



RANDOLPH
COLLEGE

MOVEMENT RHIZOME 2025

QUILLIAN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
ON SRI LANKA

February 8 • Saturday • 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM

Randolph College Houston Memorial Chapel Lounge, Lynchburg, VA



Movement Rhizome 2025: Quillian International Symposium on Sri Lanka

Randolph College presents "Movement Rhizome: Quillian International Symposium on Sri Lanka," an interdisciplinary event curated by Quillian visiting scholar Dr. Sudesh Mantillake.

Inspired by the rhizome concept, this symposium will explore the intersection of dance, performance, film, geography, philosophy, anthropology, architecture, religion, music, literature, rhetoric, decoloniality, and migration. Through performances, mindful movement sessions, roundtable discussions, and film screenings, participants will explore the history, culture, resilience, healing and politics of Sri Lanka and its global relevance.

Saturday, February 8, 2025
Houston Memorial Chapel
Randolph College, Lynchburg, VA

8:30-9:00am Contemplative Practice Session	Houston Memorial Chapel
9:00am Welcoming Remarks by Provost Tim Smith	Houston Memorial Chapel Lounge
9:05am Opening Remarks by Quillian Scholar Sudesh Mantillake	
9:10-10:30am “Identity, Politics, & Aesthetics” Roundtable	Houston Memorial Chapel Lounge

In-person roundtable presentations and discussion featuring the following scholars:

- Katrina M. Powell, Professor and Director, Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies, Virginia Tech
- Susan A. Reed, Associate Professor of Women’s & Gender Studies and Anthropology at Bucknell University
- Chamila Priyanka, Sri Lankan theatre practitioner, visiting lecturer, Ph.D. student in Performance as Public Practice at University of Texas at Austin

10:30-10:45am | **Break**

10:45-12:30pm | **“Building Resilience through Art & Performance” Roundtable**

Hybrid In-Person/Virtual Panel Houston Memorial Chapel Lounge

A hybrid panel bridging the distance between the United States and Sri Lanka, featuring the following scholars and artists in collaborative dialogue:

- Suzanne M. Bessenger, Randolph College Barbara Boyle Lemon '57 and William J. Lemon Associate Professor of Religious Studies
- Chamanee Darshika Hewagamage, theatre practitioner, Lecturer, Department of Theatre, Ballet and Modern Dance, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Thamali Kithsiri, Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
- Tharaka Gunasekara, Architect and a visiting lecturer, Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
- Vijay Madasamy, activist, community organizer, Researcher and Project Coordinator at Law and Society Trust
- Hasanthi Niriella, movement artist, visiting lecturer, Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
- Sumudu Manelanga, movement artists, Lecturer on contract, Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
- Dilanjana Pathirana, music scholar, Lecturer on contract, Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

12:30-1:30pm | **Lunch**

Dining Hall

1:30-3:00pm | **“History & Performance” Roundtable**

Houston Memorial Chapel Lounge

- Tyler Lehrer, Assistant Professor of History at Virginia Wesleyan University
- Sudesh Mantillake, Randolph Quillian International Visiting Scholar, permanent faculty member in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
- Chinthaka Bandara, Internationally acclaimed drummer and Senior Lecturer, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Gunindu "Guni" Abeysekera, Sri Lankan American ethnic studies scholar, art and cultural ethnographer, and community archivist. Ph.D. candidate in Culture and Performance, UCLA
- Vajira Mantillake, Professional Performer, Visiting Lecturer, University of Peradeniya

3:00-4:00pm | **Breakout Groups**

Houston Memorial Chapel Lounge

4:00-4:15pm | **Break**

4:15-5:15pm | **Film Screening & Talkback:**

“The Ritual of Eighteen Vannamas” (Public)

Director: Athula Samarakoon

Question & Answer: Sudesh Mantillake

Nichols Theatre

This screening and talkback is open to the public.

