

தப்பி ஓடு THAPPI ODU (FLEE)

**ANUSHIYA SUNDARALINGAM
ULSTER MUSEUM, BELFAST**

INSTALLATION: WINDOW ON OUR WORLD (GROUND FLOOR), FROM FRIDAY 4TH OCTOBER 2024

PERFORMANCE: BELFAST ROOM, WEDNESDAY 30TH OCTOBER 1-2PM

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: BELFAST ROOM, WEDNESDAY 30TH OCTOBER 2-3PM



INTRODUCTION

AS A TAMIL ARTIST FROM SRI LANKA, THE IMPACT OF THE CIVIL WAR THAT BEGAN THERE IN JULY 1983 CONTINUES TO DEEPLY INFLUENCE MY WORK. SINCE RELOCATING TO BELFAST IN 1995, MY PRACTICE HAS BEEN IMPLICITLY ROOTED IN EXPLORING HOW DISPLACEMENT - WHETHER BY CHOICE OR NECESSITY - RESHAPES OUR IDENTITY AND SENSE OF PLACE.

THE INSTALLATION AT THE CENTRE OF THIS PROJECT FEATURES IMAGES OF FOOTPRINTS GATHERED FROM TAMIL COMMUNITIES AND SRI LANKAN DIASPORA WORLDWIDE. TRANSLATED INTO 300 SCREENPRINTS, THEY CREATE A VISUAL NARRATIVE OF SURVIVAL THROUGH TENTATIVE MOVEMENT BUT COLLECTIVE STRENGTH WITHIN IMPOSING AND UNYIELDING STRUCTURES. I HAVE ALSO INVITED THE COMMUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN A CO-CREATED COLLECTIVE WORK; AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE TRACES OF THEIR JOURNEYS TO THE STORIES SHARED BY SUCH A SIGNIFICANT INSTITUTION HERE IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

RECENTLY, MY WORK HAS DEVELOPED IN SCALE, COMPLEXITY AND IN THE STORIES THAT I'M READY TO TELL. WORKING WITH THE ULSTER MUSEUM, AND WITH ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND FUNDING, HAS GIVEN ME A PLATFORM TO CONTRIBUTE TO BOTH A LOCAL AND GLOBAL, AND CONTEMPORARY AND HISTORIC, DISCOURSE ON THE IMPACTS OF CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT.

THIS NEW BODY OF WORK FEELS LIKE A COMING TOGETHER: OF DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS AND IDEAS THAT HAVE BEEN BUILDING FOR SOME TIME. WHETHER SUBJECT MATTER OR MATERIAL - PRINT, TEXTILE, SCULPTURE, PAINTING, INSTALLATION AND PERFORMANCE - EVERYTHING CONNECTS.

I AM ALWAYS CHALLENGING MYSELF TO MOVE FORWARD, EVEN THOUGH I AM BEGINNING TO ADDRESS THE PAST AND ITS MEMORIES, FROM WHICH I AND SO MANY OTHERS HAVE HAD TO FLEE.

ANUSHIYA SUNDARALINGAM, AUGUST 2024



TAKING IN STRIDES: REFLECTING ON THE 'WHY HERE?/ WHY NOW?' OF THAPPI ODU

JANE MORROW

I AM WRITING THIS AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF RACIST-FUELLED VIOLENCE THAT SWEEPED OUR CITY, AND MANY OTHERS, ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND IN AUGUST 2024. I VIBRATE WITH ANGER, TO THE EXTENT THAT I CAN'T REALLY WRITE AT ALL, ONLY SCROLL. NARRATIVES OF 'THE GOOD IMMIGRANT' AND 'LEGITIMATE CONCERNS' ABOUND, PLACATORY COMPARISONS WITH THE OVER-10 MILLION PEOPLE THAT HAVE EMIGRATED FROM THIS ISLAND, NOT JUST TO ESCAPE FAMINE AND PERSECUTION, BUT FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REASONS TOO.

OUR STORY IS NOT QUITE, OR NOT ALWAYS, AN EQUIVALENCE WITH WHAT WARSAN SHIRE DESCRIBES IN HER POEM HOME, WHERE 'HOME IS THE MOUTH OF A SHARK / HOME IS THE BARREL OF THE GUN / AND NO ONE WOULD LEAVE HOME / UNLESS HOME CHASED YOU TO THE SHORE' [1].

FROM SRI LANKA, AND BASED IN NORTHERN IRELAND SINCE THE MID-1990S, IT IS ONLY VERY RECENTLY THAT ANUSHIYA'S WORK HAS BECOME REPRESENTATIONAL; ONLY NOW THAT SHE CAN INTERROGATE THE PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND LITERAL JOURNEY FORCED UPON HER. ANUSHIYA'S WORDS, WHEN SHE FIRST INVITED ME TO WRITE ABOUT THIS PROJECT, REVERBERATE: 'WE USED TO RUN'. SHE IS JUST ONE OF THE ONE IN EIGHT SRI LANKANS WHO LIVE ABROAD.

