

# ปัก พวงมาลัย

Crochet Garlands



Exploring communication design through creative practice to foster meaningful relationships



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This research is submitted to Auckland University of Technology as partial fulfilment of the Philosophy Doctor degree.

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In submitting this work, I declare that:

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## Title

Crochet garlands: Exploring communication design through creative practice to foster meaningful relationships

## Abstract

This practice-led research asks:

**How can crochet be utilised as a creative practice with communication design tools to capture and foster meaningful connections?**

Drawing on the researcher's personal experience and observation from the past and present, this project investigates the values and qualities of the people in her community. These values and qualities are expressed through พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), Thai flower garlands, accompanied by a publication that conveys the essence of the entire project. The practice is informed by initiatives like the cultural significance of Thai gift-giving and garlands to create a personal connection to the researcher's background. Gift-giving is also used as a relational gesture to foster and facilitate meaningful connections through the crocheted garlands. This process is also captured through a visual narrative that showcases the researcher's navigation between two cultural worlds. The study contributes to the understanding of how crochet can be employed to navigate cultural adaptation.

## Keywords

Communication Design, Community, Crochet, Thai Garlands, Relational Design.



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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly quoted) nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other paper or other institution of higher learning.

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Kevalin Vongsakulkasem  
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## Intellectual Property Declaration

I retain copyright in all images and creative work produced and presented as part of this research, apart from the following images that are the intellectual property of others, listed below in the order they appear in this exegesis.

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Figure 2.3. *กระตุง (Kratong) in the river.*

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Sign:

Kevalin Vongsakulkasem  
Complete date 6/5/25



## Ethics Approval and Consents

AUTEC approval for this project was not required because it does not deal with people or animals.





# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION



## Introduction

This practice-led research aims to answer the research question:

**How can crochet be utilised as a creative practice with communication design tools to capture and foster meaningful connections?**

This research will showcase crocheted Thai-style garlands used as a communication device to articulate different values and qualities as seen in people within my community. Alongside the crocheted garlands, a publication is designed to encapsulate the essence of this research and links all parts of the project together.

This showcase aims to call attention to the importance of having a community and celebrating it to avoid loneliness and social isolation. The project is also informed by my Thai culture, demonstrating how the values of my upbringing are embedded in who I am and what I seek within relationships and community.

In recent years, it has become more common for young people to move away from home, often overseas, to pursue their education. In New Zealand, as of 2023, there were 69,135 international student enrolments. (About Education New Zealand, 2024). Among the challenges a person may face when moving to a new country is the lack of a sense of belonging and/or a stable community. Lacking a sense of belonging may lead to social isolation, which can be detrimental to one's experience and mental health, as it is human nature for people to connect (Allen et al., 2021). This research considers the experience of people trying to find a sense of belonging within their community, whether moving to a new country, school or university.

This study aims to contribute to the design practices of utilising crochet as a storytelling device. This craft is significant as it is ingrained in tradition and heritage and passed down through different generations (Peng, 2023/4). Specifically, in this project, crochet is used to create the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) or floral garlands, navigating between the researcher's Thai ethnicity and living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. In this sense, it also contributes to understanding how crochet can be employed to navigate cultural adaptation.

## Significant Terms in the Study

Key terms used throughout this research are explained below.

### Community

In this project, having a community refers to having a group of supportive people with whom you surround yourself. Community can also be the people you associate with, like the idiom, birds of a feather flock together.

### Belonging

To have a sense of belonging is to know that you are welcomed and accepted by the group of people you surround yourself with. This is the reassuring feeling of knowing that someone supports you and you are not alone.

### Social Isolation

Social isolation can be attributed to having little to no social contact with people outside of their immediate family members and not participating in any events requiring interaction with the public.

### พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) (Floral Garland)

A Phuang malai is the Thai name that translates to bunch garland or floral garlands. These are made with different flowers and can hold different meanings and symbolism. Garlands are used for different occasions, for example, as gifts, a good luck charm.

### ทำบุญ (merit-making)

One of the central concepts in Thai Buddhist practice is ทำบุญ (Tam Boon), commonly translated as making merit. Merit-making encompasses actions that accumulate บุญ (bun) or merit to improve one's spiritual standing in this life and future rebirths. It can include almsgiving, temple offerings, chanting, ethical conduct, and various forms of generosity, including gift-giving.

## Structure of the Exegesis

This exegesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the project, including the research question, rationale, significance and key terms, followed by positioning the researcher and the research. Chapter Two analyses the contextual knowledge surrounding and informing the project to provide an understanding of relational design, community, and crochet concepts. Chapter Three discusses the methodology and methods of the project, including the process of exploration and experimentation. Chapter Four provides a critical analysis and reflects on the design outcome of the project. Finally, there is a conclusion that revisits the significance of the study and outlines the next steps.

## Positioning the Research and the Researcher

### Navigating the world through two lenses

I was born in the Kingdom of Thailand and lived there until I was twelve years old, when I moved to Aotearoa, New Zealand. I had a traditional Thai education during my formative years in Thailand, and my parents taught me cultural expectations and Thai values. I remember learning the children's nursery rhyme หน้าที่เด็ก (เด็กเอ๋ยเด็กดี), meaning A Child's Duty (My child, my good child). The rhymes present ten core values, such as respect, diligence, humility, kindness and responsibility, commonly reinforced in school settings and family life. These values guide children towards becoming responsible and community-oriented individuals, reflecting the Thai culture of cultivating character development from an early age.

Some of the values from this rhyme that I still uphold in the present and are reflected in my personality:

1. วาจาดี นต้องสุภาพอ่อนหวาน - Be polite and have manners

To be a good person, being polite and having manners are crucial, as being well-mannered reflects who I am and how my parents raised me. I find myself a person with lots of empathy for others and I strive to treat the people around me with care. As the saying goes, you should treat others the way you want to be treated.

2. ยี่ดมี นกตัญญู - Be grateful

To be grateful to me is to appreciate what you have; that is why I have such high appreciation and so much love for the people in my life. I now regard my community highly because I have experienced shallow and superficial connections. Knowing that the people I choose to have around me are here to love and support me gives me more security in our connection. And in return, I want to show my gratitude to these people.

3. เป็นผู้รู้กการงาน - Be responsible

Being responsible means being aware of your actions and how they may affect others around you. This could be in how you act and talk to others or how much effort you put into connecting with others. I have learned that making a friendship, relationship or any connection you have with someone, requires effort from both parties.

## My Values

The values that I hold for myself and would seek in others are:

### 1. Genuineness

My definition of being genuine is to be true to myself when I am around others, and this means that I am not acting abnormally to be more likable. Being able to act like your usual self around your people and be comfortable knowing they accept you for who you are is very freeing.

### 2. Trust

Around November last year, I went through a breakup, which took a lot out of me. But this event showed me who was there for me and who was not. I pride myself on the support system I have built; the ones who were there to pick me up when I was at my lowest.

### 3. Open-door policy

I care a lot about my friends and family, so I often want to ensure they feel all right and have no worries. I make it clear that whenever they need me, I will always be there for them to listen and help in any way possible. One thing I genuinely love and appreciate about my community is my sense of security with them.

### 4. Communication

Over the years, I have learnt that the key to maintaining relationships between people is that there are times when you must be able to communicate your feelings. These experiences have helped me clarify what I value in relationships, how I want to treat others, and the respect I hope to receive in return.

A strong sense of community is valued, shaped by earlier experiences with friendships, interpersonal conflict, and gradual disconnection from others. These experiences have contributed to a persistent concern about being merely tolerated rather than fully accepted. This reflection connects to a period during early secondary school, around Year Nine, which involved attempts to form identity and navigate social expectations.

At that time, there was a tendency to seek approval from others to build friendships. While this approach led to wider social contact, many of these relationships remained surface-level and lacked sustained mutual commitment. When disagreements occurred, others often chose to disengage rather than work through the situation, which suggested a limited willingness to maintain the connection. These moments indicated a difference in how relationships were valued, particularly around whether to continue or end them. Such experiences have informed a more considered approach to building and maintaining a sense of community, where shared values and mutual effort are regarded as important.

## Crochet and Gift-giving

I have always had an interest in arts and crafts and have explored a range of creative hobbies, though most have been short-lived. Crocheting is the only craft I have continued with since beginning in early 2023, and it has become a meaningful part of my daily life. I initially took it up to try a form of knitted craft, and its accessibility made it enjoyable to learn and continue. The repetitive nature of crochet, which typically involves a single stitch, has made it a calming and mindful activity that helps me unwind after a long day.

Crochet has also become significant to me through the act of making gifts for friends and family, especially the Cat Ear Beanies, which have been the most frequently requested and made. Their simplicity and customisability make them well-suited as personalised gifts.

Gift-giving is a way I express care and appreciation for the people close to me. I particularly enjoy the process of creating something by hand, as it allows for a more thoughtful and deliberate form of expression. The time and effort invested in a crochet piece is reflected in each stitch, and when friends request something I have made, it feels affirming—they see value in both the object and the care behind it. Handmade gifts carry a personal quality that makes them distinct, as they are shaped by intention and not easily replicated elsewhere.

## Being Thai

Looking back at my undergraduate years, many of the projects I made were not as good a representation of who I am as much as I wanted. Often, I avoided doing projects about my culture and heritage because I wanted to separate myself from just 'being Thai'. Then, while finding the right research topic for this Masters project, I realised that I am who I am because of my culture. As I wanted this master's research to be authentically me, I have incorporated Thai elements like the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as the central aspect of the project, alongside topics such as community and crochet. Through this research, I can reignite my connection and love for my culture and heritage and share this with my community.

The next chapter will discuss the contexts that influenced this research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE



## Introduction

This chapter establishes the contextual foundation of the research by examining how design, craft, and cultural traditions intersect to inform the study. It explores concepts of relational design, the cultural and social dimensions of gift-giving, the historical and symbolic significance of the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai or Thai garlands), and the role of crochet as both a material practice and a means of fostering connection.

The first section introduces relational design, as outlined by Blauvelt (2008), and considers its development as a design methodology that supports social interaction and performative engagement. Relational design is positioned as a key influence in this research, informing how handmade objects—specifically crocheted พวงมาลัย — can be used as tools to support connection within a community.

The discussion then turns to gift-giving and relationships, considering the wider significance of gift exchange as a way of expressing care, appreciation, and relational bonds across cultures. Particular attention is given to Thai cultural perspectives, where gift-giving is closely associated with Buddhist traditions and social customs, emphasising generosity and the practice of ทำบุญ (merit-making).

The chapter next focuses on the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), a traditional Thai floral garland, which serves as a central cultural artefact within the research. These garlands are used in a variety of contexts, including religious offerings, personal adornment and acts of social gifting. Their meanings are shaped by the choice of flowers, colours and the context in which they are presented.

The following section examines crochet as a historical and socially significant craft practice. Crochet’s tactile and time-intensive nature is considered in relation to gift-giving, where handmade objects are often perceived to carry a heightened sense of emotional and relational value.

The final section engages with design practice and contemporary practitioners, situating the research within creative and practice-oriented methodologies. It considers the work of Monique Redmond, Cindy Huang, and Lissy and Rudi Robinson—designers and artists who use objects, craft, and installation to support relational encounters.

## Relational Design

Relational design, as introduced by Blauvelt (2008), emphasises the performative and socially engaged aspects of design practice. Emerging in the mid-1990s, this approach shifts focus from the final object to the effects design has on users, its role in facilitating interaction, and its responsiveness to context. Blauvelt proposed that relational design integrates pragmatic concerns with experimental and participatory methods. This research draws on these ideas to explore how performative and relational aspects of design can be expressed through the making of crochet garlands, supporting connections within a community.