6:00pm | **Speakers Dinner**

Randolph House

"Identity, Politics, & Aesthetics" Roundtable Abstracts

“Narratives of Identity and Archives in Motion in Sri Lanka”

Katrina M. Powell, Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies, Virginia Tech

Mixed identities and contested concepts of nationhood deeply inform the way to understand Sri Lanka’s history. As Ceylon became independent in 1948, constitutional law defined what it meant to be Ceylonese or Sri Lankan, while at the same time constructing an independent identity from colonial rule. As a country colonized by the Dutch, Portuguese, and British, and with multiple religious, ethnic, and cultural identities, Sri Lanka’s narratives of identity are deeply layered with its political history. Furthermore, with overlapping displacements caused by civil unrest, the Tsunami, and government-induced development, Sri Lanka is a country “constantly on the move.” As renowned Sri Lankan poet Jean Arasanayagam asserts, “My sojourn with my husband and family in a Refugee Camp in the violent eras of the eighties made me aware of barriers and boundaries. I had to know who I really was and find the rationales for asserting an identity. I had to question that identity.” Arasanayagam’s poetry addressing her own fluid identity, helps us understand how rhizomatic layers of displacement can significantly impact one’s sense of identity in relation to that constant movement. Whether in dance, film, theatre, or poetry, artistic practices in Sri Lanka provide counter narratives that challenge understandings of historical events, asking us to rethink one dimensional histories and representations. This presentation addresses identity and politics, highlighting the ways experiences of displacement inform responses to institutional histories, and ultimately presents a theory of “archives in motion,” where history is retold through narratives of identity.

“Playing with Tradition: Venuri Perera and Contemporary Dance in Sri Lanka”

Susan A. Reed, Associate Professor of Women’s & Gender Studies and Anthropology, Bucknell University

Contemporary dancers in South Asia grapple with questions of how to make “classical” dances – modern stage forms developed in the early to mid-20th century – relevant for current times. Answers to these questions, as many as they are varied, constitute heated subjects for debate in the dance world. In Sri Lanka, the preeminent classical dance is the Kandyan dance, derived largely from the ritual practices of male hereditary performers of the berava (drummer) caste. Promoted by the state via the education system, Kandyan dance is a key symbol of the nation and the traditional culture of the Sinhalas, Sri Lanka’s majority ethnic group. Preservation of the dance is the main goal of state and other professional dance institutions.

Venuri Perera is Sri Lanka’s foremost contemporary dancer. Like other contemporary choreographers, she seeks to draw from her deep, embodied knowledge of a “classical” form to create new dance works that speak to the contemporary moment. In her performance and teaching, Venuri challenges the dominant conception of Kandyan dance as an object solely for preservation through her philosophy of “play.” “Playing” with the form of Kandyan dance entails adapting various elements from the tradition, altering them, and combining them in new configurations.

In this presentation, I focus on Venuri’s first contemporary piece, *Abhinishkramanaya*, as an embodiment of this philosophy. *Abhinishkramanaya* means “going forth from home” and refers to Prince Siddhartha’s renunciation of the world to become a buddha. In creating the piece, Venuri drew inspiration from a traditional Kandyan dance, the *Thuranga* (Horse) *Vannama*. The song of the *vannama* describes Prince Siddhartha’s departure from his royal home – symbolizing the worldly life – on his beloved horse, *Kanthaka*. In *Abhinishkramanaya*, Venuri plays with elements of movement and sound to symbolize her own departure from the Kandyan dance tradition.

“Must this civilization be continued?; Analyzing patriarchal traits hidden inside Rata Yakuma”

Chamila Priyanka Gunamunige, PhD Student, University of Texas at Austin

This paper re-examines the late Sri Lankan theater practitioner and scholar Ediriweera Sarachchandra's analysis of the Rata Yakuma ceremony, a folk religious ritual in Sri Lanka aimed at ensuring fertility and health for infants. Utilizing contemporary performance theories, it reveals the embedded patriarchal elements within the ritual's structure and content. Sarachchandra's research is valuable and provides useful insights, but it mainly follows the characteristics of Aristotle's concept of drama, which doesn't fully account for the impact of gender and social factors. This study shows how the Rata Yakuma reinforces traditional gender roles and heterosexuality, especially through male exorcists acting as female characters, which strengthens social gender hierarchies. Drawing on the theories of Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and Victor Turner, the paper illustrates the ritual's role in upholding agrarian patriarchy and positions childbearing as both a divine and economic necessity. Additionally, it examines how embodied knowledge and performance perpetuate gendered ideologies across generations. By applying concepts from Peggy Phelan and Diana Taylor, the paper emphasizes the fluid nature of the ritual that resists fixed interpretation while reinforcing social hegemony. A comparative analysis with contemporary Sri Lankan works, such as Dhananjaya Karunaratne's play Oba Sapekshai (You are Relatable) critiques the ongoing influence of such rituals on modern gender and sexuality discourse. The paper advocates for a modern performance studies perspective to better understand the Rata Yakuma's significant role in perpetuating patriarchy in Sri Lanka.

