

Press Release

Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World

In collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann
Featuring Aṇaṅkuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam

22 October 2022 – 15 January 2023

'How do you tell the story of the losing side of a conflict when history has already been written by the winners?'

– Christopher Kulendran Thomas

The exhibition *Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World* at KW Institute for Contemporary Art explores an alternative approach to technology through the prism of the defeated revolutionary struggle for an independent Tamil homeland.

During the Sri Lankan Civil War, the de facto state of Tamil Eelam was self-governed by a liberation movement that, in the early years of the World Wide Web, used the internet to coordinate a globally distributed parallel economic system amongst the Tamil diaspora. However, the movement's political ambitions were eclipsed by a bitter military conflict and the autonomous state they led was brutally eradicated in 2009 by the Sri Lankan government.

Developed together with longtime collaborator Annika Kuhlmann, the exhibition features a major new commission, *The Finesse* (2022), that examines some of the lost legacies of this liberation movement in Kulendran Thomas' family homeland. The immersive film installation melts pop culture into political science and combines archive footage with AI-generated avatars. The work is choreographed across five monolithic mirrored screens and a projection that spans KW's first floor gallery to form an architectural hallucination. *The Finesse* traces the Tamil liberation movement's attempt to imagine a cooperative economy based on renewable energy, communal ownership and computational coordination. Blurring the boundaries between historical research and a sci-fi proposition for an alternate reality, it looks at how the art, architecture and technology that were lost with the defeat of the de facto state of Eelam could today inform radically different, and constantly shifting, ideas of the future. With parts of the work continually algorithmically generated anew, the film is never quite the same twice.

Across the second-floor gallery, KW presents a series of newly commissioned paintings that extend Kulendran Thomas' use of artificial intelligence technologies. Exhibited alongside ceramic works by Aṇaṅkuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam, a leading light of the Eelam artistic resistance, the paintings are made using machine-learning algorithms trained on the memetic circulation of art historical influences from the Western canon to Sri Lanka's post-civil war art world.

Bisecting the second-floor gallery is a new variation of the 2019 video work *Being Human* which takes the viewer on an elliptical journey around Sri Lanka, from the fallout of the civil war there to the biennial of contemporary art founded in its aftermath. Combining real people's lived experiences with

algorithmically synthesized characters, the film features various guests of the Colombo Art Biennale, as well as a brief appearance from Kulendran Thomas' uncle, a family hero who established the Centre for Human Rights in Tamil Eelam.

Curator: Krist Gruijthuijsen
Assistant Curator: Sofie Krogh Christensen

Christopher Kulendran Thomas – Another World is initiated by Stefan Kalmár, produced in partnership with the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, Kunsthalle Zürich and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, and realized with the generous support of Filecoin Foundation and Filecoin Foundation for the Decentralized Web.

The Finesse (2022) by Christopher Kulendran Thomas is commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, in partnership with Kunsthalle Zürich and KW Institute for Contemporary Art and realized with the generous support of Filecoin Foundation, Filecoin Foundation for the Decentralized Web and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and with thanks to OMA|AMO, satis&fy and Adam Hall Group.

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