## Gift-giving and Relationships

Gift-giving is a universal human practice that functions as a form of social and emotional communication. Anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have studied its role in establishing, maintaining, and negotiating relationships (Mauss, 1954; Sherry, 1983; Komter, 2005). Mauss (1954) argued that gift exchange is a fundamental mechanism for fostering social cohesion, where the act of giving carries obligations to reciprocate, reinforcing interpersonal and communal ties. Sherry (1983) expanded on this by describing gift-giving as a ritualistic act that conveys symbolic meaning beyond the material value of the gift.

Gifts serve a range of functions depending on the context of exchange. They can express affection, gratitude, obligation, or social status (Belk, 1996). Komter and Vollebergh (1997) observed that in platonic relationships, gift-giving plays an important role in affirming emotional bonds and reciprocal care. This project considers the role of gift-giving within personal and community relationships, focusing on the use of the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as a gesture of respect and appreciation. Handmade gifts are often perceived as more meaningful because they involve time, effort, and intentionality (Curasi et al., 2004). The handcrafted nature of the Phuang malai reinforces the emotional weight of the gift, aligning with studies on personalisation in gift exchange (Lowrey et al., 2004).

Within this project, the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) operates as an expression of care in a platonic context, strengthening interpersonal relationships. Beyond individual exchanges, gifts can also serve a collective function by contributing to a sense of group identity and belonging. Social exchange theorists suggest that gift-giving takes place within broader systems of reciprocity, where ongoing cycles of giving and receiving sustain social structures and goodwill (Molm et al., 2007). Thai cultural traditions reflect this dynamic, with Phuang malai frequently exchanged in social, familial, and ceremonial settings (Nichanan, 2023). This research engages with gift-giving as a culturally embedded practice that carries emotional, historical, and social significance.

### Gift-giving in Thai Culture

Buddhism is the predominant religion in Thailand, with over 92% of the population identifying as Buddhist (Walderich, 2023). Buddhist beliefs and practices, therefore, play a significant role in shaping Thai daily life, cultural values, and social customs. A central aspect of Thai Buddhist practice is *ทำบุญ* (Tam Boon), commonly translated as merit-making. This refers to actions aimed at accumulating *บุญ* (bun), or merit, to enhance one's spiritual progress in this life and future rebirths. Merit can be generated through various practices, including almsgiving, temple offerings (Figure 2.1), chanting, ethical conduct, and acts of generosity such as gift-giving (Keyes, 1983; Mulder, 2000).

Merit-making is grounded in the principle of karmic reciprocity, where intentional acts of generosity are understood to bring about positive spiritual outcomes. Mulder (2000) notes that such actions are guided by broader ethical values, including *metta* (loving-kindness) and *karuna* (compassion). The motivation behind the act is central; when it is free from self-interest, the ethical and spiritual value is considered greater (Sujato, 2018). Within this framework, gift-giving is understood as a spiritually significant act that acknowledges interdependence and moral responsibility toward others, whether human, animal or environmental.

**Figure 2.1.**  
*A day at the temple.*



Note: My mother is the most religious in the family. Growing up, she would include my sister and me in Buddhist customs like praying before bed or *ทำบุญ* (merit-making), often taking us to temples and doing morning alms every day. When we moved to New Zealand, Buddhist Thai temples were less accessible, but we found a couple of local temples around Auckland. In these images, we were doing the morning alms, donating to the temple to make merit and getting to know the monks. Going to a temple in a foreign country gives me a strong sense of community with the other Thai people; it gives us something in common, making it easy to connect. From researcher's personal archive.

This form of merit-making is also embedded in Thai cultural and religious festivals. One of the most significant is สงกรานต์ (Songkran), the Thai New Year, which marks a time of renewal and familial respect. Rituals include the ceremonial pouring of water over the hands or feet of elders and monks (Figure 2.2), accompanied by the offering of floral garlands such as พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as symbolic gifts of gratitude and blessing (Kuvera & Saengsin, 2023). These garlands hold both ritual and relational value, expressing emotional connection while reinforcing social hierarchy through respectful acts of giving.

Another key festival, ลอยกระทง (Loy Krathong), highlights the relational dimension of gift-giving beyond human social circles. Participants float crafted กระทง (Krathong), which are small vessels made of banana leaves and decorated with flowers and incense (Figure 2.3) into rivers and waterways as an offering to พระแม่คงคา (Pra Mae Khongkha), the water goddess (Agarwal, 2010; Thadaniti, 2014). This act of giving symbolises apology, reverence, and ecological mindfulness, embedding gift-giving within cosmological and environmental ethics.

Gift-giving is also present in secular Thai traditions. For instance, วันเด็ก (Wan Dek), or National Children’s Day, reflects values of care and recognition, particularly in lower-income communities where children are given toys and sweets as gestures of support (Bolotta, 2017). Beyond formal celebrations, everyday acts such as offering fruit, desserts, or garlands when visiting family or friends reflect broader cultural norms of gratitude and hospitality (Theppitak et al., 2021). These informal exchanges help maintain social ties and contribute to ongoing relational reciprocity.

In both religious and secular contexts, gift-giving in Thailand operates on several symbolic levels: as a form of merit-making, a relational ritual, and a gesture of cultural continuity. The emphasis lies not in the object itself, but in affirming values such as respect, care, and belonging. As Komter (2005) notes, gifts can serve as material expressions of emotional and moral intent, and in Thai contexts, they are often linked to spiritual aspiration. This research draws on these traditions to examine how the symbolic role of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), particularly as a gift of gratitude, can be adapted within a contemporary design framework. These practices inform the project’s focus on how crafted objects may carry relational significance, cultural specificity, and spiritual purpose.

**Figure 2.2.**  
*Washing a monk’s feet.*



Note: In Thai culture the feet are usually considered the dirtiest or lowest body part. Therefore, pointing your foot at people or having them elevated is deemed disrespectful. On days like สงกรานต์ (Songkran), it is common for people to wash the feet of their elders or monks as the utmost sign of respect, as shown in the picture. Another nuance about this image is that to become monks, they must make sacrifices. Typically, monks do not wear shoes so they can be more connected to the earth and, walking around with no shoes on, their feet would become dirty. People wash and cleanse the dirt off monks’ feet to thank monks and show respect for their sacrifices. From RawPixel, by RawPixel, n.d. (<https://www.rawpixel.com/image/6030382/photo-image-background-public-domain-person>). CC-BY 2.0.

**Figure 2.3.**  
*กระถง (Krathong) in the river.*



Note: This is what a กระถง (Krathong) would typically look like when floated into a body of water. It is common for people to decorate them with incense sticks and candles so that their กระถง (Krathong) can stand out from the others. Others would also use beautiful flowers and some money to appease the river goddess. In the present, it has become more common for people to buy their กระถง (Krathong) from markets and other sources than to make it themselves, but to preserve the art of making these กระถง (Krathong) there have been occasions where schools would provide materials and teach students to make their own. From *RawPixel*, By O. Prachuk, n.d. (<https://www.pexels.com/photo/floating-krathongs-in-bangkok-night-festival-29420491/>). CC-BY 2.0.

## Thai Garlands พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai):

### Cultural Significance and Symbolic Function

พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), translated as a bunch of garlands in Thai (Dare, 2016), refers to a traditional floral arrangement with cultural, spiritual, and relational significance in Thailand. Typically made from fresh flowers such as jasmine, marigold, crown flower, orchid, and rose, these garlands are carefully assembled in symbolic patterns where colour and composition convey meaning (Figure 2.4). The process of making and offering a Phuang malai extends beyond decoration; it functions as a culturally embedded form of communication, carrying both spiritual intention and social expression (Love You Flower, 2024; Nichanan, 2023).

The making of Phuang malai is traditionally a domestic and devotional activity, passed down informally through families or local communities (Theppitak et al., 2021). It is a labour-intensive process requiring precision, care, and aesthetic judgement, making the garland both a crafted object and an embodied form of cultural expression. In Buddhist contexts, flower selection is guided by qualities such as fragrance, durability, and symbolic meaning, which vary depending on region and occasion (Bunnag, 1973).

Figure 2.4.

พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) stall at a market.



Note: Similarly to the กระทง (Kratong), it is common for people to buy a pre-made พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as they are so accessible. They can be found anywhere from grocery stores to markets to even on the side of the road. The reason why the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) market is so big is that these garlands contain fresh flowers, so they would inevitably wilt, and people would have to get more and more to replace the wilted ones. Fewer people in this generation know how to make a พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), unlike the older generation. When I mentioned this project to my mother, she was elated that I was exploring this side of Thai culture. From *Flickr*, by Irene2005, 2007. (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/89555776@N00/1399253887/>). CC-BY 2.0.

Jess Dare (2016), a contemporary jeweller and artist-in-residence in Thailand, reflects on her experience engaging with พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) during her travels across the country. Despite encountering a variety of visual and cultural traditions, she describes the emotional presence of the garlands as particularly impactful. Dare identifies three primary uses of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai): as offerings, decorations, and gifts, each associated with distinct yet interconnected meanings. This project engages with the garland's layered significance—ritual, aesthetic, and relational—by reinterpreting พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) through crochet. As a parallel practice grounded in repetition, tactility, and emotional intent, crochet is used to extend the cultural logic of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) into new material and social contexts.

### Offering

It is common for Thai people to use พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as an offering to Buddha when visiting temples and shrines. After saying the Buddhist chant, a prayer to pay homage to the Buddha, this act of offering involves placing พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) in his hand, hanging it on his wrist or placing it in his lap (Dare, 2016). This ritual is viewed as an act of ทำบุญ (merit-making), which is considered an important part of Thai Buddhist practice. Merit-making contributes to one's spiritual development and is often performed to bring blessings, improve karma or express gratitude. The act of offering is quiet and reflective, involving physical gesture and mental focus.

In addition to temples, พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) are also offered at spirit houses, which are small shrines commonly found outside homes, businesses and public places across Thailand. These structures are believed to house protective spirits or ancestral entities, and offerings such as flowers, incense and food are placed before them regularly. The inclusion of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) in these offerings signifies respect and acknowledgement of the spiritual presence in these spaces (Dare, 2016). Such rituals are not necessarily bound to formal religious observance but are embedded into everyday life, forming a consistent thread of spiritual mindfulness in Thai cultural practices. The act of offering พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), whether to Buddha or spirits, reflects a sustained intention to cultivate harmony, express reverence and participate in cycles of generosity that are central to Thai worldviews.

### Decoration

Phuang malai are also used as decorative objects, extending their role beyond religious or ceremonial functions into everyday environments. Across Thailand, they are commonly seen hanging from rearview mirrors in vehicles, including cars, taxis, motorbikes, and boats. This practice is often linked to the belief that the garlands offer protection and ensure a safe journey. Drivers regularly replace them, as fresh flowers are thought to sustain good fortune and invite continued blessings (Dare, 2016).

In domestic settings, Phuang malai may be hung near windows, entryways, or placed on altars. The fragrance of jasmine, a frequently used flower, subtly spreads through living spaces, contributing to a calming and pleasant atmosphere (Dare, 2016). In commercial contexts such as restaurants or shops, garlands are displayed to support a traditional aesthetic, while also functioning symbolically to attract positive energy or protection.

These decorative uses highlight the garland's layered significance—combining visual appeal with cultural symbolism and spiritual intention. While they enhance the ambience of a space, they also serve as quiet markers of care, connection, and continuity with tradition and belief.

### Gift-Giving

Lastly, one of the primary purposes of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) is gift-giving in different festivals like Songkran, as mentioned earlier, where children give their elders a flower garland as a token of appreciation and respect (Figure 2.5). The gifting of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) also plays a role in honouring and paying respect and appreciation to the person given the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai). They can also be used for morning alms and special occasions like weddings and funerals (Dare, 2016).