“Building Resilience through Art & Performance” Roundtable Abstracts

“Performative Elements of Buddhist Nuns' Traditions in Sri Lanka”

Chamanee Hewagamage, Lecturer of Acting and Performance Studies, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Suzanne M. Bessenger, Lemon Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Randolph College

In their first meeting in February 2024, Chamanee Darshika Hewagamage and Suzanne Bessenger were mutually inspired by an offhanded reference to Chamanee's sister's ordination as a Buddhist nun in Sri Lanka, where the social and religious status of Buddhist nuns in the Theravada tradition remains both a site of ongoing contestation and an avenue for innovative social roles for women. In this talk, Chamanee and Suzanne examine the act of becoming a Buddhist nun in 21st century Sri Lanka using the lenses of performance theory, ritual studies, and interpretative performance itself. In doing so, we initiate the process of a longer, interdisciplinary collaboration investigating female ordination in this evolving cultural context.

“Performing exorcism through bodies, needs, and religion”

Thamali Kithsiri, Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

This paper builds around an ongoing ethnographic work on exorcism in a Buddhist temple in Nillambe, a village in Kandy, Sri Lanka. This study aims to understand how exorcism becomes an act of performance in contemporary Sri Lankan society. Since December 2024, I have been collecting data through video recording of exorcism practices, interviews with the exorcism practitioner (Buddhist monk), patients and family members, and a woman healer, and observations. The analysis draws on four

case studies involving three women and one man, utilizing both visual and content analysis. At the preliminary stage, I propose that exorcism is an enacted performance; it is an interplay between bodies, needs [of deceased], and religion [beliefs rooted in Sinhala Buddhism and its folk traditions] through four stages: 1) Consulting exorcism practitioner [by the patients' family], 2) Meeting the patient, 3) Performing exorcism, and 4) Healing phase. Of these stages, the second and the third stages are the most important as they represent the negotiation phase between the exorcist and the patient. The last stage of performing exorcism is emotional to family members because it is the moment when the possessed spirit agrees to depart from the body. After an exorcism, families often feel relieved, but patients may seem 'lost' and unable to recall the events. Each exorcism is unique, shaped by the specific bodies involved and their respective needs, leading to different narratives. While gender in these performances is not overly significant, the individual participant's role remains crucial. In this context, I conclude that exorcism in contemporary Sri Lankan society serves not only as a performance but also as a manifestation of resilience.

“A Smile: Cultivating Everyday Resilience through Gesture in Kandy City”

Tharaka Gunasekara, Visiting Lecturer, Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

This research examines a smile's simple yet transformative power in Kandy's busy urban spaces. Through observations and interviews, it became clear that small, intentional gestures like a smile can break people's isolation in a city. A smile in a place full of newbies can make a connection that offers warmth and comfort and reminds us of our shared humanity. Framing resilience as a continuous, lived process rather than a fixed outcome, this work draws on theories of social performance and community engagement. Influential concepts such as Jane Jacobs' "Eyes on the Street" talk about how watchful presence builds community safety and trust, and Erving Goffman's "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" inspire us to ground our approach. In this context, a smile is an act that holds a much deeper meaning than being a polite exchange, as it is an action that resists the obscurity found in many urban spaces through its susceptibility and presence that creates connections and reciprocal recognition. Through fieldwork and reflections, this study explores how a smile is a small but impactful performance that can shift the energy of public spaces. These gestures help people navigate the challenges of urban life—whether social, economic, or personal—by fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual care. This research underlines how an insignificant act such as a smile can transform urban spaces into a genial and comprehensive space. A smile is not only an action that can, even in the busiest and most impersonal settings, break boundaries and bring people closer but also a reminder of the power we hold to make our cities kind and secure places

“The role of Margali Bajani and the rituals towards resilience and resistance in the Malayaga community”

Madasamy (Vijay) Vijayakanth, Researcher, Law & Society Trust, Sri Lanka

The Malayaga community's involuntary migration from South India in the 19th century, witnessed various oppression and exploitation. Despite the systematic oppression that continues even after the colonial period, the people still struggle for their identity, sustainable livelihood and equality. The struggle for liberation, deeply marched with different forms of arts, beliefs, and rituals. It is noteworthy that the philosophies of social liberation and related activities are directly or indirectly present in rituals and traditions. While the rituals are used as a tool against oppression, they also generate leisure & happiness in the community. The Margazhi Bajani, which happens annually, is a famous social event celebrated with devotional songs and dance. This celebration of worshiping God through the body

accompanied by musical instruments is not just a ritual but also a part of their daily life. The resistance and liberation of an oppressed society is an ongoing process. A month of ritual creates a space for the community to unite, engage and increase their social responsibility as individuals and team. The body movements are performed according to the sounds of local instruments. People use this space to express their feelings and emotions, and they reproduce themselves through these leisure times. The reproduction is a much-needed process for an oppressed community to continue their fight for liberation. Of course, the rituals and performances play a significant role in this process.

