

तरंग

TĀRĀNG

by Kinnari Saraiya

(noun) - wave, ripple



KINNARI SARAIYA

Born in Bombay, India (1998), Kinnari Saraiya is an Artist, Curator, and Folk Dancer based in Gateshead, UK. She works across film, virtual reality worlds, sculptural installation, and folk dance in a multimodal practice. She considers herself a storyteller and a Worldbuilder, allowing her to weave together complex narratives. Her practice utilizes ancient and sensorial storytelling formats of dance and music that transcend visual imperialism to reveal a hybrid, decolonial and feminist ecstatic truth. Her work centers the practice of dance in the invocation of a space where we feel freed from the concreteness of the world, ultimately creating a virtual imagination, a virtual worlding.

Her recent work 'किन्नर's prakṛtiḥ, nṛtya, laya' premiered at QUAD in Derby and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. Her upcoming exhibitions will be at Attenborough Centre in Sussex and The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle. She has previously exhibited at FORMAT festival in Derby, Kyiv Biennial, London Frieze Art Fair, VISUAL Carlow, Russell-Cotes Gallery and Museum and many more. 'It was a Roadside Picnic - Beyond Black Orientalism', where she was involved as an artist and curator, won an Honorary Mention at the Prix Ars Electronica under Computer Animation.

In 2021, she was recognised to be of Exceptional Promise to the arts by the Arts Council England.

'Tārāng' is a political, decolonial and feminist interactive virtual and physical world that explores vocabularies of communication that exist beyond the spoken word. These vocabularies are embodied and transmitted in the knots of banyan tree roots, in the etched evocations on stone, in the bodies of dancers, in the sound of the string - synonymous with its tactile manifestations on fabric, drawings on the floor, and painted symbols.

By integrating technology, traditional art forms, and immersive storytelling in a multi-dimensional exhibition, Tārāng invites visitors to transcend the boundaries of the concrete world and explore the interconnected rhythms of other cultural and sensory dimensions. Through the medium of digital worldbuilding, film and installation, it foregrounds biomechanical and transmedia storytelling as the original technology upon which cosmovisions were stored.

It situates science fiction, not as a modern invention descended from the imagination of the West, but rather weaves stories from across six centuries that feature concepts - such as illusion, transformation, flying across the sky into different realms, dreaming, the apocalypse, and motifs of the cosmos and mythical creatures. There is no pristine intact tradition after colonialism, nor is retrieval of a pre-colonial tradition an option. Invention on the basis of what remains, what is passed down generations, what the body remembers, in a contemporary, decolonising context is the work's problematic.

TĀRĀNG

तरंग

AREBYTE GALLERY

fabric painted with
saffron/indigo dye



entrance

short visual novels
from the world

The exhibition design evokes the symbolism of a meandering river weaving across the space in the underflooring of the gallery, upon the banks of which flourishes the story of Karuputtadi and Kinnari.

The river serves as a central motif, a conceptual focal point that is non-linear in nature. The strata or sedimented layers of the earth, created by this symbolic river over eons, are not only geological but historical, cultural, and spiritual, much like the layering of the storytelling form itself over millennia.





The exhibition centers around two large scale projections with open sound

Chapter ONE
virtually produced film

Chapter TWO
interactive virtual world (controlled by xbox controller)

backed by fabric painted and dipped in Saffron and Indigo dye

KARUPPUTADI करुपुतादी



Karupputadi (“black beard”), belonging to the तामसिक (tamsik) tribe, is a hunter and forest dweller. His face is coal black with criss cross lines drawn around the eyes. He carries a bow, quiver, and an instrument that he has crafted with his hands to hunt.

KINNARI

किन्नरी

The Kinnaris are mythological beings of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. They are depicted as half-human, half-bird creatures with the upper body of a human and the lower body and wings of a bird. Kinnaris are considered celestial musicians and dancers. In Buddhist mythology, Kinnaris are seen as gentle and peaceful beings, often depicted as protectors of the forest and natural world.

