

THINGS WE CARRY: A REFLECTIVE CATALOGUE TEXT



by Zimkhitha Mabonga, Phatsimo Kashe-Katiya , Micaiah Cloete,
Buhle Hillie, and Jordan Walters

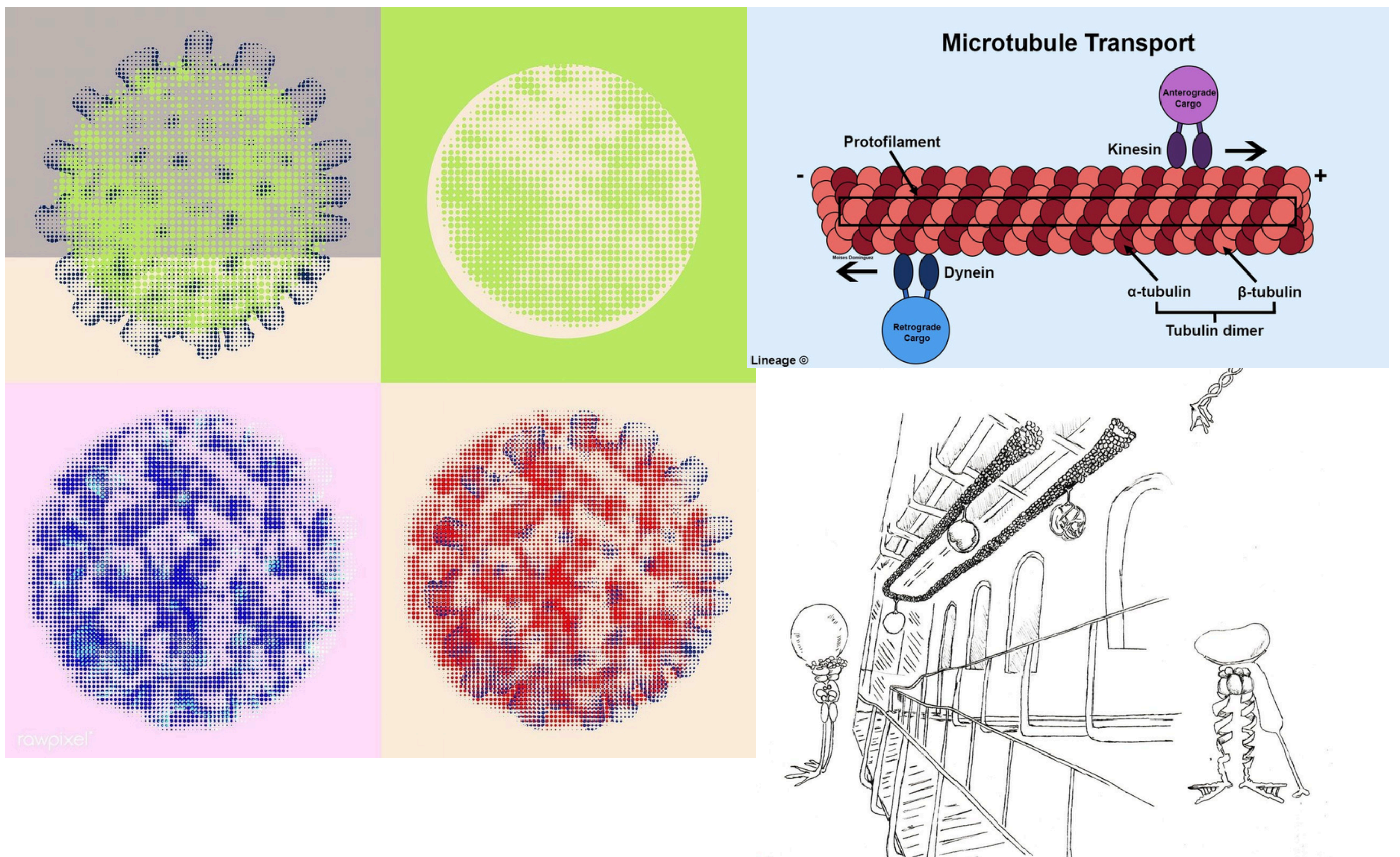
CONCEPT

‘*The Things We Carry*’, with a focus on proteomics, unfolds as a meditation on the unseen infrastructures of life, being the cellular, the molecular, and the systemic.