“Bala Walalla’ (Power Ring): A Transcultural Dance Ritual for Resilience from Trauma”

Hasanthi Niriella, Movement Artist, Researcher and Visiting Lecturer, University of Peradeniya

This study aims to create a transcultural ritual that fosters personal and interpersonal connections through mindful and conscious living. It promotes a non-religious, gender-free healing journey that is relevant to contemporary society. The foundation of this study is based on my experiences with two recent projects. The first project is the "Power Ring," which is integral to the contemporary ritual "Kuveni Yakkama". For my second project, I created 11 therapy sessions for 15 participants, utilizing the Biology of Trauma theory developed by Dr. Aimie Apigion. Ultimately, the Power Ring serves as a transcultural ritual, a playful activity, and a community healing practice designed to foster resilience for general use in society. The ritual comprises two parts: 'Swasana Walalla' (Breathing Ring) and 'Chala Walalla' (Moving Ring), allowing for adaptable movements in the latter to suit different communities. This study investigates how this contemporary community ritual empowers mental health through a somatic approach, linking dance/movement, the nervous system, physical presence, and self-expression. It argues that individuals can contribute to community healing by "thinking through the body," expanding the concept of "self" in relation to others. It is an experimental work that can be called "practice as research", a method of incorporating auto-ethnography as a methodology. It involves embodied knowledge, improvisation, and body consciousness of the researcher. The findings aim to develop community centers that bolster mental and physical strength, to enable individuals to navigate the challenges and build resilience in contemporary society.

“Data Dances: A Ritual of Recovery in the Age of Technology”

Sumudu Wikasitha Manelanga, Lecturer on contract, University of Peradeniya

This research explores anxiety and healing through technology-infused Kandyan dance performance. It examines the process of integration of digital technology with the ritualistic elements of Kandyan dance from Sri Lanka, utilizing a practice-led approach that incorporates photovoice and autoethnography as central methodologies. As a practitioner of Kandyan dance, the study reflects on my past experiences and explorations of technology-infused rituals. By employing photovoice, I analyze my past photographs to critically engage with my own journey that reflects happiness and difficulties, and anxieties. The culmination of this research manifests in a performance piece that synthesizes traditional dance rituals with digital technologies, aiming to engage with my own anxieties and achieve recovery from anxiety. The exploration seeks to investigate the potential of this technology-infused dance ritual as a pathway to healing and wellbeing, assessing the personal feelings. Ultimately, this research endeavors to illuminate the ways in which merging the past with innovative hybrid practices can enrich the personal and cultural narratives and broaden the discourse on wellness through performance art.

“Reviving a Sinhala Sign Alphabet: A Historical Exploration and Re-Performance of Embodied Learning and Cultural Resilience”

Dilanjan M. Pathirana, Lecturer in Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya,
Bhagya M. Wijesinghe, Master's Student, PGIHS at University of Peradeniya

This research investigates a Sinhala sign alphabet that originated orally as a Sinhala folk song in Sri Lanka, where body parts and hand gestures represent vowels and consonants. Originally developed as an educational and communication tool for individuals with hearing and speech disabilities, this alphabet embodies a rhythmic and embodied approach to learning, reflecting the cultural and linguistic practices of its time. Despite the development of advanced modern sign languages, this unique system remains understudied, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of historical methods of inclusive education. Grounded in the concept of musicality, which emphasizes rhythm, embodiment, and emotional engagement, this study examines how the Sinhala sign alphabet fostered resilience and cultural belonging among marginalized learners. By employing a historical research methodology, the study explores the alphabet's origins, its role in ancient educational practices, and the cultural framework that sustained its use. It also investigates how the embodied gestures of the alphabet promoted cognitive development and emotional well-being. To deepen this exploration, the research incorporates a re-performance of the alphabet, reenacting its gestures to understand the embodied learning processes it facilitated. This methodological approach connects past practices to present insights, offering a unique perspective on how traditional systems of communication can inform modern frameworks for inclusive education and cultural revitalization. While this sign alphabet may no longer compete with the complexity of contemporary sign languages, it offers valuable lessons in resilience and cultural identity. This study advocates for the preservation of such historical methods, highlighting their potential as symbolic tools in modern education and heritage projects. By bridging historical inquiry with contemporary relevance, this research underscores the enduring importance of traditional practices in fostering inclusivity, resilience, and cultural continuity.