CHAPTER 9

Chapter 9 unveils the vibrant forest as Karupputadi tirelessly tracks his prey. Balancing on banyan tree roots like a tightrope walker, his feet adorned with melodious bells, he moves with grace. Karupputadi descends from the roots and seeks solace under the sheltering canopy of the banyan tree. As he rests, the screen transforms with the flickering image of a flame, casting its gentle glow on Karupputadi's face as he slips into a dreamlike state.



THE EMPIRE DREAMT BACK

This political and decolonial artwork emerges from a little-known research project by the anthropologist Charles Gabriel Seligman. Seligman collected hundreds of dreams from various regions of the British empire - Indian subcontinent, Nigeria, Uganda, Australia, and the Solomon Islands. He was funded by colonial governments and used his findings to train colonial officials on their subjects at the London School of Economics. Seligman's research was centered around racialist science, which involved defining human groups on the basis of physiognomy and psychology and locating them in evolutionary hierarchies.

When he analyzed the dreams of 'subjects' living under British colonialism, he noted that many involved scenes of running and jumping: expressions of the longing for physical freedom, for the ability to move without fear, that the reality of colonial rule denied them. In Uganda, an African working for the colonial administration also suffered nightmares about the authority figures in his life. For Oruro, by contrast, even sleep did not provide a respite from the weight of oppression – a striking revelation. Yet beyond acknowledging the very large part played by white officials in these dreams, Seligman seemed unsure what to make of them. The dreams unveiled a dark side of the empire that he was unwilling, or unable, to acknowledge.

In 'Tarang', Karuputtadi encounters symbols and archetypes that represent the oppressive forces of colonialism. These symbols manifest as authoritative figures, reminiscent of the British officials and missionaries who held power over the lives of the colonized. As Karuputtadi moves through this dreamscape, he becomes both witness and participant in the struggle against colonial oppression. The dreamscape becomes a battleground where the desire for physical freedom, the longing to move without fear, clashes with the harsh realities of subjugation.


I am inclined to regard the whole of savage life, with its innumerable ceremonies, as a psycho-therapeutic sublimation, without which the savage could not get through life. This view has also been put forward by Dr. E.J. Kempf* who points out that man has for centuries practised a form of psychotherapy on himself, which he had found necessary to relieve the tension of unconscious strivings. This system of sympathetic magic does not influence the environment as primitive man believed, but only the process of animate nature within the individual, causing increased comfort, co-ordination, and happiness.

* The probable origin of man's belief in sympathetic magic and taboo, Medical Journal and Record 1931, summarized in Journal of Mental Science, 1932.

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-Royal Anthropological Institute, "Seligman, Charles Gabriel Collection"

CHAPTER 2



Chapter 2 is a first-person interactive experience in the body of Karuputtadi. Here, Karuputtadi becomes a wanderer, a seeker, crossing and recrossing the well-guarded boundaries. This seeker will act as a mediator for the viewer in navigating the unknown territories of this world.



Karupputadi encounters the enchanting Kinnari by the lake and seeks to capture them through his music. A fierce war dance ensues, with both sides pushing the boundaries of movement and sound. Despite Karupputadi's frustration, the Kinnari's dance transforms into a divine spectacle. In awe, he sets his instrument aside and humbly touches the ground.



नृत्य (dance) in collaboration with Payal Ramchandani

Karuputtadi and Kinnari's story is brought to life through a sophisticated vocabulary of movements, encompassing the arms, upper body, neck, bends, turns, eyes, and rhythmic foot movements. The story is entirely non-verbal, only sung in ancient tongues stored in the body.

These intricate gestures and postures are captured through motion capture technology in collaboration with the renowned Kuchipudi dancer, Payal Ramchandani.



"Dance is the ultimate expression of what nature contains. It predates history in its origin and yet it is a succinct reminder of what a civilisation has achieved in the particular direction that it has taken. A single pose from a dance tells you of the notions of equilibrium in a culture: the body's points of rest are in implicit conjunction with what the universe must constitute for it.

Upon two basic poses and two basic movements, one can build up whole cybernetics that reveal the nervous system's encoded signs of nature, freeing the body at once from pre-determined governance, to work with or against gravity, discovering new sources of speech."