Inspired by the study of microtubule transportation with proteins and their intricate folding patterns, this work translates microscopic movement into material form. The installation suspends a large, tactile “microtubule” structure, wrapped in woven red and blue fabric, holding within it two cargo spheres - disco balls draped in textile membranes.

Our depiction aims to reflect the way in which proteins walk in the cell transporting cargo with students, faculty members and visitors who walk the corridor below, transporting knowledge, ideas, and discoveries ahead. Essentially, the juxtaposition of the two journeys emphasizes a very straightforward fact: structure is function. By translating the cellscape into a visible, playful, and wondrous form, this piece connects the microscopic and the human realms. It situates the scientific mission and purpose of the institute within a metaphor, representing that it is precision, creativity, but most importantly, play and curiosity that drives science forward.

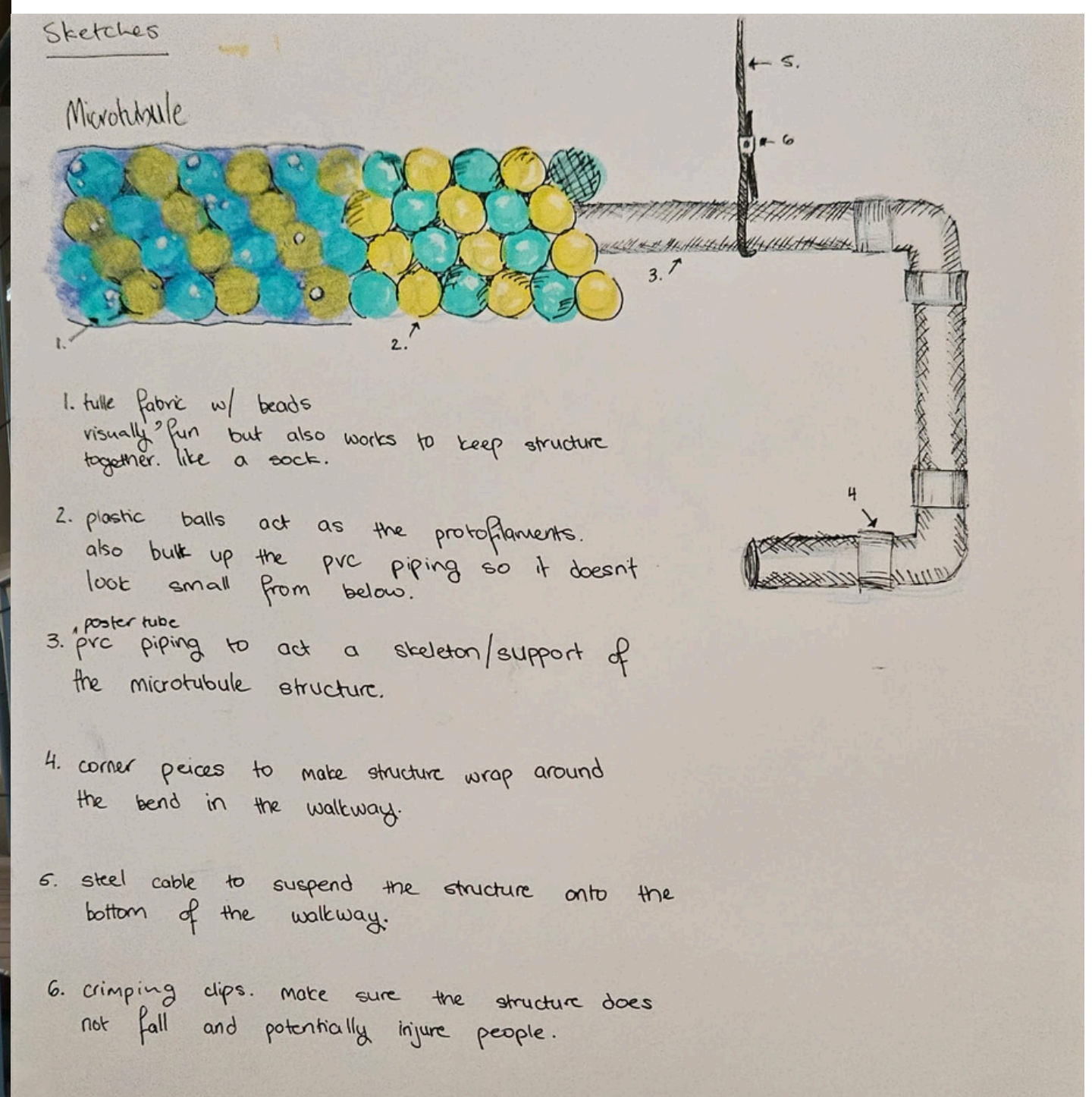
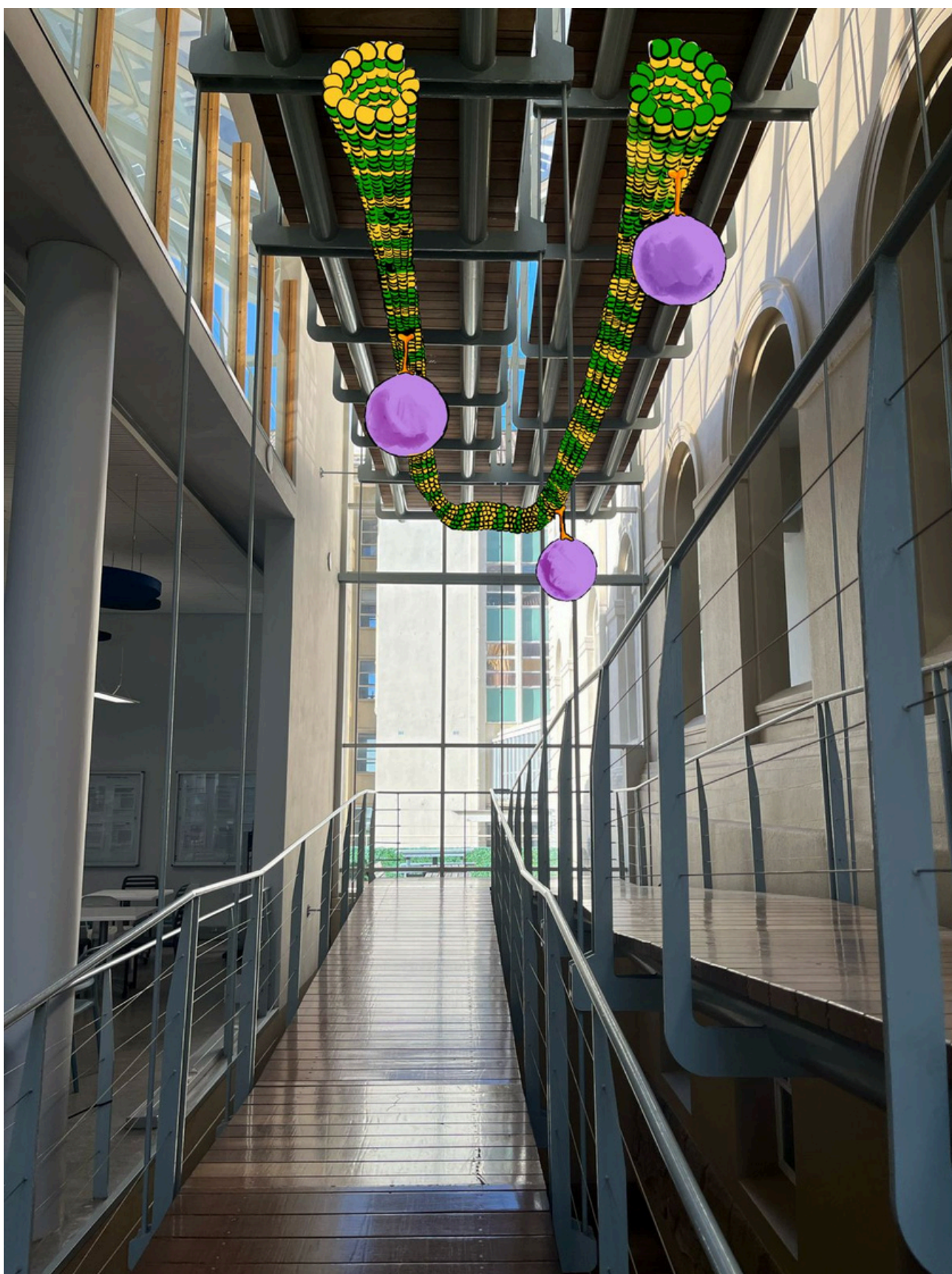
In the language of biology, microtubules move proteins within the cell – yet here, they carry questions of memory, care, and connection. What happens when we make the invisible processes of life visible through art? How can the microscopic become a mirror for the social, the emotional, the human?