“History & Performance” Roundtable Abstracts

“Moving Monks: Buddhist Maritime Diplomacy in 18th Century Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean”

Tyler A. Lehrer, Assistant Professor of History, Virginia Wesleyan University

Between the 1740s and 1760s, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) mediated Buddhist diplomacy between Sri Lanka's Kandyan Kingdom and Ayutthaya (in present-day Thailand) in hopes of improving trading relations with both polities. This diplomacy centered on Kandy's efforts to restore its declining monastic ordination lineage by importing senior monks from across the sea. My presentation traces the journeys of Kandyan envoys and Ayutthayan monks aboard Dutch ships, navigating what were often perilous lands and seas in the late age of sail seeking to forge religious connectivity.

How should we understand movement in this context? What conditions enabled and constrained these circulations? Rather than situating this diplomacy within a broader Indian Ocean Buddhist network, I take a more micro-level approach, reconstructing individual journeys through Kandyan and Ayutthayan travelogues, court biographies, VOC directives, and ships' registers.

They experienced years of diplomatic delays, dangerous monsoon storms, unsuitable winds that prevented onward voyages, shipwrecks, running aground in hostile territories, and encountered illness, violence, and death during oceangoing travel and in foreign lands. Here, a religious ritual performed by monks during a monsoon storm at sea becomes a microcosm of how religious and political power become intertwined, reflecting the moral and soteriological concerns of early modern Buddhist travelers. By focusing on these encounters, I reveal movement as difficult, dangerous, and transactional— yet

profoundly meaningful. These journeys illuminate the interplay of individual agency and institutional politics, demonstrating how religious and political motivations shaped this precarious moment of Buddhist diplomacy.

“Docu-Dance Performance: An Alternative Approach to Presenting Narratives through Dance”

Sudesh Mantillake, Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, and Quillian International Scholar, Randolph College

In 2016, I created a performance piece titled My Devil Dance, which premiered at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland. In My Devil Dance, I aimed to embody the experience of a Sri Lankan dancer brought to a European colonial exhibition in the 1880s. The piece explores the dancer’s journey through cultural histories, colonization, and neo-colonization. The piece incorporated traditional Kandyan dance sequences, spoken words, a monologue, recitations, songs, and other theatrical techniques, leading me to categorize it as a “movement theatre piece”; following the terminology used by other movement artists. While I consider My Devil Dance among my strongest works, I was not entirely satisfied with its reception. Despite numerous screenings and discussions, the intended experience was not always effectively conveyed to all audience members. This prompted my inquiry: Is there a genre that facilitates the presentation of narratives through dance? This question led to the creation of Contextualizing My Devil Dance (2025), a devised performance developed collaboratively with his colleagues Chinthaka Bandhara and Vijara Mantillake, as well as students from the Randolph College Department of Performing Arts. I consider Contextualizing My Devil Dance a docu-dance performance. Unlike dance theatre, docu-dance specifically presents non-fictional narratives.

“The Evolution of Suvisi Vivarana Recitations: Music, Performance, and Community Engagement in Sri Lankan Buddhism”

Chinthaka Bandara, Senior lecturer, Department of Performing Arts, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sudesh Mantillake, Permanent Faculty, Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, and Quillian International Scholar, Randolph College

Vajira Dilrukshi Mantillake, Visiting Lecturer, Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, and Lecturer, Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA), Sri Lanka

This paper examines the diverse aspects of Suvisi Vivarana, a Theravada Buddhist ceremony performed in Sri Lanka honoring the twenty-four past Buddhas. The ritual, sometimes described as a form of Buddhist religious entertainment, centers around dancers narrating how Siddhartha Gautama, the last Buddha, received wishes (varamas) from the preceding twenty-three Buddhas during their own dances. This study delves into the rich and varied history of Suvisi Vivarana recitations, exploring notable developments such as the contributions of Muslim singer Nurdeen Lebbe, the emergence of female singers, and its conversational singing style. Analyzing these elements reveals the dynamic evolution of Suvisi Vivarana and its ability to attract people to temples within Sri Lankan Buddhist practice.