I RECENTLY COMMISSIONED ANUSHIYA TO MAKE A DURATIONAL DRAWING PERFORMANCE: A MONUMENTAL WORK WHICH REFERENCES THE SMALL BOATS THAT CARRIED HER AND HER YOUNG SON TO SAFETY; SIMILAR IN SIZE AND CONSTRUCTION AND DESPAIR TO THE SMALL BOATS WE SEE AND HEAR ABOUT IN THE MEDIA. I MENTION THIS WORK HERE BECAUSE IT TOO MARKS A DEPARTURE; A RECONCILIATION, OF SORTS, FOR ANUSHIYA, WITH HIDING IN AND FROM HER HISTORY, AND WITH SHARING HER LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THE HERE AND NOW.

THE CIVIL WAR IN SRI LANKA BEGAN IN 1983 AND ENDED IN 2009. LIKE THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND, THESE DATES WERE - OF COURSE - NOT THE BEGINNING NOR THE END OF VIOLENCE AND FAILED ATTEMPTS AT POWER-SHARING BY THAT ISLAND'S BUDDHIST, HINDU, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM PLAYERS.

IT MAKES ME THINK OF THE BANYAN TREE THAT ANUSHIYA REFERENCES IN HER WORK (THOUGH SHE DOES SO IN A MUCH MORE POSITIVE LIGHT), ABOUT DEEP AND IMPENETRABLE ROOTS, SNAKING INDEFINITELY IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS, ENVELOPING AND STRANGLING ALL IN ITS PATH UNTIL EVERYONE HAS FORGOTTEN WHERE EXACTLY IT BEGAN. FOR ANUSHIYA, AS FOR MANY OTHERS FROM SOUTHERN ASIA, THE BANYAN HAS A SACRED DESIGNATION, REPRESENTING ENLIGHTENMENT, DETERMINATION, RESILIENCE, AND GROUNDING. IT'S ALMOST AS IF, WITH A LITTLE CURIOSITY, YOUR PERSPECTIVE CAN CHANGE COMPLETELY.

MOSTLY, HER WORK WORRIES AT THE EDGES OF A SELF IN TRANSITION: OMNIPRESENT AND UNRESOLVABLE LONGING AND BELONGING. SO SHE MAKES. AND MAKES, AND MAKES, AND MAKES. ACROSS NUMEROUS MASTERED DISCIPLINES, FROM PAINT TO PRINT TO TEXTILES TO SCULPTURE AND INSTALLATION, ANUSHIYA'S BUSY HANDS OFFER TRACES AND OBJECTS AND SUBJECTS OF LIVES LIVED, AND EXPERIENCES SHARED.

EVERYTHING IS POLITICAL, EVEN HER ABSTRACT WORKS, WHICH HAVE MADE UP A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF HER ARTISTIC OUTPUT OVER THE DECADES. EACH OF THE 69 WORKS THAT SHE HAS CONTRIBUTED, FOR EXAMPLE, TO THE A TO Z OF CONFLICT - A WEIGHTY TRILINGUAL ARTISTS' BOOK BY TEN INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS WHO ARE ALL FROM SRI LANKA - IS ABSTRACT. FORMED AROUND GRIDS, LINES, ORDER, UNITY, AND A PALETTE OF ONLY REDS, BLACK, BLUES AND WHITE.



IF THOSE STRUCTURES AND COLOURS DON'T RESONATE WITH A NORTHERN IRISH READERSHIP, HOW ABOUT THE BOOK'S THREE LANGUAGES - ENGLISH, SINHALA, AND TAMIL - WHICH TESTIFY TO 'THE WAYS LANGUAGE DEFINES US LINGUISTICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND POLITICALLY [TO] CONJOIN AND DIVIDE US...' WITH THE UTMOST CARE TAKEN TO POSITION THEM 'WITHOUT GIVING ONE LANGUAGE GREATER STATUS OVER THE OTHERS'? [2]

HERE, IN THE ULSTER MUSEUM, THERE ARE THREE VISIBLE COMPONENTS PRESENTED FROM ANUSHIYA'S NEW WORK: AN INSTALLATION, A PERFORMANCE, AND ITS RESIDUE, BUT THE PROCESS OF GETTING HERE IS UNSEEN. SHE HAS SPENT ALMOST TWO YEARS REACHING OUT TO THE SRI LANKAN DIASPORA ALL OVER THE WORLD IN AUSTRALIA, CANADA, AMERICA, UK, IRELAND, SWITZERLAND, HOLLAND, DENMARK, GERMANY, NIGERIA, INDIA, NORWAY, SINGAPORE, THE SEYCHELLES AND MORE. USING ACCESSIBLE AND SHAREABLE MEDIA, MAINLY WHATSAPP, SHE CONTACTED MANY HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE. THEIR REPLIES, FEATURING IMAGES OF THEIR BARE FEET, MAKE UP THE 300 SCREENPRINTS CONTAINED WITHIN THIS INSTALLATION.