In Thai culture, the flowers that make up the garland communicate different meanings. For example, Dare (2016) writes that she chose the crown flower to represent love and the amaranth to represent never-ending love. The flowers commonly used in floral garlands are jasmine to represent purity, orchid for luxury and lotus for peace (Love You Flower, 2024). Nichanan (2023) is a Thai macramé artist who runs an online store that sells พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) and other macramé pieces. When writing about the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), she states that friends and family gift these garlands to show affection and respect and are commonly used for important milestones such as birthdays, weddings and graduation ceremonies (Nichanan, 2023).

**Figure 2.5.**

*Brother and Mother on Mother's day 2024.*



Note: My mother tends to go back to Thailand often and was away from New Zealand for most of the last year. She keeps in touch with me through daily updates on a messaging app. Last year, she was in Thailand for Mother's Day and sent me this photo of her celebrating with my brother. From researcher's personal archive, 2024.

# Crochet

## A Brief History of Crochet

The origins of crochet are difficult to trace, though the term itself derives from the French word *croche*, meaning hook (Marks, 2009). Historically, crochet was regarded as a lesser craft in England, often seen as a substitute for traditional lace (WATG, 2015, p. 1). Its status shifted when Queen Victoria learned to crochet and donated handmade scarves to veterans of the South African War, which helped raise its profile and encourage wider public interest (WATG, 2015).

Crochet gained renewed popularity in the 1970s, supported by the availability of patterns and instructions in print media (Strong, 2023). One widely produced item was the Afghan blanket, often created collaboratively by groups of women as shared craft practice and gifted to others. Strong (2023) notes that these colourful blankets became a symbol of generosity and community. The origins of the Afghan as a textile are recorded as early as the 1830s, and by the 1860s, crocheted Afghans were recognised as handcrafted artefacts displayed at public fairs (Carlyle, 1833; Reported on *Fancy Articles & Fine Art*, 1859, p. 39).

## Crochet and Well-being

The repetitive nature of crochet, often involving a single stitch repeated in sequence, fosters focus and continuity, which many associate with mindfulness. Baer (2003) defines mindfulness as sustained, non-judgmental attention to the present moment. When applied to activities like crochet, this attentiveness can promote psychological balance and emotional stability.

Integrating mindfulness into daily tasks has been linked to improved mental health (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Garland et al., 2015). In this context, crochet functions as a form of informal mindfulness, engaging sustained concentration and fine motor skills. Burns and Van de Meer (2021) found that regular practitioners reported feeling “happier, calmer and more useful” (p. 155), suggesting positive emotional effects. This is echoed in broader literature on the therapeutic potential of handcrafts such as knitting and crochet, which have been associated with reduced anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms (Riley et al., 2013; Pöllänen, 2015).

Soni’s (2023) recent findings reinforce this connection, showing that crochet can help manage stress and anxiety, occasionally reducing dependence on medication. Participants highlighted the activity’s rhythm and tactile nature as effective tools for emotional regulation (Soni, 2023, p. 314). Crochet thus serves not only as a means of relaxation but also as a practical form of self-care.

From a neurological standpoint, repetitive hand motions activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which supports rest and emotional regulation (Lambert, 2020). Additionally, crochet supports cognitive functions, helping maintain dexterity and coordination. Adams-Price and Morse (2018) argue that craft-based hobbies can aid cognitive functioning in older adults, while also contributing to emotional and social well-being. The process of making also generates a sense of agency and fulfilment. Gauntlett (2011) suggests that craft activities offer tangible forms of creative expression and meaning-making, contributing to individual happiness. Within this research, crochet operates both methodologically and reflectively, supporting a process of thinking-through-making while fostering a sense of calm and purposeful engagement.

### Connecting with Crochet

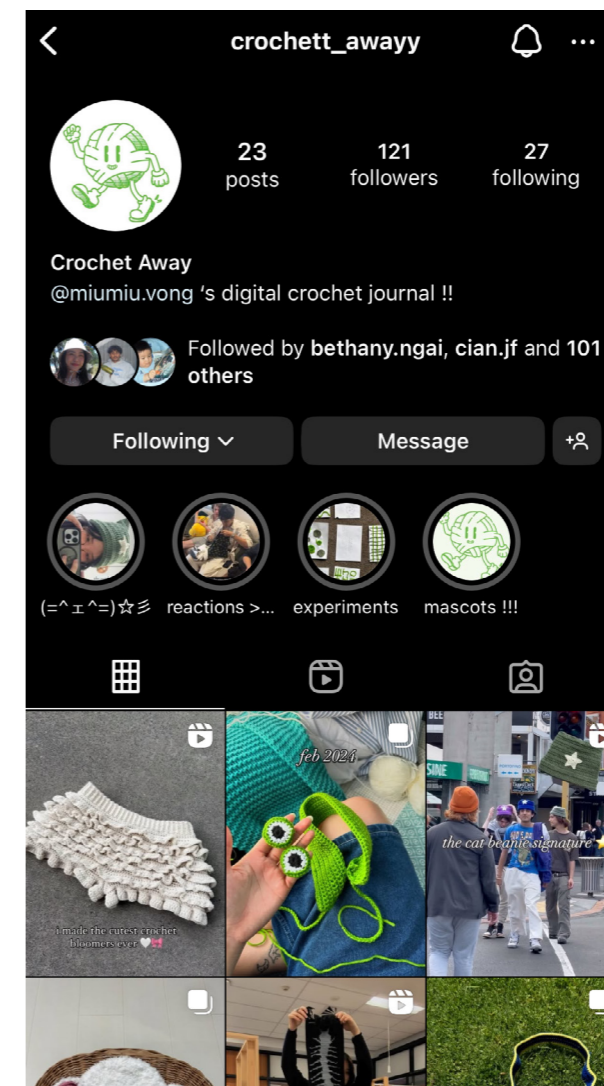
Although often viewed as a solitary activity, crochet can foster social connection and community, particularly through shared interests and online engagement. Burns and Van de Meer (2021) observe that while in-person crochet groups have become less common, practitioners still experience social benefits, including reduced loneliness and opportunities for new relationships.

In this project, social media—particularly Instagram—has served as a platform for connecting with other crochet makers. Sharing images of completed work has led to informal exchanges involving encouragement, technical advice, and expressions of interest (Figure 2.6). These interactions have contributed to a sense of belonging within a wider network of practice. In some cases, online engagement has also opened pathways for public sharing, including interest in commissioned pieces, indicating an appreciation for handmade craft in digital communities.

Mayne’s (2016) research reinforces the idea that digital platforms can enhance social connection among craft practitioners. Examining crochet-focused communities on Instagram, Mayne found that regular online interaction supports both knowledge exchange and the development of personal and social relationships. These connections are built on shared appreciation for craft and an ethos of generosity, with members offering encouragement and inspiration to one another. Social media also allows geographically distant individuals to engage in shared making, fostering ongoing motivation and creative growth.

In this project, sharing crocheted artefacts—whether in progress or completed—extends the relational values of the work. It brings visibility to the labour involved in handmaking and invites others into the creative process.

**Figure 2.6.**  
Crochet Away Instagram page.



Note: This is a screenshot of my crochet Instagram page, @crochett\_away, where I share my completed projects and processes. Through this account, I have built up a network of followers while showing the work and skills that I put into each project. From researcher’s personal archive, 2025.

### **Crochet as a Visual Narrative**

Crochet can be understood within communication design as a material and visual form of narrative construction. As a structured method based on repetition and variation, it generates visual meaning through process and composition. Each stitch records a decision made by the maker, forming a sequence of actions that gives the object both form and symbolic content (Gauntlett, 2011). Within this framework, crochet is not only a method of production but also a process through which stories, relationships, and cultural values may be expressed.

When informed by personal or collective memory, crochet work often engages in symbolic or representational functions. Pöllänen (2015) argues that textile-making practices such as crochet carry autobiographical and emotional content, particularly when linked to cultural heritage or personal reflection. The visual qualities of the final object—colour, motif, texture—serve as a form of non-verbal communication that may reference place, identity, or interpersonal connection. In this sense, the artefact itself can be read as a narrative structure.

In the context of this study, crochet is applied as a material method for articulating values observed within a community. The selection of motifs and their arrangement in the garlands is informed by reflective observation and intended to convey a set of attributes through visual and tactile means. As Mäkelä (2007) suggests, meaning is embedded in the act of making, and the artefact becomes a site through which knowledge is developed and communicated.

## Making with Hands

Throughout the process of crocheting, a growing appreciation has emerged for the value of working with the hands. Crochet, in this context, has developed into more than a creative outlet; it has become a site of engagement where material and thought intersect. The tactile nature of crochet, manipulating yarn through variations in tension, pattern and stitch, facilitates a heightened awareness of the body's role in knowledge production (Figure 2.7).

Adams-Price and Morse (2018) argue that regular participation in craft supports both cognitive and social development, enhancing skills such as hand–eye coordination and concentration. Craft also offers a space for self-expression, which can contribute to emotional well-being and personal growth. These affective benefits are not separate from the act of making but are embedded within it. This notion aligns with practice-based research, where knowledge is understood to emerge through the act of making. Mäkelä (2007) describes this as tacit and situated knowledge —difficult to express in conventional academic terms, yet meaningful and valid. Bolt (2004) similarly introduces the idea of material thinking, where interaction with materials becomes a generative process through which new insights arise.

Handmaking also reshapes the relationship between the object and the maker. Page and Thorsteinsson (2018) suggest that handmade items carry personal significance, as they embody time, care and intention. Their study differentiates between professional craft and what they call amateur craft, rooted in the Latin *amare*, meaning to love, highlighting the emotional dimension of non-commercial making. In this project, handmaking is central to the methodological approach. It serves as a way to reflect inwardly while connecting outwardly, framing crochet as a relational process through which meaning is formed. Knowledge in this context is not external to practice but arises through material engagement.

**Figure 2.7.**  
*Miu crocheting.*



Note: This is a screenshot of a video I took of myself to show what I typically look like when I create crochet projects. I took this video to show the process of making myself a pair of shorts. An edited video was created for my crochet account on Instagram. I usually show the finished product of my work on Instagram but in this case, I wanted to show people the time and effort it takes to create. I also wanted to emphasise the making with hands aspect of crochet, how the things I make are entirely handmade. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

## Colours and Emotions

In the design of crocheted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as relational artefacts, colour selection plays a purposeful role. Colour operates as a non-verbal system of communication, capable of evoking emotional responses and creating atmosphere without relying on language (Brooks, 2003). Within the context of gift-giving, colour can express sentiments such as care, warmth, reassurance, or reflection, depending on its hue, saturation, and arrangement.

Zhandyrbay's (2024) research on visual communication explores how viewers interpret colour palettes based on emotional associations. Participants linked specific colours with emotional qualities—blue, for instance, was often associated with calm, trust and stability. These associations are particularly relevant in relational contexts, where colour choice shapes how a gift is received and understood. In this project, colour becomes a subtle but integral part of the communicative function of the Phuang malai.

## Floral Symbolism

The cultural symbolism of flowers plays a significant role in this project. In Thai traditions, both the species and colour of flowers are selected purposefully, with each conveying specific meanings—jasmine represents purity, orchids denote admiration or respect, and lotus flowers symbolise spiritual peace (Love You Flower, 2024). These symbolic associations are embedded in traditional พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), where each floral element contributes to the message of the gift.

In this project, each crocheted garland is designed to represent a particular relationship within the maker's community. Colour choices are informed by the emotional tone of that relationship, whether expressing gratitude, remembrance, support, or celebration.

## Design Practice and Practitioners

As a practice-led research project, this study frames making as a form of inquiry and reflection. It is grounded in the understanding that knowledge can arise through material engagement and context-specific practice. This section references contemporary practitioners whose work has informed both the conceptual and methodological aspects of the study.

The practices of Monique Redmond, Cindy Huang, and Lissy and Rudi Robinson offer insight into the social and affective dimensions of handmade forms. Their work incorporates gifting, ritual, cultural identity, and collaboration, often realised through public installations, participatory exchanges, and textile-based crafts. These approaches position objects as sites of memory, connection, and shared experience.