Kumar Shahani, *Dance and Film*, 1995.

Revealing the tensions between digital and physical, tangible and intangible, past and present, East and West - motion capture technology as a medium interwoven with ancient folk dance in the world of Karuputtadi and Kinnari, creates a liminal / threshold space that transcends the limitations of singular time and space.



संगीत (music) in collaboration with Aliyah Hussain



Payal's (Karuputtadi) and my (Kinnari) rhythmic movements encapsulated in the sounds of the ghungroo bells tied on our feet will overlay and sync with music commissioned for this world by sound artist Aliyah Hussain.

The sounds of this world will weave across the gallery space through different speakers placed across the space mirroring a river, mixing and tuning relative to the viewer's position in the gallery.

During the era of British colonial rule, dance occupied a position of significance within the broader agenda aimed at purification and civilization. The progressively reformist mindset of the British in nineteenth-century India initiated campaigns against the practice of 'nautch' - an Anglicized rendition of the Hindi term 'naach' for dance. Specifically, the 'anti-nautch' movement denoted the marginalization of female performers by the British authorities, accomplished through the assimilation and classification of these individuals and their dances as forms of prostitution. This reclassification was achieved through the implementation of colonial ethnographies and censuses, which transformed previously fluid and mobile groups into a rigid caste category within the social hierarchy.



Karuputtadi and Kinnari's dance is a depiction of time and narration where it acquires a maximum freedom from political and chronological unfolding. It is the activation of rhythms, which creates the structural ability to pay attention to the seemingly insignificant and acknowledge differential temporalities, breathing patterns, life cycles, dependencies and sensations.



Rhythm does not privilege singular ways of being but rather insists, in advance, that collaborative engagement is necessary to who and what we are. As we groove- even if alone- we collaborate with tunes, poetics, and styles, fusing ostensible disconnect between science (sound vibrations, physiological movements, flesh and blood) and narrative (musical score, lyric, cultural text). Rhythm is conceptualized as one way to invite collaborative worlding; rhythm lays bare not only emotions and imaginations but also their scientific underpinnings.

Sylvia Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica'





Image: Jyoti Bhatt, Kolam/Rangoli (Floor Paintings), Madras, photograph, 1974. Jyoti Bhatt Archive, AAA Collections.

