



PRESS RELEASE

*Christopher Kulendran Thomas: Another World*

in collaboration with Annika Kuhlmann  
featuring Aṇaṅkuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam  
11 October 2022 – 22 January 2023

ICA LONDON AND KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART IN  
BERLIN PRESENT IN PARALLEL THE FIRST MAJOR SURVEY OF  
THE WORK OF BRITISH-TAMIL ARTIST CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN  
THOMAS

Press view: 10 October, 10am – 12 pm / Preview: 10 October, 6.30pm

‘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



Christopher Kulendran Thomas, *The Finesse* (2022) in collaboration with  
Annika Kuhlmann; film still

Opening in October 2022 in London and Berlin, *Christopher Kulendran Thomas: Another World* 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 ICA's lower 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 first floor gallery, ICA 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 first floor gallery is a new variation of Kulendran Thomas' 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 synthesised 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.

A variation of the exhibition will run concurrently at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, opening 21 October.

A talks programme will accompany *Another World*, developed in conjunction with KW Institute for Contemporary Art, and the RadicalxChange Foundation. On 2 November, 7–8.30pm, the ICA will host the inaugural event: a conversation with Ethereum co-founder Vitalik Buterin on decentralised societies, exploring the possibilities of using new technologies to build communities founded on fairer systems. Further events will feature Marta Belcher, blockchain lawyer and chair of Filecoin Foundation for the Decentralised Web; Trevor McFedries, founder of web3 community Friends With Benefits; and Balaji Srinivasan, angel investor, tech founder, and author. The programme will continue through to January and will mark the launch of earth, an associated research and development studio to devise shared tools for new ways of living, based at the ICA from 2 November throughout the duration of the exhibition.

*Another World* by Christopher Kulendran Thomas is initiated by Stefan Kalmár, produced in partnership with Kunsthalle Zürich and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin and realised with the generous support of Filecoin Foundation and Filecoin Foundation for the Decentralized Web, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts and Henry Moore Foundation with additional support from Adam Hall Group.

With special thanks to OMA|AMO and satis&fy.

**Bengi Ünsal, Director, ICA, says:**

‘Christopher Kulendran Thomas addresses some of the pressing issues of our times – of identity, of justice, of how to live together in a complicated world. But there is no safe critical distance from which to pass moral judgements in the ‘world’ that his work constructs. Bringing a kind of x-ray vision to the systems shaping our polarised political climate, Christopher’s work deals not in moral certainties but in complicities, interdependencies and ambiguities. Rather than take head-on any of the divisive culture war debates of the present moment, it looks systemically at how cultures *become* divided. From the perspective of another time and place – namely that of the Tamil resistance movement that was wiped out in his family’s homeland – Christopher looks behind the curtain at how political conflicts are shaped by new technologies and the economies they enable.’

**Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Artist, says:**

‘Like many Eelam Tamils, I grew up having to negotiate wildly different views of our history. We saw our liberation movement re-labeled as a terrorist organisation, and so we had to come to terms with how reality can be shaped by narrative fictions. For me these histories that didn’t get to play out are interesting as alternate realities – as ways of glimpsing, beyond the assumptions of the world we know, the possibility of other kinds of societies.’

**Annika Kuhlmann, Collaborator and Artistic Director of Earth, says:**

‘The struggles of stateless nations are one important prism through which to think about the possibility of a world after nation states. For a few hundred years, citizenship around the world has been organised by nation states that guaranteed protection and organised public goods for their citizens. Many of these states were in theory constructed around the idea of the ‘individual’, but in practice often at the service of a ruling class. Could our era of planetary-scale computation though bring about a new kind of social contract? Will it be defined by tech monopolies, by AI superpowers, or is there an alternative future in which civic technologies are organised cooperatively and owned by us all? And if a collective alternative is possible, how might this shift the idea of the individual that has underpinned the nation state?’

**Aṇaṅkuperuntinaivarkal Inkaaleneraam, Artist, says:**

‘Here in the jungle we understand that we are our environment; we understand that we are the jungle, we are the sum of its lifeforms, not the ancestral roles reinforced by our colonisers. We must reject the hierarchies of domination imposed by one caste over another. Then only we can imagine together other possible worlds, experimental kinds of kindred, unexpected possible selves.’

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### **Christopher Kulendran Thomas**

Christopher Kulendran Thomas is an artist of Tamil descent who spent his formative years in London after his family left escalating civil unrest in Sri Lanka. Seeing, mostly from a distance, how an ascendent contemporary art scene in Sri Lanka blossomed from the ashes of ethnic cleansing on the island, Christopher began examining the structural processes by which art produces reality – by which art transforms cities and builds nations. Often utilising advanced technologies, Christopher's work looks at various, as yet unrealised, possibilities at the intersection of culture, technology and citizenship. His work is represented in major collections, like that of The Museum of Modern Art in New York and recent exhibitions include *Oh, Gods of Dust And Rainbows*, Cleveland Triennial of Contemporary Art (2022); *Uncanny Valley: Being Human in the Age of AI*, de Young Museum San Francisco (2020); and *Time, Forward!*, V–A–C Zattere for the 58th Venice Biennale (2019); as well as solo shows at Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2019); Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane (2019); Spike Island, Bristol (2019); and Tensta konsthall, Stockholm (2017). Kulendran Thomas' work has been included in the 7th Bi City Biennale, Shenzhen (2017); the 11th Gwangju Biennale; the 9th Berlin Biennale; and the 3rd Dhaka Art Summit (all 2016); as well as in *Alternatives for Living*, Kunstmuseen Krefeld (2019); *I was raised on the internet*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2018); *moving is in every direction*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2017); *Bread and Roses*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2016); *Co-Workers: Network As Artist*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2015); and *Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making*, Tate Liverpool (2013).

### **The Institute of Contemporary Arts**

The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is London's leading space for contemporary culture. We commission, produce and present new work in film, music, performance and the visual arts by today's most progressive artists. In our landmark home on The Mall in central London, we invite artists and audiences to interrogate what it means to live in our world today, with a genre-fluid programme that challenges the past, questions the present and confronts the future. The cross-disciplinary programme encourages these art forms and others to pollinate in new combinations and collaborations. We stage club nights and film festivals, gigs and exhibitions, talks and digital art—with interplay and interaction at the core of all we do. Our history of presenting and promoting visionary new art is unrivalled in London: from Kenneth Anger to Kathy Acker, k-punk to Klein, Jackson Pollock to Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gay Sweatshop to Forensic Architecture, Pop Art to queer techno. Today, as ever, our inclusive programme reflects and represents who we are as a disparate and diverse collection of cultures and identities.

Exactly 75 years after a group of artists and poets founded the ICA as an alternative to the mainstream, we are committed more than ever to pave the way for the next generation and to platform creative voices. The ICA continues to celebrate risk and champion innovation, and experimentation across the arts – a playground and a home for today's most vital artists. The ICA is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organization and supported by the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund.

## **Access**

If you have an access requirement that we can assist you with, please get in touch and we will make our best endeavours to help you. Please contact us in advance of your visit for more information at [access@ica.art](mailto:access@ica.art). Full venue accessibility information can be found here and you can download an accessibility map of the venue [here](#).

## **Visitor Information**

Opening times: *Christopher Kulendran Thomas: Another World* can be visited during regular ICA opening hours Tuesday – Sunday 12 – 9pm.

Location: Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London, SW1Y 5AH

For information about tickets and membership, please contact:  
sales@ica.art / +44 (0) 20 7930 3647 / [www.ica.art](http://www.ica.art)