This research draws on their approaches to relational materiality to guide the making of crocheted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), using the garlands as expressions of intention, care, and social meaning within a specific community context.

## Monique Redmond

Monique Redmond’s project *The Event within Temporary Practices and the Public Social* (2019) explores how everyday objects—particularly those linked to acts of giving and receiving—can serve as catalysts for social interaction within event-based and temporary public art contexts. Framed within the field of social practice, the work examines how materials such as flowers, risograph prints, and ceramic vessels contribute to relational exchanges.

Redmond (2019) treats gifting as an active form of interpersonal engagement. Crafted or selected objects in her installations are modest yet meaningful, chosen for their accessibility and cultural associations. Examples include floral prints, ceramic vessels, and the live gifting of flowers (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). These elements are placed or shared in ways that invite participation, encourage reflection, and create openings for spontaneous conversation. The gesture of offering is durational and embodied, fostering conditions for reciprocity and presence. Central to Redmond’s methodology is the belief that ordinary materials can carry emotional and social significance when framed with artistic intent. The gifts in her installations are not final outcomes but entry points into connection and shared experience. Her work emphasises how attention, care, and generosity can be embedded into public artistic encounters.

This research draws from Redmond’s approach to material exchange as a framework for connection. The crocheted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) produced in this study similarly invites relational reflection through its making and offering. Informed by Redmond’s model, the garlands are not positioned as decorative or commemorative objects but as conduits for presence and quiet social interaction.

**Figure 2.8.**  
*A Floral Gesture.*



This spread and text: Image 77 (a, b, c, d, e, f, g). A floral gesture (iteration 5), 2019 - posters #1-7. Risograph prints, 420 x 272mm.

Note: This is a screenshot of Redmond’s thesis of the third iteration of the printed matter called A Floral Gesture. These are a collection of risograph-printed posters using bright colours from the printer to depict silhouettes of different flowers. The bright use of colour and a clear grid system create a strong design system within the collection of the posters. The relation of this piece to my project revolves around the use of normal items to facilitate a conversation and connection between people. From *The Event within Temporary Practices and the Public Social*, by M. Redmond, 2019. ([https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/y1jebpz2nwxuva3ek8sst/Monique-Redmond-\\_PhD-2019-\\_share-copy-76mb-spreads.pdf?rlkey=lu0hnxdhhoct6izgb9xkbd6s9&e=14&st=7p13nbxy&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/y1jebpz2nwxuva3ek8sst/Monique-Redmond-_PhD-2019-_share-copy-76mb-spreads.pdf?rlkey=lu0hnxdhhoct6izgb9xkbd6s9&e=14&st=7p13nbxy&dl=0)). Used with permission.

**Figure 2.9.**  
Ceramic Vases.

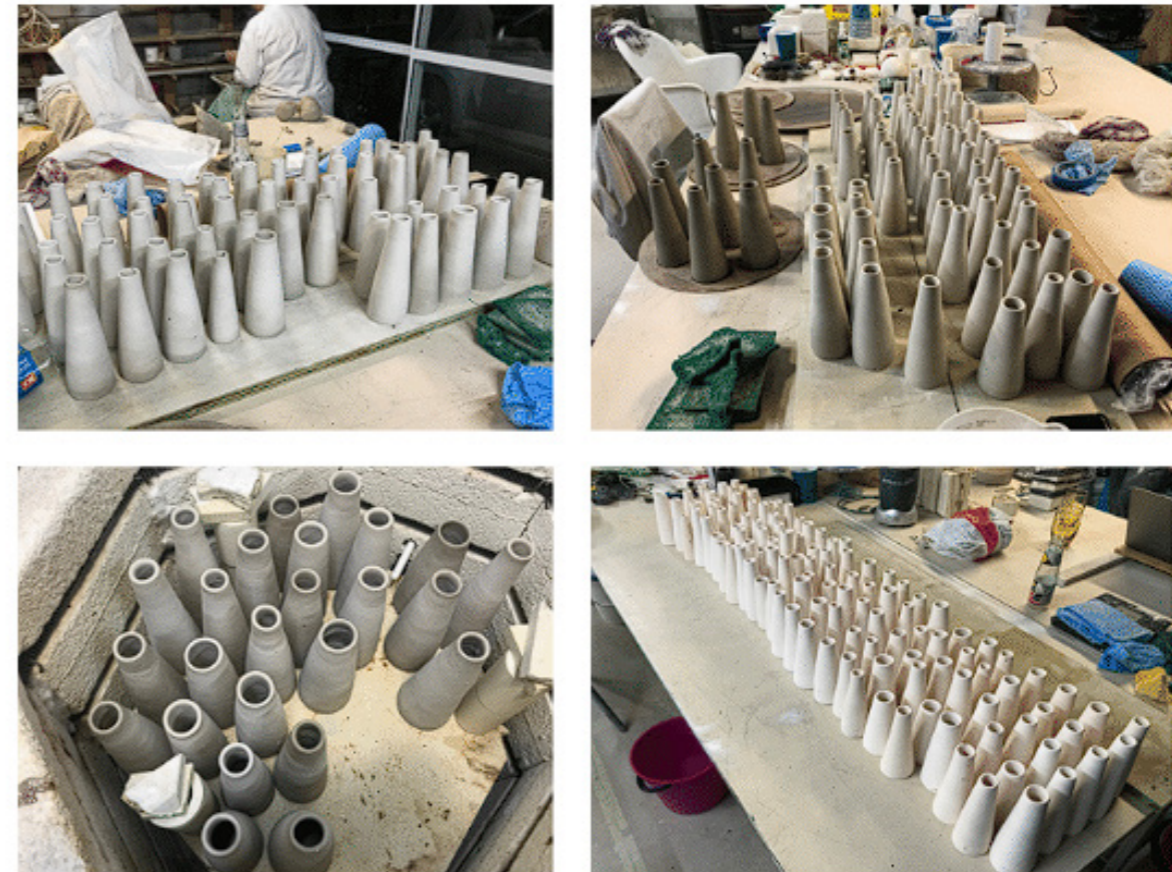


Image 80 (a, b, c, d). Making the bud vases in the studio; Harriet on the wheel, Monique doing the hand work, September 2019.

Note: Another screenshot from Redmond's thesis of her and another practitioner (Harriett) making the ceramic vases used in the project. The vases are of the same design, but because they are handmade, they will all differ slightly due to human error. From *The Event within Temporary Practices and the Public Social*, by M. Redmond, 2019. ([https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/y1jebpz2nwxuva3ek8sst/Monique-Redmond-\\_PhD-2019-\\_share-copy-76mb-spreads.pdf?rlkey=lu0hnxdhhoct6izgb9xkxbd6s9&e=14&st=7p13nbxy&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/y1jebpz2nwxuva3ek8sst/Monique-Redmond-_PhD-2019-_share-copy-76mb-spreads.pdf?rlkey=lu0hnxdhhoct6izgb9xkxbd6s9&e=14&st=7p13nbxy&dl=0)). Used with permission.

## Cindy Huang

Cindy Huang’s socially engaged installation *Twin Cultivation*, developed in collaboration with Michael McCabe and Rosabel Tan, was designed to coincide with Matariki, the Māori New Year—a time associated with reflection and renewal. The work invited participants to engage in a three-part structured exchange with a stranger: initiating conversation, building rapport, and exchanging a handmade ceramic vegetable as a final gesture (Hansen, n.d.).

At the centre of *Twin Cultivation* (Figure 2.10) is gift-giving, positioned as a tool for generating connection. Huang reflects on how community interactions often remain within cultural boundaries, and the installation acted as a gentle intervention to prompt new social ties across differences. This research draws on *Twin Cultivation* as an example of how crafted objects can carry emotional significance and facilitate meaningful social engagement. The crocheted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) produced in this study similarly functions as an intentional material offering, created to recognise and honour relationships within a community setting.

**Figure 2.10.**  
*Twin Cultivation.*



Note: A screenshot from the Britomart group’s interview with Cindy Huang about her installation to celebrate Matariki. The picture consists of some of the ceramic vegetables that she handmade to be given to the participants who are engaging in the installation. The variety of vegetables made shows a part of history as well as the different types of people who are brought together from the project, similarly to how the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) are meant to function in this project. From *Britomart Group*, by G. Van der Star, n.d. (<https://britomart.org/cindyhuang/>). Used with permission.

### Lissy and Rudi Robinson

The *Wharenui Harikoa (House of Joy)* is a large-scale crocheted installation by artists Lissy and Rudi Robinson. Taking the form of a wharenui (Māori meeting house), the work serves as a space for collective joy, cultural affirmation, and intergenerational healing (Lissy & Rudi, n.d.). Constructed entirely from brightly coloured yarn, it reimagines traditional Māori architecture through domestic craft, symbolically weaving together heritage, resilience, and creative expression (Figure 2.11).

Each component of the wharenui is colour-coded with intent. The artists explain that each yarn selection conveys emotional significance, with individual stitches representing acts of care, survival, and cultural continuity. Informed by their whakapapa (genealogy), the work foregrounds crochet as both a cultural and relational practice. The act of making is framed as a form of storytelling, embedding lived experience into the material form.

As a public installation, the *Wharenui Harikoa* invites visitors from diverse backgrounds to reflect and connect through a shared experience. Its tactile and symbolic qualities align with this research's emphasis on making as a mode of expressing care and connection. Similarly, the crocheted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) in this project are offered as relational artefacts, shaped through repetitive labour and intentional design. By referencing *The Wharenui Harikoa*, this research acknowledges the role of crochet in preserving cultural narratives and fostering spaces of relationship through material and emotional engagement.

**Figure 2.11.**  
*The Wharenui Harikoa.*



Note: This is an image from the Lissy and Rudi Robinson website of the Wharenui in its entirety, showing off the different brightly coloured yarn and how it works together to create one cohesive crochet project. I wanted to use this image to highlight how something of cultural significance can be seen in a new light using textile crafts, similarly to how I am creating Thai พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) in crochet. Even if the scale of the two different artefacts (The Wharenui and the flower garland) are so different, I wanted to highlight the similar idea of preserving one's culture through craft. From *Wharenui Harikoa*, by Lissy and Rudi, n.d. (<https://www.lissyandrudi.com/>). Used with permission.

## Conclusion

This chapter has established the contextual foundation of the research by examining theoretical and practical influences relevant to the study. It considers the performative dimensions of relational design and the potential of design to facilitate social interaction. The cultural and social dimensions of gift-giving were explored, with a particular focus on Thai traditions, where acts of giving express gratitude, respect, and relational ties. Within this framework, พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) was identified as a culturally significant object, used in offering, decoration, and gift exchange, and positioned as a key element of this research.

Crochet, as a central making practice, was examined in terms of its historical, social, and emotional significance. Its role in supporting mindfulness, connection, and self-expression was discussed, considering its solitary and communal aspects. The chapter also addressed the value of handmade artefacts in design, noting how time, labour and intention can enhance the emotional and relational meaning of a gift.

The research is situated within contemporary design methodologies through reference to the work of Monique Redmond, Cindy Huang, and Lissy and Rudi Robinson.

The following chapter, Design Methodology, will outline the research framework and describe the methods used to integrate these concepts into the making process.

## CHAPTER 3: DESIGN METHODOLOGY



## Introduction

This chapter outlines the research framework and processes employed in the project, including the research paradigm, methodology, and how specific methods integrate into the practice. The study adopts a postpositivist perspective, recognising that the researcher’s subjectivity—including prior understandings, identity, and inherent biases—shapes the production and interpretation of knowledge (Ryan, 2006). This perspective values situated insight as a valid contribution to understanding complex phenomena. In this project, growing up within a different cultural context has informed the values and worldview that underpin the inquiry.

The research is grounded in a practice-led methodology, where creative practice functions as a primary mode of investigation. This includes processes of making, iteration, and documentation. Reflective practice supports this methodological approach by enabling critical engagement with personal history, creative decisions, and external feedback received over the course of the project. Through this iterative and reflective process, the research explores how personal experience and values are negotiated and expressed through creative practice.