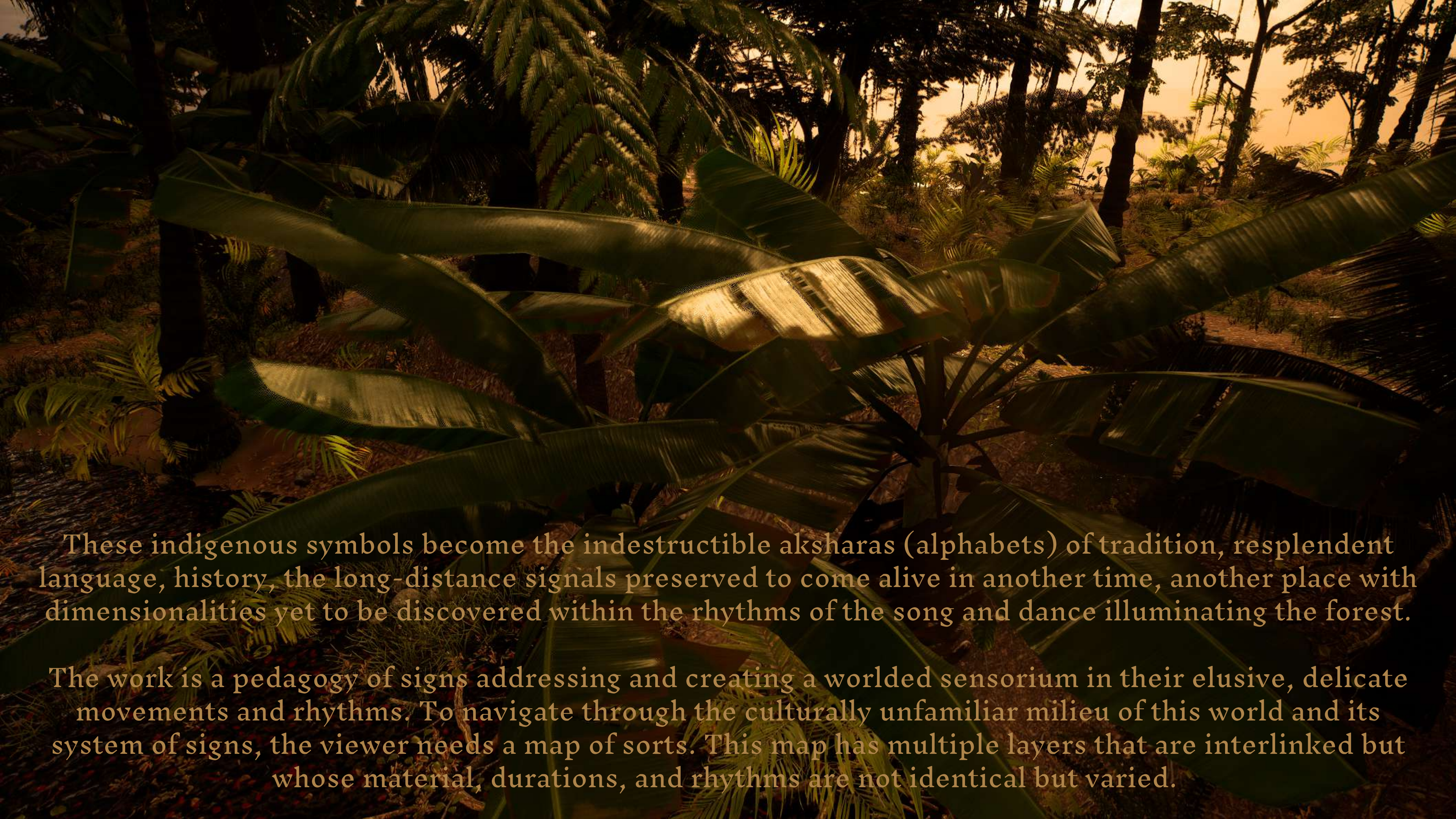


Between the two chapters are gaps in the floor - containing drawings in powder of indigenous symbols from the paintings and worlds.

Visitors can witness the transformation of these static symbols into dynamic and interactive augmented visuals from key moments in Karuputtadi and Kinnari's journey using their smartphones or AR-enabled devices.

These drawings act as a backdrop for the aerial projection of moving waters with floating rose petals from the virtual worlds.





These indigenous symbols become the indestructible aksharas (alphabets) of tradition, resplendent language, history, the long-distance signals preserved to come alive in another time, another place with dimensionalities yet to be discovered within the rhythms of the song and dance illuminating the forest.

The work is a pedagogy of signs addressing and creating a worlded sensorium in their elusive, delicate movements and rhythms. To navigate through the culturally unfamiliar milieu of this world and its system of signs, the viewer needs a map of sorts. This map has multiple layers that are interlinked but whose material, durations, and rhythms are not identical but varied.



In collaboration with perfumer, Ezra Lloyd Jackson, I will craft a custom fragrance, which will enrich the visitor's journey across the space by awakening the scents of the virtual worlds.

The scent, like a wispy breeze, guides their exploration, intensifying their emotional connection to the virtual worlds portrayed in Tārāng. Recipes of sandalwood, rose petals, lingering smell of fresh tea leaves, coconut, cumin, mango, cardamon, black pepper, and turmeric that make up the sensorial landscape of this world, will be hand-rolled into bespoke incense sticks and essential oils.

इत्र (scent) in
collaboration with
Ezra Llyod Jackson





short visual novel
showcasing dance
'mudras'
(gestures) and
their meanings
from Karuputtadi
and Kinnari's
story.