“From ‘Devil’ Dance to National Icon: A Visual Analysis of British Depictions of Udarata Natum in Sri Lanka”

Gunindu Sithunada Abeysekera, PhD Student, University of California, Los Angeles

This dissertation examines the visual representations of Sri Lanka’s udarata natum (Kandyan dance) in British-produced documentary films and newsreels from 1930 to 1972. Drawing from visual studies, postcolonial theory, and performance studies, the project interrogates how colonial filmmaking

shaped the perception of Sri Lankan dance, particularly within the ideological framework of British imperialism. While colonial cinema often documented the cultural productions of colonized communities, dance from Sri Lanka has remained understudied within these visual archives. Through close visual analysis, this study explores how these films constructed representations of *udarata natum* in ways that aligned with colonial narratives and, later, post-independence national discourse.

British Pathé's newsreels serve as the primary corpus for this study, given their extensive colonial-era coverage of Ceylon. Additionally, the dissertation engages with Basil Wright's *The Song of Ceylon* (1934), a seminal documentary in the British documentary movement that prominently features Sri Lankan dance. By analyzing these films within their historical contexts, the project underscores how they reinforced racialized and hegemonic visual conventions while shaping evolving conceptions of national identity.

Beyond tracing shifting representations, this study also examines how the choreographic transformations of *udarata natum* reflect broader socio political transitions—from its mythological and ritualistic origins to its nationalized performance on the global stage and state processions. Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to the underrepresented scholarship on Sri Lankan performance and visual culture by elucidating the colonial and postcolonial visual politics of dance in the island's cinematic history.

Symposium Participants

Gunindu Abeysekera is a Queer Sri Lankan American ethnic studies scholar and visual ethnographer. Born in Sri Lanka and raised in California, Guni's work explores the intersections of cultural theory, artistic practice, and community engagement. A photographer and filmmaker, he collaborates with South Asian American artists to create socially engaged media, including *Returning the Ga(y)ze*, a reinterpretation of Lionel Wendt's Queer Sri Lankan photography, and *Bhumika: A Mother's Lament*, a Bharatanatyam-based climate justice film. Guni also does creative direction for *SandaWaruna Art of Dance*, a Sri Lankan dance duo. His MA thesis, *Anubhāva*, convened three generations of Tamil-American Bharatanatyam dancers and their diasporic identities. As a PhD student in World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, Guni's research investigates British colonial and Sri Lankan national representations of Kandyan dance, interrogating how visual media have shaped the dance's cultural and political meanings. Find his work at www.gunindu.com.

Chinthaka Bandara is a percussionist, composer, dancer, choreographer and a senior lecturer at the Department of Performing Arts, Sri Palee Campus, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He is the former Head in the Department of Performing Arts at Sri Palee Campus. Chinthaka's current research interests includes dance ethnography, ritual and dance experience, practice-led research, dance and phenomenology, Sri Lankan dance and drumming, percussive therapy. His publications include the book titled *Theatrical Presentation, Representation and Language of Traditional Sexual Culture in Sri Lanka*. He has been a reviewer in various academic curricula, symposiums, conferences. Chinthaka is a former member of National Dance Council of Sri Lanka, and dance advisor, Department of education, Sri Lanka. He was also an advisor in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Sri Lanka. His creations include *Les Misérables* as a dance production in Sinhala, and *Pasanga Rava*. Chinthaka has performed in Indian, Pakistan, Japan, Sweden, Tharthus, USA, New Zealand.

Suzanne M. Bessenger is the Barbara Boyle Lemon '57 and William J. Lemon Associate Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Comparative Philosophy at Randolph College, as well as the 2024-2026 Randolph College Presidential Fellow. She teaches classes on Asian religions and philosophies, as well as topical courses such as gender studies, the visual culture of South Asian religions, religious

auto/biography, the philosophy of non-violence, and contemplative studies. Her research is on Himalayan Buddhism: her current project is a translation of the religious biography of the 14th century Tibetan female saint Sönam Pelden.