### 1. Finding a theme

Approaching this stage, I was unsure as to the research focus I wanted to pursue in this Master's course, and I was exploring too many ideas at once, making me more lost and overwhelmed. Through weekly discussions with my supervisors and working with the whiteboard (Figure 3.1), I was able to draw out what I care about and want out of this Master's project. The main topics we identified included:

#### Embracing my Culture

As I was born in Thailand but have spent most of my life in New Zealand, I am constantly navigating between two worlds. For a while, I disregarded the fact that my upbringing in a bilingual household had shaped me into who I am today. For this project, I wanted to explore how the Thai values I grew up with are still relevant and influence my worldview.

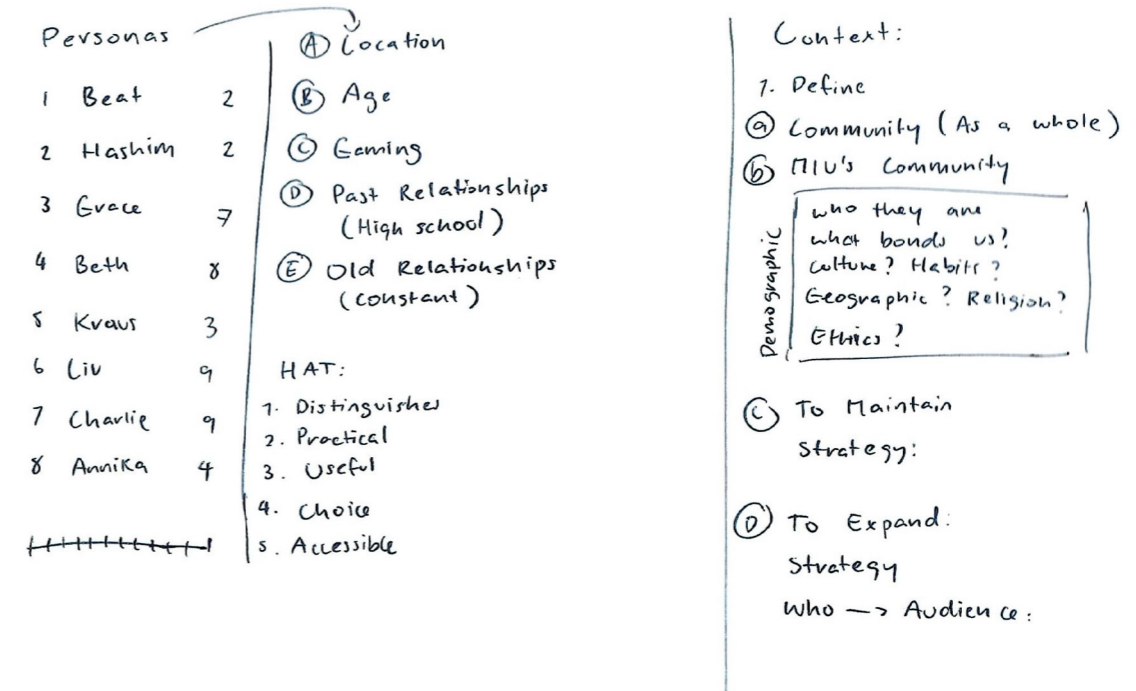
#### Crocheting

Recently, crocheting has become a big part of who I am and how I express myself and my affection to others. I am passionate about this craft and have completed an undergraduate project on crocheters' well-being and community benefits. I am interested in exploring crochet further as a material practice in communication design.

#### Looking into my Community

Since the end of 2024, I have had an ongoing interest in creating a community of people with similar interests in crochet. As I progressed in the research, the focus evolved to looking inward at myself and my existing community. Specifically, the values I hold for myself influence the people I choose to surround myself with (Figure 3.2). While looking into this topic, I have realised that the people in my community are a big part of who I am. I wanted to use the importance of community as a foundation for this Master's project.

**Figure 3.1.**  
Whiteboard Discussion Notes.



Note: This is an example of how the whiteboard looked after one of my meetings with supervisors that I have copied down into my notebook. In this meeting, I approached topics that I wanted to explore for this thesis. Then, we organised the topics into a structure for me to write about, which gave me a clearer direction for continuing with the project. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

During this stage, I was focused on writing the Positioning of the Research and the Researcher Chapter. The methods I used were journaling, reflective writing and observation to take a deeper look at myself, the customs I follow, my family and my community. By writing and developing the content for this chapter, I was able to draw a connection between the way I was raised, the values I was taught and how they still influence me day-to-day and help me to build a sense of community with people who have the same values as I do.

**Figure 3.2.**  
*Collection of my Polaroids.*



Note: For the past few years, I have been capturing meaningful moments in my life using Polaroid pictures. The ones of me in the red dress were taken on my 21st birthday. These Polaroids hold a special place for me as they act as a memento. It is a physical object that embodies the memories that I cherish, so I display them on my wall where I can see them every day. I have developed a personal system for updating the wall over time. It feels cathartic to take down photos of people who are no longer part of my life and replace them with images that now hold greater significance. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

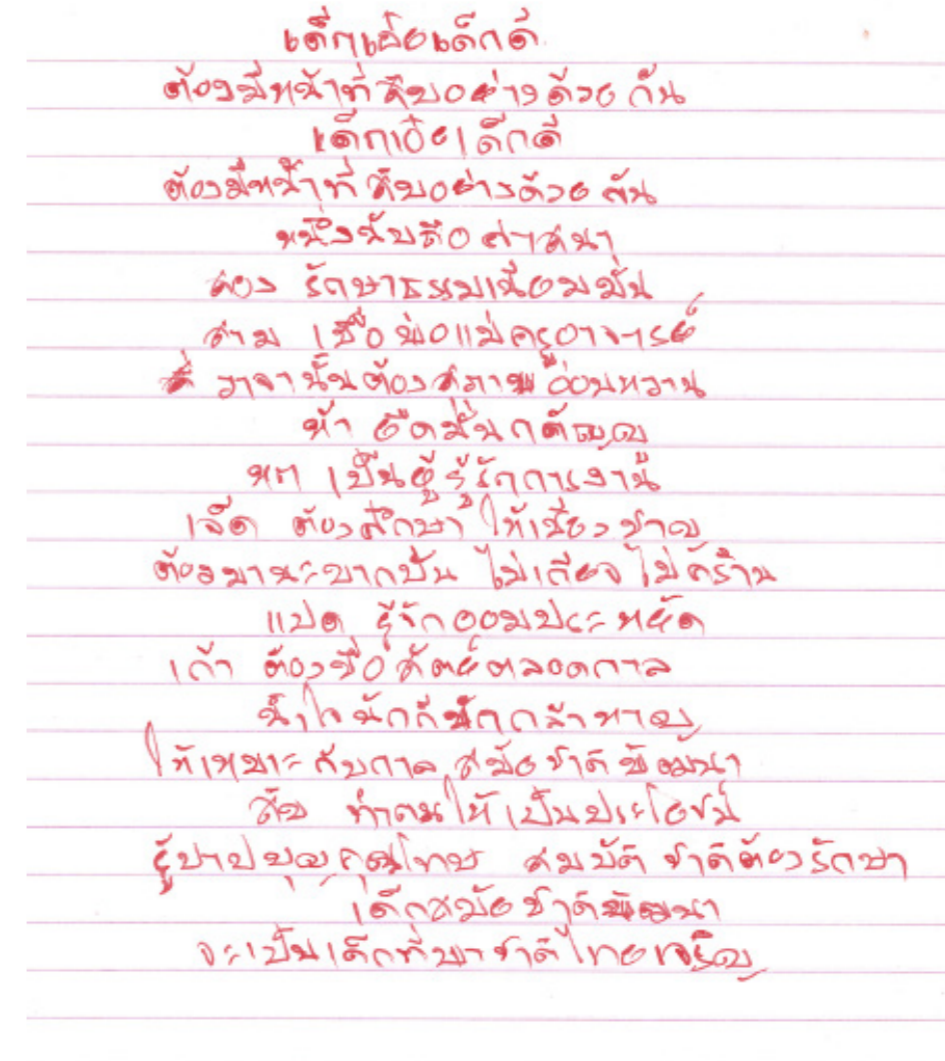
## 2. Gathering materials

After locking in the foundation of topics that I wanted to explore, I started looking into the creative making of the project. The first part of this stage was establishing the project's what, who and how. I investigated my past, selected the values I uphold, and looked for them in others. To do this, I made journal entries reflecting on my experiences of being raised in Thailand but growing up in New Zealand. Examples of the things I looked back on are connected to my childhood, which took me back to the nursery rhyme (Figure 3.3) I was taught as a child about the ten values Thai children should uphold, and how I learnt to fit in when I first arrived in New Zealand and established myself as I grew up.

The 'who' of this project emerged through observing the people currently within my community and considering how they reflect the values I hold. For the 'how', I chose to apply my strongest skills: crochet and illustration. At first, I intended to create specific crochet items to represent individuals in my community. However, as the project developed, I decided to incorporate elements of my cultural background by focusing on the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai). Given the project's emphasis on the symbolic meanings of flowers, I used illustration to capture the beauty and intricate details of each flower selected. In addition, I aimed to develop a publication as a storytelling device, bringing together the various components of the project to communicate its narrative from beginning to end.

Figure 3.3.

หน้าที่เด็ก (เด็กเอ๋ยเด็กดี) A Child's Duty (My child, my good child) lyrics.



Note: For this image of a traditional Thai nursery rhyme, I asked my mother to handwrite the lyrics as I think that her handwriting is better than mine. Over time, I became out of touch with the Thai script and never improved my handwriting. This experience felt like a full-circle moment, as she introduced these values to me during childhood, and I am now engaging with those memories from an adult perspective. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

### 3. Frogging

In the context of crochet, the term frogging refers to the act of pulling out multiple stitches, either to undo the entire piece or to return to the point where a mistake occurred (Figure 3.4). During this phase of the project, I began developing the crochet flowers for the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), which are traditional Thai floral garlands. Alongside this, I also considered which graphic design and print media approaches might complement the garlands effectively.

My initial idea was to create a botanical-style book featuring detailed descriptions of each flower used in the garlands. However, I came to realise that this concept was too superficial and primarily aesthetic. The book focused solely on the flowers and did not address the broader dimensions of the project. Additionally, I had not yet developed a proper floor plan for the publication, which made it difficult to organise content and determine its structure.

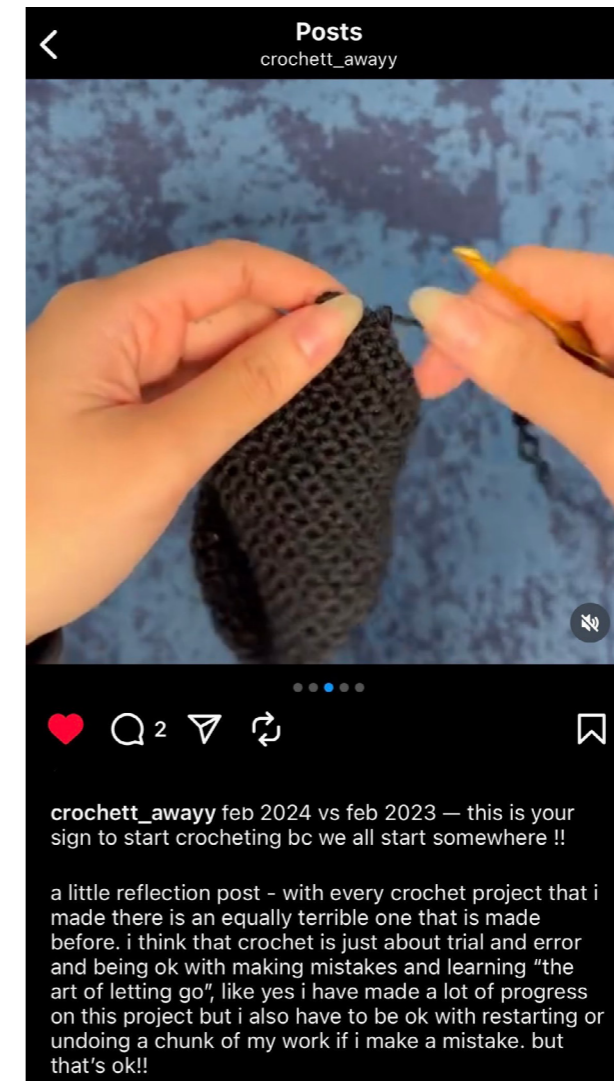
The first attempt at making the crochet flowers was also unsatisfactory for several reasons. To begin learning how to make each flower, I turned to YouTube tutorials. There were hundreds of videos for the flowers I was aiming to create, but some techniques were more effective than others. I also discovered that the 4mm crochet hook I used was too large, which caused the flowers to appear bulky and imprecise. Furthermore, I struggled with yarn colour transitions, particularly with achieving seamless changes between petal colours within a single flower (Figure 3.5). Progress during this stage was slow, as I had yet to establish a consistent strategy or effective workflow.