LAYERED OVER AND OVER, AND WITH THE SPECIFICS REMOVED AND DEPERSONALISED, THE FOCUS CHANGES FROM THE INDIVIDUALS THEMSELVES TO THE LANDSCAPE CREATED BY THEIR NUMBERS, EACH LITTLE WRINKLE AND NUANCE WITHIN A FIXED AND OVERBEARING STRUCTURE. IN VIEWING THEM WE ARE, AS DEREK POOLE SAYS IN AN EARLIER ESSAY ON ANUSHIYA'S WORK, 'EXALTED AND TERRIFIED BY THE PROFOUND AWARENESS THAT WE HAVE A BODY' [3]. SINUOUS TENDRILS, CREATED FROM ANUSHIYA'S WORK WITH LINEN THREADS, BIND THE FEET TO ONE ANOTHER AND THE 'GROUND' OF THE PAPER SURFACE.

THE LIGHTNESS OF THE PAPER, STITCHED TOGETHER WITH VISIBLE THREAD, ENABLES THEM TO AGITATE INDIVIDUALLY BUT MOVE AS ONE WHEN DISRUPTED, AND THE SITE OF THE WORK ON THE MUSEUM'S MEZZANINE SUGGESTIVE OF A KIND OF HALF-WAY POINT, A NO MAN'S LAND.

ANUSHIYA'S PERFORMANCE INVITES PARTICIPATION FROM DIASPORA COMMUNITIES AS A RECORD THAT THEY WERE HERE, THE RED OF THEIR FEET A VITAL LIVING ENTITY AND ARRESTING SYMPTOM OF THEIR ENERGY, ANGER, HATE, PASSION, LOVE, DESIRE AND REVOLUTION.

EXPLICITLY BODILY, HER CHOICE OF COLOUR IS ALSO NUANCED AND DEEPLY SPECIFIC TO A PLACE AND A PEOPLE. BEFORE BECOMING THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA IN 1972, AND HAVING BEEN NAMED CEYLON UNDER COLONIAL OCCUPATION, THIS INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND WAS KNOWN IN

ANCIENT TIMES AS TAMBAPANNI. LITERALLY MEANING 'DUST OF THE RED EARTH', THIS RED COLOUR TRANSFERRED ONTO THE HANDS AND FEET OF ITS PEOPLE AS THEY WORKED THE LAND.

THE PERFORMANCE PROPS ARE ANYTHING BUT INCIDENTAL. SUITCASES ARE PRE-PACKED. ANUSHIYA'S PERSONAL HISTORY IS EMBEDDED IN THESE OBJECTS. SRI LANKA'S MOTTO IS PRO PATRIA; LATIN FOR 'FOR THE FATHERLAND', AND HER OWN FATHER IS REPRESENTED BY HIS NATIONAL IDENTITY CARD, WHICH HAD TO BE CARRIED AT ALL TIMES.

OF WHAT REMAINS, POST-PERFORMANCE, THE RESULTANT PAPER IS UNWOVEN; GAPS CREATED, AND CONNECTIONS BROKEN. THE THINGS THAT YOU CAN'T TAKE WITH YOU ECHO TANGIBLY, POIGNANT EMBLEMS OF HOW, AS CORMAC MCCARTHY DESCRIBES IN THE ROAD, 'YOU FORGET WHAT YOU WANT TO REMEMBER AND YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU WANT TO FORGET' [4].

WE ALREADY KNEW THAT THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT SPACE HERE, IN NORTHERN IRELAND, FOR GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES TO BE FOREGROUNDED, NOW IT IS ALL THE MORE URGENT. ANUSHIYA RETURNS TO THE ULSTER MUSEUM AS AN EXHIBITING ARTIST HAVING BEGUN HER CAREER DELIVERING CREATIVE WORKSHOPS HERE MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO. THE MUSEUM IS THE PERFECT SITE FOR THIS WORK, FOR ENQUIRY, CURIOSITY AND RELATABILITY, AND AS 'A PLACE TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR SHARED HUMANITY' [5].

ALONGSIDE CURRENT EXHIBITIONS ON INCLUSIVE GLOBAL HISTORIES AND TEXTILES WHICH SPEAK TO CONFLICT AND OPPRESSION INTERNATIONALLY, ANUSHIYA'S WORK COMPLEMENTS WIDESPREAD (AND FRUSTRATINGLY ONGOING) ATTEMPTS TO DECOLONISE AND DIVERSIFY THE VOICES THAT ARE REPRESENTED WITHIN THE ARTS AND HERITAGE SECTORS. HER WORK HAS BEEN HERE FOR DECADES, UNDER OUR NOSES, IN SO MANY FORMS THAT SHE NEEDS THREE SEPARATE STUDIOS TO CONTAIN IT.