Chamila Priyanka Gunamunige (he/him) is a theatre artist and scholar from Sri Lanka. He is a PhD student with a specialization in performance as public practice at The University of Texas at Austin. His recent publication is "Ideological Crisis, Compliance, and Self-Censorship: Identifying the Symptoms of Sinhala-Speaking Theatre Through Its Responses to the Civil War" for the Asian Theatre Journal, 2024. He won the USA Fulbright Scholarship in 2016, and as a result of that, He obtained his MFA in Theatre Directing at Long Island University, New York. Chamila did his BA in Political Science at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Chamanee Darshika Hewagamage is a theatre practitioner, critic, and academic specializing in acting and performance studies. She completed her postgraduate studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. Her research focuses on gendered bodies and their performative elements, with a particular interest in unlearning the performer's body and reconnecting with Indigenous South Asian practices and rituals. Currently pursuing an MPhil on "Gendering Nūrti and Sinhala Nationalism: The Emergence of Female Actors in Early Modern Sinhala Theatre" at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts (Sri Lanka), Chamanee is a permanent faculty member at the Faculty of Dance and Drama, UVPA. She teaches Acting and Performance Studies and is a visiting lecturer at Uva Wellassa University, University of Peradeniya, University of Colombo, and Sri Palee Campus. Previously, she was an assistant lecturer at the University of Kelaniya in Drama & Theatre.

Tharaka Gunasekara is an artist, visiting lecturer, and researcher specializing in space and performance. Currently pursuing an MPhil in Fine Arts at PGIHS, University of Peradeniya, Tharaka, examines how urban environments shape and are shaped by performative practices. With a background in architecture, Tharaka integrates spatial theory with artistic expression, emphasizing the socio-political dimensions of performance. Their work explores urban performances, under commerce performances, and the negotiation of power in public spaces.

Thamali Kithsiri is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka, where she teaches various human geography courses, including Political Geography, Culture and Space, and Advanced Human Geography. She earned her PhD in Political Geography from the University of Zurich in 2021. Thamali's research explores cultural and political geography, with a particular focus on place-making, identity politics, nationalism, and everyday geography in Sri Lanka. She utilizes ethnographic and visual methods in her research. Currently, one of her works examines the 'nightscapes' of Kandy, specifically how cafes have become central to the nightlife in this heritage city.

Tyler A. Lehrer (he/him) is an assistant professor of history and a faculty affiliate in gender, women, and sexuality studies at Virginia Wesleyan University. His primary research, publication, and teaching areas encompass the history of South and Southeast Asian Buddhist lineages, European seaborne empires, transregional and transnational religious and political movements in the global south, and gender and sexual diversity in the early modern Indian Ocean.

Vijay Madasamy (Madasamy Vijayakanth) is an activist and researcher with six years of experience in research and advocacy. He was interested in researching the values of a plantation community's resistance life, rituals, celebrations, and the struggle for the right to land & housing. Also, he has been working on the rights of rural women farmers in Sri Lanka. Since 2018, he has been a part of the team Law and Society Trust (LST). Vijay completed his first degree in Geography at the university of Peradeniya in 2014, and he

obtained his Master's in Geography at Post Graduate Institute of Humanities and Social Science, university of Peradeniya, in 2018. Vijay is currently documenting his research experiences on a Facebook page named 'tea traces'.

Sumudu Manelanga completed his Bachelor's degree in Performing Arts in 2016, specializing in Video Dance at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts. As a practice-led researcher, he began his research in 2020/21, focusing on creating a technological ritual based on Kandyan healing practices as part of his Master's research at the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya. His teaching scope includes Dance and Film, Theatre Design and Technology, and Performance Studies. In 2023, he furthered his academic journey by joining the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya as a Lecturer on contract.

Sudesh Mantillake is the William F. Quillian, Jr. Visiting International Professor at Randolph College, USA (2024/25). He is a permanent faculty member and the former Head of the Department at the Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Sudesh is passionate about the intersection of dance, philosophy, education, healing, and activism. He received his BA in Fine Arts from Sri Lanka, MSc in Communication Science from Switzerland, and PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies from the USA. He is trained in Kandyan dance of Sri Lanka and Kathak dance of India, theatrical clowning, and Tai Chi. He is a Vice-Chair (Dance) of the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD) National Committee for Sri Lanka. Sudesh is also a member of the Research Committee of the International Association for Creative Arts in Education and Therapy (IACAET).