I continued to observe the groups within my community, particularly those I interacted with regularly. After selecting the groups I wished to represent through the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), there was a notable shift in the dynamics of one of these groups. I began to experience differences in values or perspectives with one individual, which altered their behaviour towards me and gradually influenced the atmosphere within the wider group.

As a result, I began to reassess my relationship with certain members and chose to distance myself. This experience led me to revise the design of one of the garlands entirely. I changed the selection of flowers originally planned for that group, as I felt it was important to remain honest in representing both the positive and more difficult aspects of my community experience.

**Figure 3.4.**

*A post from the Crochet Away Instagram page.*



Note: I had created an Instagram page called @crochett\_awayy, which I called my digital crochet journal, to document my processes and completed projects. This post from January 2025 reflects on my journey with crochet. The post includes videos of frogging my work, in which I explained that not every step of my process with crochet is perfect, and it is inevitable that at some point, I must undo my work because of a mistake I made. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

**Figure 3.5.**

*The different versions of crocheted Marigolds compared to the final version.*



Note: I did not perfect the crochet flower-making technique during this project phase and had to try different ways of crocheting, including using different sizes (8-ply or 4-ply) and colours of yarn. I later found that the difference in hook size makes the most difference. These two images show the difference between the failed versions (image on the left) of the marigold compared to the final version (image on the right). From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

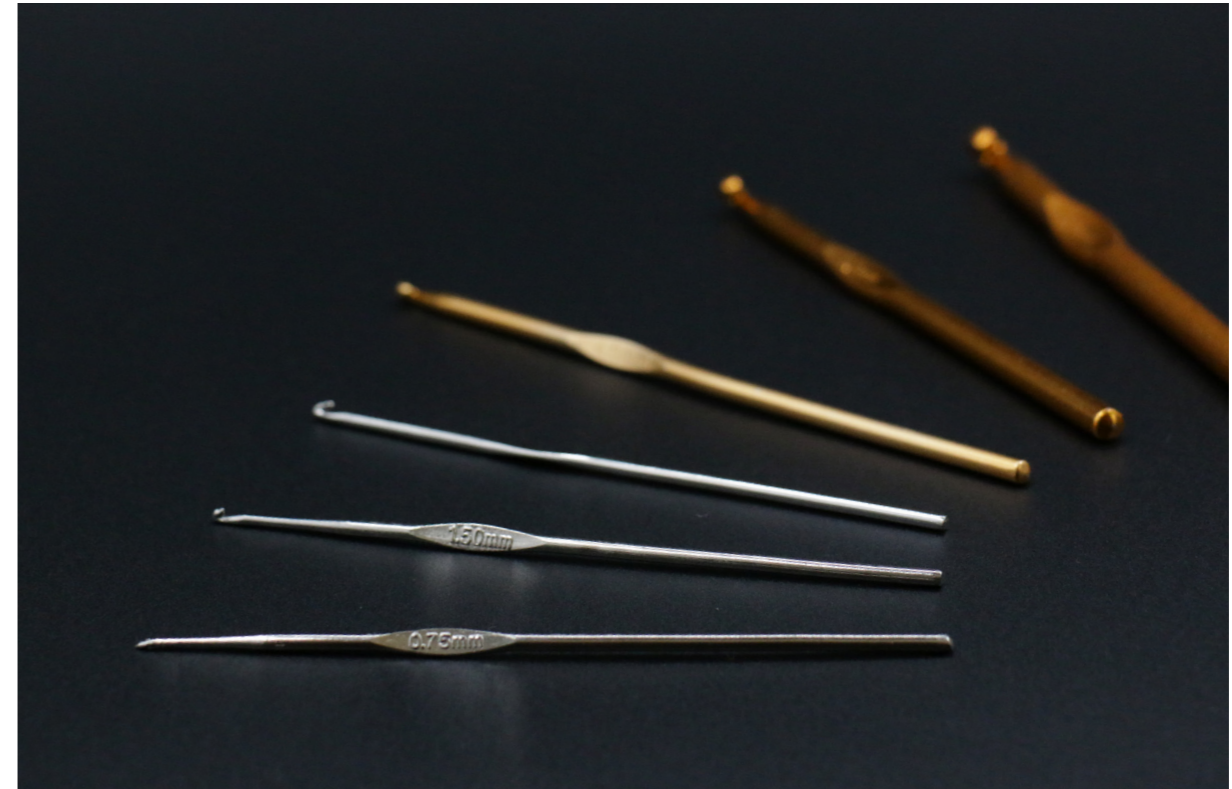
#### 4. Stitching Connections

At this stage, I established a cohesive workflow that involved essay writing, crocheting, illustrating, and publication design. By rotating between these activities each day, I was able to maintain momentum and develop greater confidence in my output. I identified the most suitable tutorials on YouTube and switched to using smaller crochet hooks (2mm and 1.5mm) (Figure 3.6) to improve the quality of the flowers (Figure 3.7). To create a sense of depth and detail, I used watercolour and alcohol markers for shading. Completing the first garland allowed me to visualise how all the elements came together, which gave me more confidence in the crochet-making process.

I began by constructing the base wreath, which was the most time-consuming component. I then crocheted the individual flowers, each representing a chosen value for the selected group, followed by the crown flower tassels. After finishing all the components, I assembled the full พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) using a hot glue gun. At this point, I applied additional shading with watercolour and alcohol markers to enhance the colour and dimension (Figure 3.7).

The process of making these พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) was repetitive and at times challenging, as I had to work with small hooks and fine yarn, which made the process difficult to manage. However, this stage taught me patience and resilience. While crocheting, I noted down some of my thoughts and reflections. One key insight was the connection I made between the fragility of flower petals and yarn, and the delicate nature of relationships—both require care and attention, as mishandling can easily cause damage.

**Figure 3.6.**  
*Crochet hook size.*



Note: This photo shows the variation in both the size and thickness of the crochet hooks I used. By placing them side by side, the image helps to illustrate how different sizes can affect the outcome and texture of the final piece. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

**Figure 3.7.**  
*The first two completed พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai).*



Note: This image consists of the completed look of the first two groups' พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) with the differing flowers to represent the different values I observed. I wanted to keep the wreath of the garlands the same to represent how these people all fall under the umbrella of my community, but what makes them different is the values I observe in them. The garland on the left has jasmine, marigold and plumeria flowers, and the garland on the right has rose, champaca and jasmine flowers. From researcher's personal archive, 2025.

All the illustrations in this project were hand-drawn before being scanned and printed (Figure 3.8). I then added colour to the scanned versions using either paint or markers, before rescanning them for use in the publication (Figure 3.8). I wanted to apply my strength in drawing to introduce additional nuance to the visual elements of the project. For the illustrations, I chose to draw directly in pen without preliminary sketches, using a Muji pen for its smooth handling and compatibility with my Moleskine sketchbook. I adopted a hatching technique to add depth and dimension to the illustrations without relying on colour in the initial stage.

The role of the publication is to document and communicate the essence of the entire project from beginning to end. It serves as a storytelling device, introducing myself and my background, the community that shaped the project, and the rationale for creating the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as a reflection of that community. The publication includes documentation of the making process—crochet and illustration—and provides explanations for the selection and symbolism of each flower. The use of Thai words and phrases reflects my navigation of the world through two cultural lenses. I aimed to incorporate Thai language into the design system in a way that remains accessible to English readers.

This chapter outlined the methodologies used in the project, grounded in a post-positivist paradigm that acknowledges the influence of the researcher’s worldview on the research process. The project employed a practice-based approach, integrating making and reflection as core methods. Through my strongest skills—illustration and crochet—I explored and represented values that I hold personally and seek within my community. The resulting publication captures both the process and the outcomes of this journey.

The next chapter explores the critical analysis and application of the methodologies.

**Figure 3.8.**  
*Kowhai illustrations.*



Note: These are illustrations that I made with a Muji ink pen in my Moleskine sketchbook of the Kowhai, which I scanned at 300 dpi. I then printed the scanned black and white image to hand colour the flowers with watercolour and alcohol markers before scanning again to be used in the publication. I did this process manually to capture the handmade trace, as this project revolves around making with hands. By scanning the illustration, I intended to capture the marks that I made during the process of drawing and adding colour. From researcher’s personal archive, 2025.

## CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL COMMENTARY



## Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the project. The chapter explores how key concepts outlined in the contextual review are expressed and materialised in my practice and the resulting artefacts. This includes the symbolism of the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) in Thai culture and how crocheted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), holding personal values, are developed through a relational design process. The chapter also reviews the visual narrative that manifests in the project.

## The Symbolism of the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai)

As this project revolves around the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), this project has taken into consideration all aspects of this artefact. This first key point discusses the idea of gift-giving with the garland and the relational aspects of this gesture. Expanding on the contextual research is a discussion on how the flowers are chosen and made for the garland.

### Gift-giving with the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) Garland

Gift-giving is expressed in this project through the making of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), which serves as a communicative artefact within my community. As the project centres on observing and reflecting on the values embodied by different groups within this community, the gesture of crafting these garlands was conceived as an act of appreciation and relational acknowledgement. Initially, I considered creating crochet objects that literally depicted the likeness of individuals. However, this approach did not align with the cultural and relational dimensions I intended to foreground. It did not adequately represent my heritage—an essential foundation for the values I recognise and seek in others—nor did it provide a meaningful way to articulate the qualities present in each relationship. Literal representation risked reducing complex connections to surface attributes, rather than offering a symbolic form of recognition.

**Figure 4.1.**

*The First Collection of the Garlands.*



Note: At this stage of the project, I had completed three of the five crochet พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) and conducted a test photography session to assess how effectively the yarn texture, stitch detail, and colour variations would be captured on camera. For this session, I used an at-home photo box, which allowed greater control over the backdrop and lighting conditions. A tripod was positioned to face downward, and the camera's self-timer function was used to minimise motion and ensure the resulting images were as clear and consistent as possible. From researcher's archive, 2025.

By drawing from the tradition of Thai พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), I was able to reconnect with my cultural background and use this form to express care, gratitude, and intentionality through design. Informed by Thai cultural practices, the making process evolved into a more deliberate and reflective engagement. This shift in focus led to a stronger sense of appreciation for those represented in the garlands, which in turn deepened my investment in each phase of production (Figure 4.1). Each step—from material selection to construction—became a form of quiet reflection on the nature of the relationships being represented.