INTERVENTION AND SPACE

Installed within the atrium of the IDM building, Walk with me engages the space as a living environment of circulation -of people, air, and light. The suspended form responds to the architecture's vertical openness, echoing the building's scientific purpose while disrupting its clinical precision with softness, tactility, and play. The disco-ball "cargoes" refract light across the walls, suggesting the constant flow and reflection of cellular communication.

The intervention asks viewers to look up - to shift their habitual line of sight. This act of looking becomes an ethical gesture, allowing curiosity toward the overlooked. In its quiet hanging, it transforms the passageway into a site of wonder. The installation invites curiosity and wonder, along with celebrating the centrality of proteins in life but also reminding all who pass through that their own work, like the work of proteins, is essential to the larger functioning of the whole.



MATERIAL PROCESS AND RELEVANCE

In our work we wanted to play between the tension between imagination and science. From our understanding the protein functions at a molecular level thus their visual and aesthetic properties remain largely speculative. This gap for creativity invited us to explore texture, colour and truly play in materiality. Playing on beauty and curiosity, we wanted to make the unseen seen, bringing whimsy and wonder to the IDM institute. We felt this was best done using soft sculpture, colour and most importantly glitter.

The work emerged from a series of material experiments with fabric, tension, and weight. The hand-bound textures mimic protein folding -a biological act translated into an embodied one. The use of bright primary colours (red, blue, yellow) recalls both anatomical diagrams and the official IDM colors.

The inclusion of disco balls introduces an element of movement and sound. These objects -usually associated with joy, energy, and community - here become molecular cargo, suggesting that even within scientific systems, there is a kind of energy of connection.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION

The installation's location within a public scientific institution foregrounds an important dialogue: between art and science, between the macro and the micro, between the viewer and the processes that sustain their own body. Viewers pause under the suspended form, their reflections caught in the mirrored cargo, implicating them in the system of circulation.

In this way, it becomes an act of translation -turning data into form, form into feeling. It challenges disciplinary borders by making the aesthetic a tool for inquiry, and the molecular a site for empathy.