VISITOR JOURNEY

Two large projections dominate the space, each accompanied by an open sound environment. The first projection transports viewers into the world of Karuputtadi as he embarks on his hunt, through the medium of film. This visually striking chapter portrays the internal landscape of Karuputtadi's mind, constrained by oppression and bureaucratic obedience. The rhythmic variations in this chapter mirror the turmoil within, creating a deeply introspective ambiance.

Moving forward, visitors encounter the second chapter, which chronicles Karuputtadi's encounter with the Kinnaris, leading to a powerful war dance. Here, the violence manifests not in physicality but through the expressive movements and music. The rhythmically varied nature of this chapter evokes a sense of urgency and intensity, as the external conflicts and tensions unfold.

The tactile fabric that hangs from the ceiling behind the large projections is a visual tapestry painted with symbols from the world, adorned with saffron and indigo dye.

Curated interruptions in the form of gaps in the floor and visual novels displayed on pillars create pauses between the two chapters. These elements serve as intimate encounters that invite viewers to decode the gestures and symbols from Karuputtadi and Kinnari's journey.





Walking through the space, visitors are accompanied by a symphony of sounds. Apart from the two major soundscapes supporting the large projections, three additional small speakers are strategically placed, emitting ambient sounds from the virtual world. These sounds mix and tune relative to the viewers' position in the gallery, creating an enveloping auditory experience.

At the center of the gallery, a diffuser releases scents carefully crafted from essential oils, emanating fragrances from the virtual world. This olfactory dimension enhances the sensory immersion, transporting visitors deeper into the realms of Karuputtadi and Kinnari.

As you move through the gallery, the interplay of projections, tactile fabric, augmented visuals, ambient sounds, and aromatic scents creates a multisensory experience that transcends traditional exhibition formats. It allows you to connect with the narrative on a profound level, immersing yourself in the world of Karuputtadi and Kinnari, and their journey through movement, symbolism, and emotion.

Project Timeline		2023								2024				
		May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
Research and Development	Modelling of 3D characters and assets													
	Writing the story + storyboarding													
	Visualising Cinematic cuts													
	Scent development with Ezra - mixing and testing													
	Dance choreography and rehearsals													
	Sound development													
	Sketching and painting symbols													
	Dye testing on fabric													
Production	Building environments in Unreal Engine + animations													
	Testing interactivity													
	Scent - incense, essential oil and perfume													
	Sound - layering with film and environment													
	Motion Capture at PROTO													
	Projection Mapping													
	Filming in Unreal Engine													
	Film final edit													
	Source copyrights and permissions for Kumar Shahani text reprinting													
	Write exhibition text													
	Publication design and layout													
	Painting on fabric													
	Build AR interactions													
	Floor drawings sketches													
Printing film stills and research on photopaper														
Press and Marketing	Send promo visuals													
	Liase with Arebyte Marketing team for interviews													
Install	Fabrication & testing													
	Installation													
Exhibition Run	Duration of the show													
	Event 1 - date TBC													
	Event 2 - date TBC													
	Event 3 - date TBC													
De-install	Packaging and return of works													

Timeline on Google Sheets

PUBLICATION

The booklet will include a visual essay on the work written by myself and a glossary of symbols that appear in the virtual world of Karuputtadi and Kinnari and the physical space of the exhibition.

The booklet will also feature a reprinted essay 'Dance and Film' written by Kumar Shahani in 1995.

The booklet's closure will hold a CD of virtual world's sounds mixed by Aliyah Hussain.

Its spine will carry one incense stick, a ceremonial guide, created in collaboration with Ezra Llyod Jackson, instructing its burning before indulging in the game, film, and sounds.



EVENTS

A curated film screening followed by an in-conversation with
Kinnari Saraiya, Larry Achiampong and Helen Starr:
Indigenous Knowledge, New Materialism and Decolonial Worlding

Interactive performance by Payal Ramchandani (Kuchipudi
dancer), Kinnari Saraiya (Folk dancer) and Kalamandalam Barbara
Vijayakumar (Kathakali dancer):
Our Body Curves like Woven Threads and Roots.

Artist Talk: Kinnari Saraiya on Tārāṅ and Hotel Generation