The act of making by hand required sustained attention to detail, reinforcing the significance of each gesture within the broader relational context. As Curasi et al. (2004) note, handmade gifts are often regarded as meaningful due to the time, effort, and thought embedded in their making. This observation closely aligned with my own experience. When producing these garlands, I noticed a heightened sense of patience and attentiveness compared to previous crochet projects. This was reflected in small but consistent decisions, such as the arrangement of flowers and the intentional interplay of colour across the garland designs (Figure 4.2). These choices were not decorative alone, but informed by the tone, character, and energy of the specific group or individual being acknowledged.

If stitches appeared misaligned or inconsistent with the intended outcome, I would frog the piece—unravel the stitches—and begin again (Figure 4.3). Such revisions were part of a considered process that prioritised clarity, accuracy, and alignment with the symbolic role of the artefacts. This willingness to restart reflected not only a commitment to quality but also an ethic of care within the making itself. In some instances, additional colour was applied between the petals to introduce tonal variation and depth, referencing the subtle shifts found in real flowers (Figure 4.4). These adjustments were part of a broader effort to produce artefacts that were visually and emotionally resonant. Rather than being purely aesthetic, they reflected the complexity and care embedded in the relationships that the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) were created to honour.

**Figure 4.2.**  
*Flower Arrangements in the Garlands.*



From researcher's archive, 2025.

**Figure 4.3.**  
*Unused Crochet Flowers.*



From researcher's archive, 2025.

**Figure 4.4.**  
*Hidden Detail in the Crochet Flowers.*



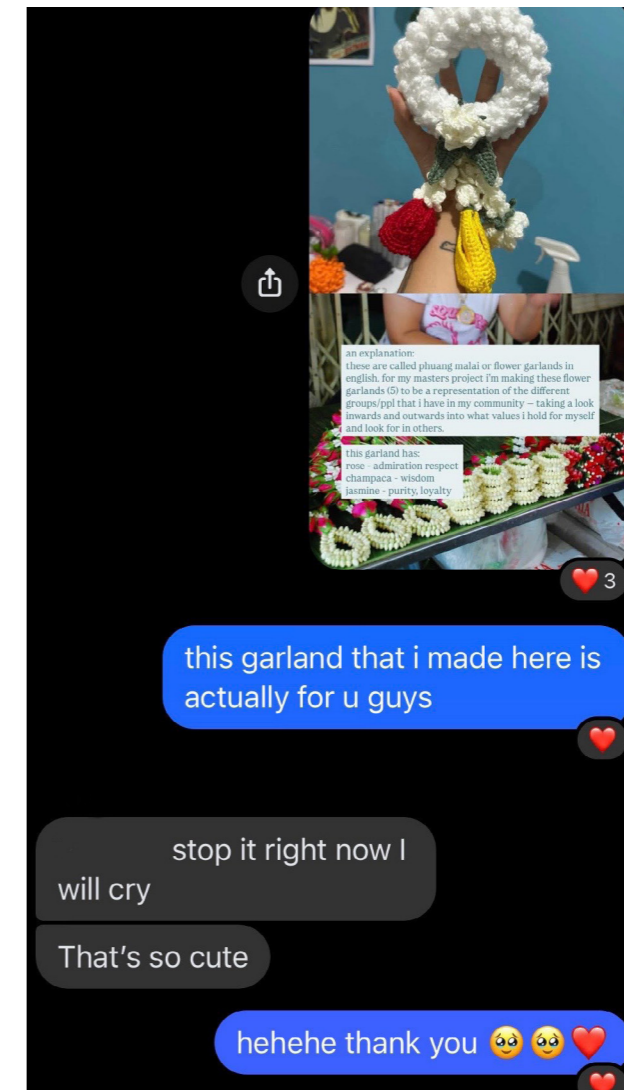
From researcher's archive, 2025.

### Relational Aspects of this Gesture

The พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) in this project were employed as relational artefacts to facilitate social interaction and connection within specific community groups. Blauvelt (2008) describes the performative nature of relational design as involving not only the object’s impact on the viewer but also its capacity to prompt social engagement. Upon completing each garland, I shared it with the respective group, using the moment as an opportunity to explain the values embedded in the design. This act of presentation often elicited reflective and appreciative responses, reinforcing the mutual exchange of meaning (Figure 4.5). The emotional investment I experienced during the making process—particularly feelings of gratitude and sentimentality—was frequently mirrored in the feedback received. This aligns with Redmond’s (2019) framing of gifting as a practice that enables interpersonal engagement rather than serving as a purely symbolic gesture.

**Figure 4.5.**

*First reactions to the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai).*



Note: For many of my friend groups, we would share a group chat on social media to keep in touch with each other. It makes chatting with everyone and planning for possible functions easier. This text was the reaction to the first พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) that I finished. With this screenshot, I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment after sharing my work with the people I care about. From researcher’s archive, 2025.

## Visual Narrative and Crochet as Practice and Communication Design tool

An important dimension within the visual narrative of this project is the negotiation between cultural identities, explored through both the thesis and the design of the publication. This negotiation is expressed through the integration of visual elements inspired by Thai culture, which are carefully incorporated into the aesthetic and conceptual framework of the publication. These design choices reflect the personal experience of having relocated from Thailand while continuing to carry the values, customs and cultural sensibilities formed there. The publication thus becomes a site where two cultural worlds are held in dialogue, representing the ongoing process of cultural navigation and belonging.

This negotiation is particularly evident in one of the crafted พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), in which I deliberately chose to use native New Zealand flowers. This decision was made to acknowledge and honour Aotearoa New Zealand, the country where I have grown up and formed meaningful relationships. By combining the symbolic format of the Thai garland with flora native to New Zealand, the piece embodies a material synthesis of my dual cultural affiliations. The outcome is not merely decorative but represents an intentional act of cultural expression, marking a space of intersection where personal history, place, and identity coalesce (Figure 4.6).

The use of the Thai language in the publication serves two primary functions. First, it acts as a storytelling device, allowing specific concepts to be articulated in their most culturally and emotionally accurate form. As a bilingual speaker, I often find that certain Thai terms hold nuances that are difficult to replicate in English. For this reason, I have paired each Thai word or phrase with the closest English equivalent, creating a dual-language system that respects both linguistic worlds while remaining accessible to readers unfamiliar with Thai (Figure 4.7). To support this aim, I have distinguished the Thai text in red, drawing attention to it without overshadowing the broader narrative. In doing so, colour is employed not only as a visual cue but also as a semiotic device, offering an additional layer of communication that works in parallel with language (Brooks, 2003) (Figure 4.8). This system demonstrates the relational and intercultural intentions embedded in the design, enabling the project to speak across cultural contexts without erasing difference.

**Figure 4.6.**  
*Illustrations of Native flowers used in the Garland.*



Note: The Kowhai (left) and Kotukutuku (right) are the New Zealand native flowers chosen to be a part of the garland. Kowhais are associated with moving on from the past, and Kotukutukus are associated with detaching and letting go of the past. From researcher's archive, 2025.

**Figure 4.7.**  
Thai phrases in the publication.



**Figure 4.8.**  
The Thai-English system in the publication.



Note: An example of a word I chose to retain in Thai within the publication is พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), as used consistently throughout this thesis. While the literal translation of พวงมาลัย is 'bunch garland', and the closest English equivalent is 'flower garland', I consider these translations to be insufficient in conveying the cultural specificity of the object. The term refers not only to a physical arrangement of flowers but to a cultural artefact embedded within Thai heritage and ritual practice. For this reason, I have opted to use the original Thai term to preserve its layered significance. From researcher's archive, 2025.

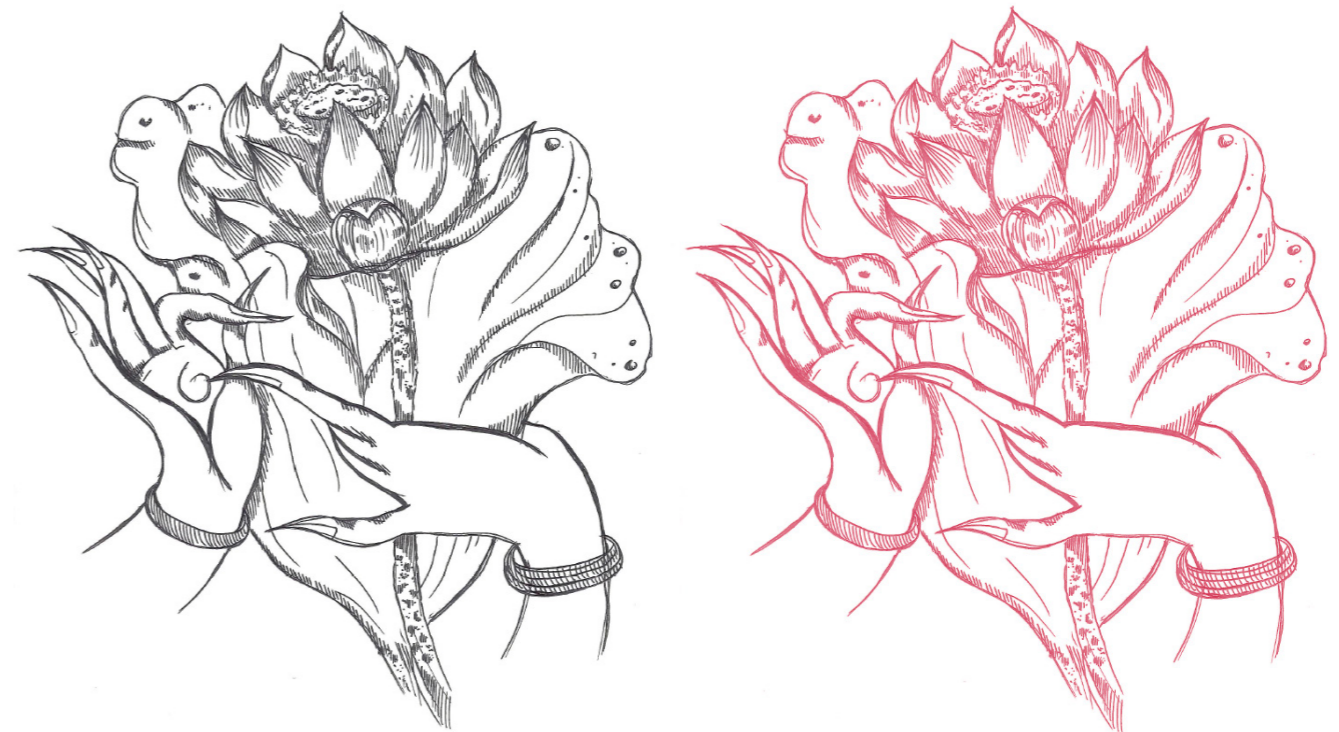
Note: This is an example of the system used throughout the publication, with Thai words and phrases and the English translation. The goal for the system is to be easily readable to the viewers but not make the page look too busy. From researcher's archive, 2025.

Colour is employed to represent the presence of my Thai identity, despite having grown up within a Western cultural context. This design decision reflects a negotiation between inherited and lived experiences, acknowledging that Thai cultural values continue to inform my perspective. The Thai-style illustrations included at the beginning of each chapter, along with other graphic elements in the publication, are intentionally distinct from the botanical flower illustrations. This distinction highlights the coexistence of two cultural influences within the project (Figure 4.9). The colour schemes used in these components serve as a non-verbal system of meaning, communicating aspects of identity, cultural memory, and personal narrative.

Secondly, the negotiation between my two cultural worlds is expressed through the design and making of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), capturing the symbolic qualities of this traditional artefact within Thai culture by using crochet as a contemporary material practice. This process engages with cultural continuity through the reinterpretation of familiar forms in a different medium. Crochet has proven to be a flexible and tactile method that supports the construction of detailed floral elements, enabling the representation of each chosen value through the garland's composition. The project draws on the symbolism and relational function of the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), while employing a medium more commonly associated with Western craft traditions, allowing for a layered interpretation of cultural identity.