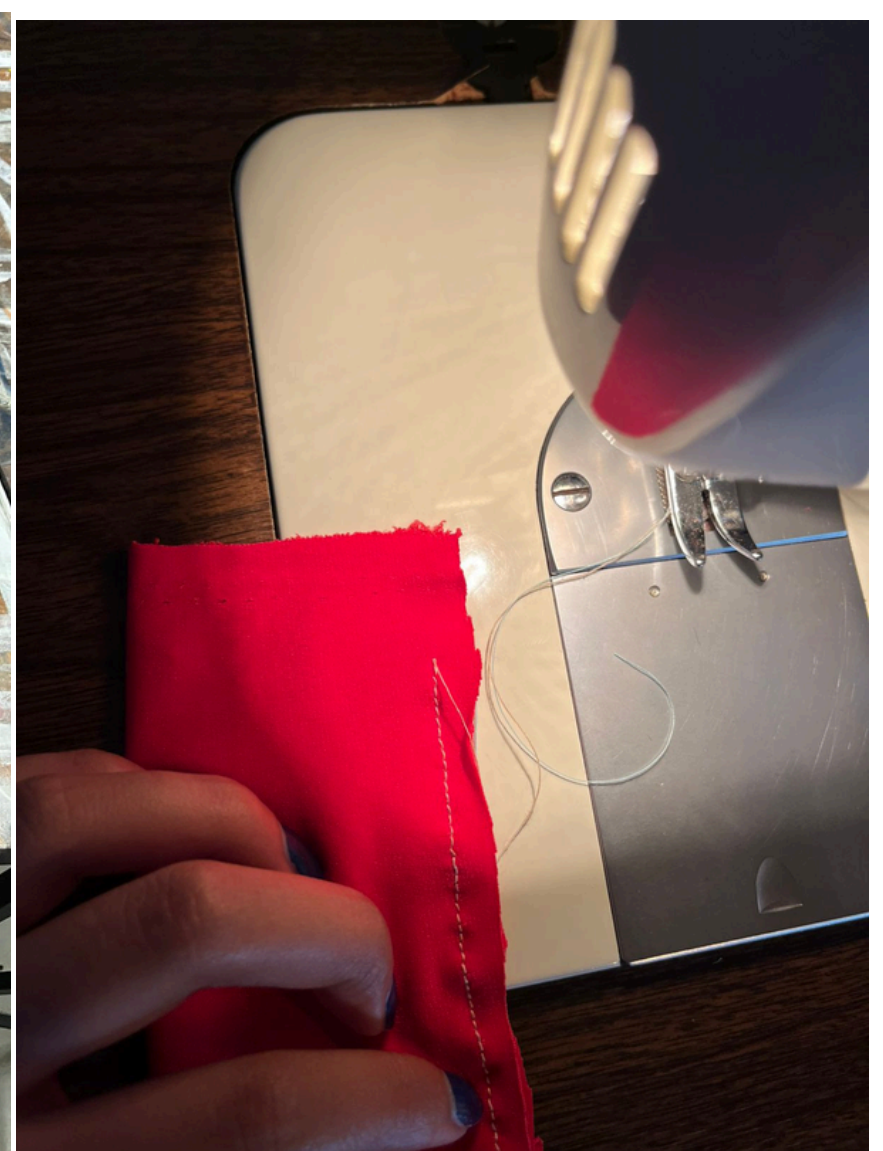


PRODUCTION



THE BASE OF THE STRUCTURE ARE SHIPPING TUBES WHICH WAS SPRAY PAINTED BLACK

SOCKS WERE STUFFED WITH BATTING AND TIED WITH YARN



TO REFLECT AND REPRESENT THE BRAND OF THE IDM INSTITUTE, WE CHOSE RED AND BLUE FOR THE MAIN COLOURS OF THE MICROTUBULE