WAR, RELIGION, (UN)CIVILISATIONS, AND (IN)HUMANITY, THAT'S WHAT ANUSHIYA'S BEAUTIFUL, DELICATE WORKS ARE MADE OF. I'M REMINDED OF A LINE IN THE BOOKER PRIZE-WINNING NOVEL BY SRI-LANKAN SHEHAN KARUNATILAKA: 'WE HAVE JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF EDUCATION TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE WORLD IS CRUEL... AND JUST ENOUGH CORRUPTION AND INEQUALITY TO FEEL POWERLESS AGAINST IT' [6]. THESE WORKS HELP ALL OF US TREAD A PATH TOWARDS SOMETHING ELSE, SOMETHING BETTER. WE RUN TOO, BECAUSE DESPERATION AND HOPE ARE SYNONYMS.

REFERENCES

- [1] SHIRE, W. (2016) HOME. AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://WWW.AMNESTY.IE/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2016/06/HOME-BY-WARSAN-SHIRE.PDF](https://www.amnesty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/home-by-warsan-shire.pdf)
- [2] PEREIRA, S (ED.).(2019). THE A-Z OF CONFLICT. COLOMBO: RAKING LEAVES.
- [3] POOLE, D. (2014). RE ROOT, PUBLICATION TO ACCOMPANY THE EXHIBITION OF THE SAME NAME. CRESCENT ARTS CENTRE, BELFAST, 2014.
- [4] MCCARTHY, C. (2006). THE ROAD. NEW YORK: ALFRED A KNOPF.
- [5] [HTTPS://WWW.ULSTERMUSEUM.ORG](https://www.ulstermuseum.org)
- [6] KARUNATILAKA, S. (2023). THE SEVEN MOONS OF MAALI ALMEIDA. LONDON: SORT OF BOOKS. P.285.



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

ANUSHIYA SUNDARALINGAM IS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST. SHE IS A STUDIO HOLDER AT QSS AND A MEMBER OF BELFAST PRINT WORKSHOP. SHE HAS ALSO EXTENSIVELY EXHIBITED ACROSS IRELAND AND INTERNATIONALLY (SRI LANKA, AUSTRALIA, SPAIN, AND USA AMONGST OTHERS). HER WORKS ARE HELD IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COLLECTIONS, INCLUDING THAT OF ARTS COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND. [HTTPS://WWW.ANUSHIYAARTIST.CO.UK](https://www.anushiyaartist.co.uk)

ABOUT THE WRITER:

DR JANE MORROW IS A VISUAL ART CURATOR, WRITER, RESEARCHER, EDUCATOR, AND ADVOCATE. SHE IS CURRENTLY CO-DIRECTOR/ STRATEGIC VISION AND DEVELOPMENT CURATOR AT PS². SHE ALSO DEVELOPS INDEPENDENT AND COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS, SUCH AS CO-INITIATING THE ANGELICA NETWORK. [HTTPS://ANGELICA.NETWORK](https://angelica.network)

தப்பி ஓடு THAPPI ODU (FLEE) IS FUNDED BY THE ARTISTS' CAREER ENHANCEMENT SCHEME (ACES), WHICH FORMS PART OF THE WIDER SUPPORT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL ARTIST PROGRAMME (SIAP), ADMINISTERED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND ANNUALLY WITH FUNDING FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY.





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SPECIAL THANKS TO DONALL BILLING FROM BELFAST PRINT WORKSHOP FOR HIS EXPERTISE IN DIGITAL AND SCREEN PRINTING.

BEFORE CONCLUDING, I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO MY SISTER, VATHSI, AND MY FRIEND, DHAMY, FOR THEIR EFFORTS IN CONNECTING WITH THE SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY TO COLLECT IMAGES. MOST OF ALL, I AM PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL TO MY MOTHER, THABO, FOR HER ENDURING LOVE, SUPPORT, AND PATIENCE WITH MY ONGOING PROJECTS.

ADDITIONALLY, I EXTEND MY SINCERE THANKS TO CATHERINE CHARLEY FOR HER INVALUABLE ADVICE AND SUPPORT WITH THE INITIAL APPLICATION.

TO ALL MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY, WHO HAVE SUPPORTED ME THROUGHOUT THE YEARS—THANK YOU FOR YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT, GUIDANCE, AND FRIENDSHIP. YOUR SUPPORT HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING THIS PROJECT TO LIFE.

IMAGE ON FRONT COVER COURTESY OF EMMA BARONE, THE TYRONE GUTHRIE CENTRE AT ANNAGHMAKERRIG, JULY 2024.



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