This method resonates with the approach taken in *The Wharenui Harikoa* by Lissy and Rudi Robinson (n.d.), where crochet is used to affirm whakapapa (genealogy) and foster collective memory through the making process. In both projects, the act of handcrafting is situated as a mode of storytelling, reinforcing a sense of belonging and relational awareness. The use of crochet in this research enables the symbolic and emotional qualities of the garlands to be carried forward in a form that is durable and materially stable. The yarn used in each component of the garlands—whether flowers, wreaths, or tassels—preserves the intended shape and structure over time. This material characteristic stands in contrast to the ephemerality of fresh flowers traditionally used in พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), allowing the artefacts to endure as lasting objects of care, memory and cultural expression

**Figure 4.9.**  
*Thai-style illustration example.*



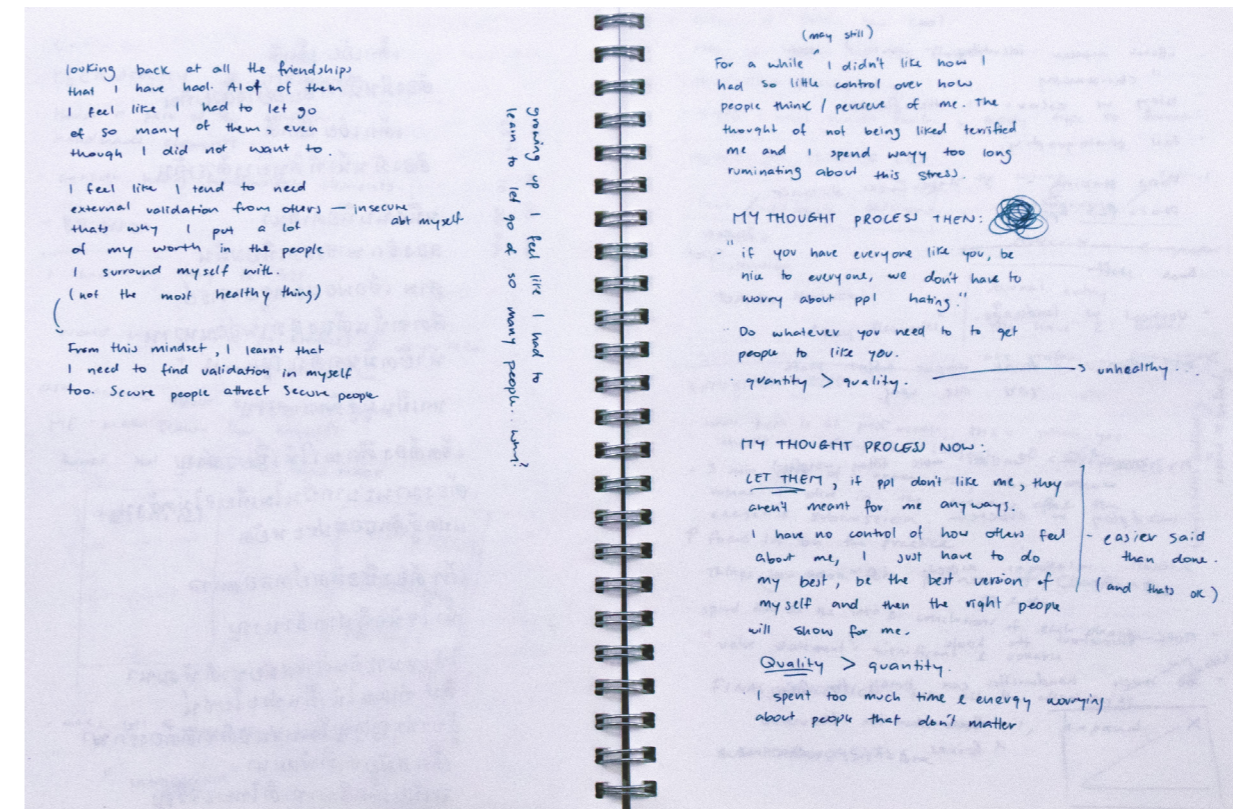
Note: Similarly to the flower illustrations I made, this Thai-style illustration was done by hand and with the same Muji ink pen. The left image is the scanned image of the illustration, and on the right is the edited version to match the rest of the publication. This image depicts a traditional drawing of hands holding a lotus. This illustration style is considered old-fashioned and can be seen in vintage books. I specifically chose to draw a lotus for the beginning of chapter one, as it discusses who I am and my background. As this flower is a representation of birth and Buddha. Where the story goes, when he was born, he immediately took seven steps, and a lotus would bloom after each step. From researcher's archive, 2025.

## Reflective Making

As this project draws upon personal memories and lived experiences, reflective writing was employed as a key method to articulate internal processes and evolving perspectives. Engaging in journaling enabled me to revisit aspects of my childhood and trace the development of my identity and values over time. This reflective process offered insight into recurring thoughts, behaviours, and emotional responses, allowing for a deeper awareness of how my personal history informs my present worldview and creative practice.

Most of my reflective writing was done by hand, using pen and paper, which supported a stronger sense of connection with my inner dialogue. This tactile mode of engagement encouraged a more authentic and unfiltered reflection, where fleeting or unresolved thoughts could be recorded without the constraints often associated with structured or edited writing. Although not all of these reflections were included in the final publication, the act of recording them contributed significantly to the conceptual development of the project. This process allowed ideas to emerge more organically, with fewer restrictions, and helped establish meaningful links between memory, emotion and making (Figure 4.10).

**Figure 4.10.**  
Thai-style illustration example.



Note: I have a specific notebook in which I like to document my thoughts, which are non-linear. I jump back and forth between the pages to get my thoughts down. In this spread, even though the content was a journal of the reflection on some of my behaviour, I treated it like writing notes, anecdotes and other fleeting thoughts. From researcher's archive, 2025.

Crochet serves as one of the primary methods of making in this research. The process is grounded in repetition, with each stitch made individually and repeated across a sequence. This repetitive motion creates a focused and quiet space for reflection. During periods of crocheting, I often found myself thinking about the individuals I had chosen to represent through each พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), using the time to consider the relationships and values associated with them.

One of the garlands was made for a group with whom I have recently become more distanced. Despite the shift in our relationship, I decided to proceed with creating a พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) to acknowledge the role they had played in my community and my personal development. The act of making the garland became a reflective process through which I could examine my thoughts and feelings towards the group and come to a place of acceptance and resolution.

Crochet, in this context, also functioned as a method for emotional regulation. Its rhythmic and tactile nature contributed to a sense of calm, consistent with Soni's (2023) observations that the activity's repetitive engagement can assist in managing anxiety and supporting emotional balance.

While engaged in this process, I drew parallels between my approach to relationships, the yarn I worked with, and the flowers I selected. Each of these elements requires attention and care. When neglected or handled without sensitivity, they can become compromised or damaged. This reflection reinforced the value of intentionality—both in making and in maintaining relationships—highlighting how material practice can serve as a site of emotional insight and reconciliation.

In this chapter, I have outlined and discussed the critical commentary of this project. I started with the symbolism of the พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) and how the act of gift-giving manifests and its relational role through the function of these garlands. I moved on to the role of visual narrative in conveying my negotiation between my two cultural worlds in the design approach I had for the publication and พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai). Lastly, I discussed the role of reflective making in my making process and methods like journaling and crocheting.

The next chapter concludes the exegesis and discusses my final thoughts and reflections.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION



## Introduction

This practice-led research asks:

### **How can crochet be utilised as a creative practice with communication design tools to capture and foster meaningful connections?**

This project draws on personal experience to inform the use of crochet as a material practice. Thai flower garlands are employed as a communicative device to articulate the values and qualities observed in members of my community. Informed by the contextual review, the project considers the cultural significance of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as artefacts within the Thai tradition of gift-giving. The narrative structure of the work reflects my navigation between two cultural contexts—my Thai heritage, shaped during my early years in Thailand, and my life in Aotearoa New Zealand. This process of negotiation is embedded both in the crochet practice and in the accompanying publication, which is designed to convey the broader scope of the project. The gesture of gift-giving is understood here as a relational act, intended to support and strengthen meaningful connections through the making and offering of the garlands.

## Contributions to the Field

This study contributes to a range of design contexts. It offers a culturally grounded perspective by presenting Thai values and heritage within a Western design framework. Through the integration of traditional Thai artefacts, specifically พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai), into a contemporary material practice, the research provides an example of how cultural identity can be preserved and expressed through design. The project also reflects a personal process of alignment between design practice and cultural background, resulting in a strengthened sense of design identity. It is intended that this work may be of relevance to others navigating between cultural contexts and seeking ways to integrate heritage into their creative practice.

Additionally, the study contributes to discussions on crochet as both a material practice and a method of visual storytelling. The use of crochet to create Thai flower garlands becomes a means of articulating the values and characteristics observed in the researcher's community, while also sustaining cultural traditions through handmade practice. The research highlights the potential of crochet to serve as a reflective and relational method, and it also acknowledges its role in supporting well-being, based on both practitioner experience and relevant literature.

## Further Research

Given its personal and practice-based grounding of this project, there is scope to extend the research beyond the individual context through scholarly dissemination. One potential pathway is to present the project at a postgraduate research forum, such as the AUT Postgraduate Symposium, where preliminary findings and reflections can be shared with academic peers.

There is also value in considering the transformation of the exegesis into a journal article. This would involve reframing key aspects of the research to address broader scholarly conversations around cultural preservation, material practices, and relational design. Identifying appropriate journals focused on design research, material culture, or cross-cultural studies would support this process and ensure the work reaches relevant academic communities.

While scholarly dissemination remains a priority, there is also the potential for public engagement. The project may be adapted into participatory formats, such as community-based crochet workshops or informal talks, which could create space for others to reflect on and share their own cultural experiences through making. Online platforms centred on craft and cultural storytelling may also serve to expand the reach and ongoing relevance of the work.

## Reflection in Closing

This practice-based research brought together three interrelated elements that shaped the outcome of the project and its broader significance.

Firstly, the process has supported a renewed and more meaningful connection with my cultural heritage. Born in Thailand and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, I have experienced a dual perspective that, at times, led to a sense of disconnection from aspects of my Thai upbringing. Through the design and making of พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) as a central artefact, I re-engaged with cultural traditions that were once familiar but had become distant. The research into the cultural, religious and relational roles of the garland deepened my understanding of the values embedded in Thai practices and supported the recovery of knowledge that had remained dormant.

Secondly, the reflective dimension of this project has enabled a clearer articulation of the values that I hold and those I look for within my community. Revisiting my own experiences—particularly through reflective writing and observation—allowed me to clarify how these values have emerged and evolved. This process shaped the conceptual framework of the research, as well as the visual and material decisions in the making. It also strengthened my ability to work through emotion and ambiguity, not as obstacles but as integral to practice.

Thirdly, the act of making the crocheted garlands functioned as a method of expression and connection. The labour involved in handcrafting each พวงมาลัย (Phuang malai) embedded intention, time, and care into the object. These artefacts became more than representations of appreciation—they operated as relational tools, supporting encounters, conversations and reflection. The symbolism within each garland and the decisions made in terms of colour, form, and flower selection were shaped by my observations of others and my interpretation of shared values. The use of crochet, a slower and tactile process, gave form to these relational meanings in a way that reflected both cultural continuity and personal negotiation.

To close, I offer a verse by Sunthorn Phu (สุนทรภู่) one of Thailand's most celebrated poets, whose works often reflect themes of memory, journey, and relational care:

“ใจเอ๋ยใจเรา  
อย่าเฝ้ารำพึงถึงสิ่ง ings  
ให้จำไว้เพีย ความหวัง  
แล้วตั้งใจเดินต่อไป”

O heart, O my heart,  
Let not the past weigh you down,  
Hold only hope in your path ahead,  
And step forward with calm resolve.

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## Appendix 1: Exhibition

An appendix of the final creative works will be added following the exhibition at Te Wai Ngutu Kākā gallery on 10 June 2025.