Vajira Dilrukshi Mantillake is a Sri Lankan traditional dancer, singer, drummer, choreographer, and dance educator. Growing up amidst the rich artistic traditions of Kandy and Matale, Sri Lanka, she immersed herself in the world of Kandyan arts from a young age. Vajira honed her skills in Kandyan dance and recitations under the tutelage of Dr. Waidyawathi Rajapaksha, a well-known hereditary dance teacher. She holds a B.F.A. honors degree from the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, a B.A. degree from the University of Kelaniya, and MA degree from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. She has also trained in Indian classical dance forms, Kathak and Bharatanatyam. She has 14 years of experience as a dance teacher in the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. Currently, Vajira is a Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, and at the SIBA campus, Sri Lanka.

Wilton Martinez is a Peruvian filmmaker, visual anthropologist and archetypal psychologist. Founding president of the Center for Visual Anthropology of Peru cavperu.org and professor of anthropology at the University of Maryland University College. He has conducted research and published on ethnographic film, spectatorship and pedagogy, and has produced numerous films on topics such as Amazonian history, transnational migration, oral history, cultural identity and school education among Amazonian indigenous peoples, Andean music and culture. Ph.D. in social anthropology and M.A. in visual anthropology from the University of Southern California; M.A. in psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute.

Hasanthi Niriella is a Movement Artist, Researcher, and Visiting Lecturer. She holds a BA (Hons) in Performing Arts and is currently pursuing an MPhil in Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya. Her work explores how artistic use of the human body can foster a conscious and contemporary approach to mindful living, drawing inspiration from art, science, philosophy, and ritual. Her movements are grounded in Sri Lankan traditional dance, Bharatanatyam, and Kathak, and have expanded to include improvisational styles with contemplative movements influenced by the fundamentals of Tai Chi Chuan. Her independent artistic research has been published twice by the ICTMD (International Council of Traditional Music and Dance):

first, at the symposium of the Study Group Sound, Movement and the Sciences in Sweden (2020), and more recently, at the 48th World Conference in New Zealand (January 2025).

Dilanjana M. Pathirana is a Lecturer (on contract basis) in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, and also serves as a visiting lecturer at several other universities. He has worked as a research assistant on both national and international research projects. Dilanjana holds a BA (Hons) in Fine Arts from the University of Peradeniya, where he was awarded the Gold Medal for Fine Arts, and is currently pursuing a Master's in Sinhala at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Dilanjana has published several research articles and books and frequently contributes articles to newspapers. His research interests encompass the history of Sri Lankan music, ethnomusicology, musical linguistics, and the Sinhala language. Dilanjana is a dedicated scholar aiming to expand his research through multidisciplinary approaches.

Katrina Powell is Professor of English and Founding Director of the Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies at Virginia Tech. She teaches courses in Critical Displacement Studies, Autobiography, and Rhetorics of Social Justice. She has published several books, including *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* (Routledge 2015), *Performing Autobiography* (Palgrave 2021), and *Beginning Again: Stories of Movement and Migration in Appalachia* (Haymarket 2024). She is co-director of the Monuments Across Appalachian Virginia project, funded by the Mellon Foundation, which seeks to honor little known stories of movement and migration across the Appalachian region. Her current research focuses on the literal and figurative constructions of contemporary structures (refugee camps, detention centers, housing shelters), while claiming to be solutions, actually continue to warehouse the displaced, exacerbate vulnerability, and do little to offer solutions to root causes of displacement.

Susan A. Reed is Associate Professor of Women's & Gender Studies and Anthropology at Bucknell University. She is a cultural anthropologist specializing in the study of dance, ritual, and performance; gender and sexuality; ethnicity and nationalism; and South Asia. Her book and DVD, *Dance and the Nation: Performance, Ritual and Politics in Sri Lanka* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2010) received the Outstanding Publication Award from the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) and a Special Citation Award from the Society of Dance History Scholars. Her recent scholarship focuses on dance and disability and contemporary dance in Sri Lanka. She is currently working on a documentary film on the work and lives of hereditary and contemporary dancers in Kandy and Colombo.

Bhagya M. Wijesinghe is a recent graduate of the Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA) Campus, Kandy, Sri Lanka, holding a BPA (Hons) in Kandyan Dance. She also holds a Visharad in Bharatanatyam from Lucknow, India, and is currently pursuing an MA in Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. With a strong foundation in traditional dance practices, her academic journey focuses on researching the therapeutic applications of dance movements. Bhagya has hands-on experience in teaching and designing inclusive dance programs that enhance physical coordination, emotional expression, and social interaction for children with special needs. As a dedicated practitioner and scholar, her research interests include dance movement therapy, dance pedagogy, and dance education, emphasizing the real-time significance of dance in various contexts.