**SOCKS WERE STAPLED
TO THE TUBE**



INITIAL CONCEPT

VS

FINISHED PRODUCT

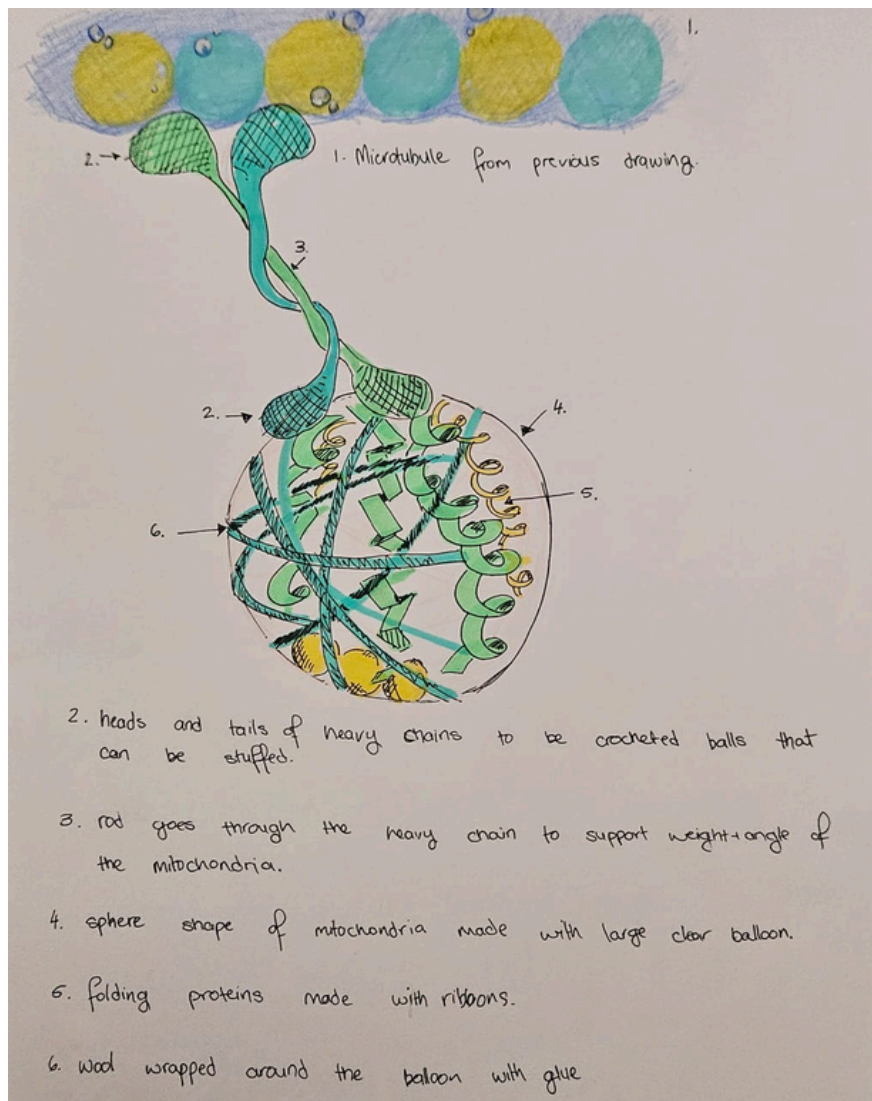


**USE OF CRIMPING CLIPS AND
STEEL CABLES FOR HANGING**

PLAN A

USE YARN COATED WITH GLUE AND WRAP IT AROUND AN INFLATED BALLON, THIS WOULD CREATE A SHELL LIKE STRUCTURE WE FELT RESEMBLED PROTEIN FOLDING

