charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Artist-led and established for nearly 25 years, Art Gene engages local communities in the re-visioning of the social, natural and built environment of Barrow and Furness.

Art Gene manages artist studios, an impressive gallery and Allotment Soup: the Isle of Walney community growing space. It hosts local and visiting artists and has developed an extensive portfolio of creative projects authentically rooted in working class culture and place.

For more information on its work visit www.art-gene.co.uk

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