HOWEVER WE FACED DIFFICULTY IN TRYING TO GET THE STRUCTURE TO RETAIN ITS SHAPE

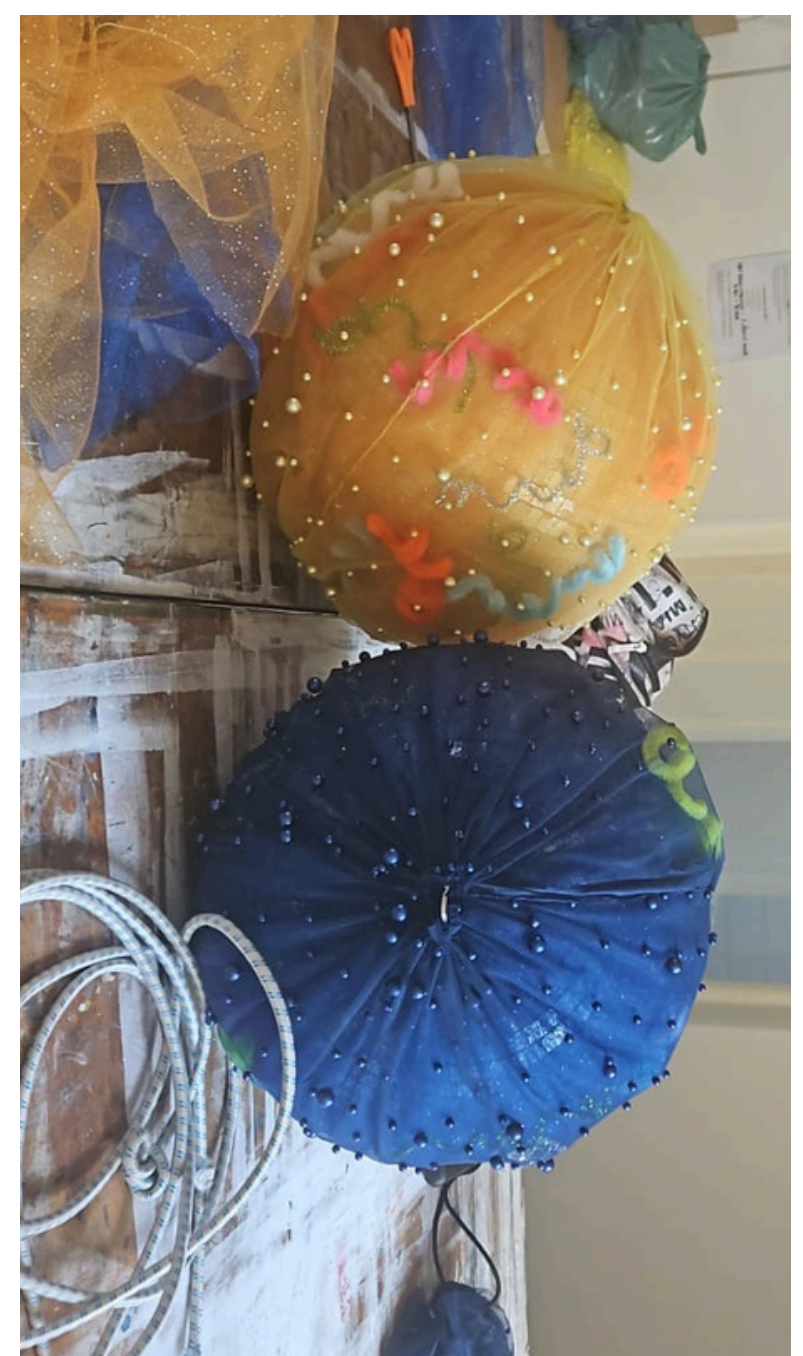


PLAN B

THE INCLUSION OF DISCO BALLS INTRODUCES AN ELEMENT OF MOVEMENT. THESE BALLS WERE THEN PLEATED INTO GLITTERY BEADED TULE AND COMBINED WITH COLOURFUL PIPE CLEANERS



THIS WE FELT RESEMBLES A FILM OF MEMBRANE AND PROTEIN FOLDS HELD WITHIN THE CARGO





Use of fabric to plait together the “protein” that would be holding the “CARGO”. This plait was weaved onto the crimping clips to support the disco balls



YELLOW POM-POMS MADE WITH YARN TO ADD ON THE MICROTUBULE. ADDITIONALLY, YELLOW WAS CHOSEN IN ORDER TO REFLECT THE BRAND OF THE IDM INSTITUTE

PROJECT REFLECTION

The process of bringing the installation to life revealed how material and conceptual intentions constantly evolve when making. Our initial plan- to construct the 'cargo' from wool- became unfeasible. The structure lacked stability and failed to capture the cellular dynamism we envisioned. This challenge led us to an unexpected yet meaningful shift : replacing the wool spheres with disco balls wrapped in fabric. The change deepened the works metaphor. Light and movement was then introduced- qualities which mirrored the constant energy of microtubule transportation and molecular exchange. microtubule

Although the overall scale of the installation had to be reduced due to time constraints, the core message remained intact. The act of downsizing allowed us to focus on precision, form and balance, ensuring that every element of the final piece carried an intentional weight.

