2026 VISITING FACULTY LECTURE, June 24, 2026
Karthik Pandian; introduced by Resident Faculty Naomi Rincón-Gallardo

Naomi Rincón-Gallardo: [applause; Naomi arrives at the podium with a slide reading 'Surrendur' on screen behind it] Dear Karthik, can I join you?

We don't know each other–yet. I've been visiting your work in your website for some days now, and yesterday I had the great opportunity to see your film. I'm honored to welcome you this evening and to share the collective excitement to listen to you, and to feel/think in your energy-conducting presence. I acknowledge the incommensurate multi-layered past stories of displacement and migration, exclusion and inclusion, imperialism and colonization that precede and exceed all of us who are sharing this very room this evening.

I want to hold space for the liminality that you create around your work through your shapeshifting faculties and your ceremonies. Gloria Anzaldúa taught me how to stand in between things and to inhabit ambivalence, to bridge and to unbridge differences. I saw you becoming a flamingo, walking barefoot while sustaining a fragile balance, defying normative time. You dress in pink. You bow and lay down on the sidewalk in a city somewhere in this country that frightens us who are rendered strangers.

In your work *Tamil Man* from 2018, I see you standing still in your studio, slowing down time while standing on one foot. The other foot slowly moves forwards to meet the floor, in order to become a step. You carry a sickle in your hand. Some ropes hang from your shoulder. Your body is painted in bronze. Each movement slows down time. Your body trembles in a brutal equilibrium. You intercut the interior of your studio with a snowy landscape where you meet a tree. You climb the tree using the rags and ropes to leverage your body, your feet finding support on the trunk. I learned that while doing this delicate choreography, you were walking with your ancestors; with migrants, with pilgrims, with outcasts.

Can I join you?

You insufflate breath and movement into a bronze sculpture from early 30s titled *A Tamil Man from Southeast India* by Malvina Hoffman, an American sculptor who was entitled to identify and portray the racial types for an exhibition called *The Races of Mankind*. Racial colonialism, knowledge production, social life, and hunting are all entangled. *The Tamil Man* demands your recognition and reapparition. You welcome spirits from past histories that continue to be felt in the present. You create offerings for them in the form of moving image, sculpture, performance, ceremonies, and sound.

Can I join you?

We are surrounded by colonial monuments yet to be toppled. We know that making them fall is just one step in a continuous and restless battle over discursive practices and toxic myths, whose exclusionary effects expand and intensify in our bleak planetary present.

You recruit past and future ghosts, channeling energy to rehabilitate affect, emotions and passions with the urgent need for human dignity against the project of turning life into artifacts, and people into waste. A pupil dilates. An eclipse forms. It turns into a tunnel that transports us to the layers of history beneath our feet. Thank you for the ring of light that you open with your work.

Los Angeles-born Karthik Pandian is an artist and teacher developing ceremonial technologies. He has presented his work at exhibition venues such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Hammer and the Palais de Tokyo, and on digital platforms such as the Criterion Channel and Triple Canopy. He is a professor of Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard University and a guide certified in offering Lama Rod Owens' Seven Homecomings practice. Pandian's Creative Capital Awarded-project, *Surrendur* –that we just saw yesterday –is a collaboration with American Indian Movement activist Mike Forcia. In 2025, he presented an exhibition version of the work at Midway Contemporary Art and premiered a short film version at the 63rd New York Film Festival. Let us give Karthik Pandian a warm welcome to Skowhegan Lecture Series 2026.

Thank you. [applause, cheering]

Karthik Pandian: Alright. How are you all doing? [cheering]

[gestures hand] Naomi, the answer is 'Yes'. I mean, even just hearing the way you've introduced me. The profound gratitude I feel for it. But I feel we are already joined in the kind of deep thought that you've given my work, and I'm just so happy to be here. So thanks for everyone that made this possible –from Ruth and Peery, to Elle. Thank you for the invitation, thanks for everyone who was in the house last night. I also want to thank everyone who makes this place work –From the folks that are taking care of the buildings, folks that are taking care of the land, and cooking incredible, delicious food for us. [claps] [applause]

It really feels special to be here, and also to be so well taken care of in this space [gestures] by Chris and Carisa, thank you so much. [claps] [applause] And Maliyamungu and Mattia, thanks for making that rad po–I think it defies the category of 'poster' –which, again, all the engagement is just so, ah, it's such a beautiful welcome, so thank you. [claps] [applause]

Okay, so tonight I'm going to say a few words about my practice in general. I'm going to spend most of the time talking about the *Forsythia Cycle*, which is a cycle of work that the film many of you saw last night called *Surrendur* is kind of embedded in. I am also going to be showing clips from the film, for those of you who didn't catch it. But I also want to say from the top that I'm really looking forward to hearing your questions, your provocations, your thoughts… either in the kind of very intense fresco barn situation that we're in, or like, casually wherever throughout the week. So please don't be shy about engaging me in this work. The work is, you know, it's both complicated and complex. Maybe sometimes to a fault, I'll even admit. But I think it's, you know, hopefully it provokes something that can be like a seed that we can grow something out of.

Okay, so first, just a few words about how I've been thinking about my practice in general. Naomi said, actually, [switches slide] one of the first things that I wanted to say, which is that I've sort of reframed my art practice in the last few years as thinking about myself as a conductor of energy. First and foremost, I'm thinking about conduction in the kind of electrical sense. In the sense of, I'm drawn to materials that can transmit certain political, historical, aesthetic energies.

And you'll see that hopefully borne out through the work. But also, most of my practice –like after grad school and beyond –was in moving image installation. But performance has become increasingly a part of my practice. So this question of how one directs a group of people that are bringing in complex histories, ideas, different forms of embodiment, textures…How does one kind of conduct that into something? So this one kind of framing device I want to put in there.

[switches slide] The second is related to collaboration. You're going to see that I work with a lot of people. I kind of put that word out there to start because it's a word we recognize in terms of art. But I'm not sure it's the best word for what I do, and so I also put this word "relation" in there. And I think that the relationship between these two terms oscillates in my work. Sometimes I might approach someone as an artistic collaborator, but the intention might be to actually form a relation with them, right? To understand how we're related. And that might feed back into the collaboration or vice versa.

But this question about how one becomes a relative; how one forms mutually accountable reciprocal relationships that yield something. Something, and doesn't have to be new, but something that emerges from those relationships, that's really important to me. [switches slide] And the last kind of framing device is this notion of the cycle. I've been working for the last 15 years in these very loosely defined cycles. And so what I mean by that are a couple of things.

One, it's a long term engagement. I rarely just make a work and say "peace," like, "see you later." That's not really what I'm interested in, especially as I'm investing a lot of energy into relations. So multi-year projects that take different manifestations and that emerge in different

forms. So, moving image, installation, short films, performances… And I really, in some ways, I use the word "unsettlement" –I don't like to let the work settle, I like to keep it moving and cycling… and this notion of the circular movement of the cycle is also a kind of figure of revolutionary movement for me. The circular time, the spinning, which I'm sure many of you probably picked up on last night in the film.

[switches slide] So, this cycle of work is called the *Forsythia Cycle*, and this probably breezed by you, so I thought I would break it down here, but there is a little title sequence that shows you in this kind of painterly way, the words emerging in this very coded way. Right? And within the *Forsythia cycle* to date, the first major work –and I'm going to be very linear about this part and then we're going to get back to all the multiple simultaneous temporalities that you saw last night –*In The River* is a public performance that I presented with 11 incredible other people in Minneapolis–Saint Paul in 2022. And that was the first work. [switches slide] The second was a moving image installation called *Surrendur* that was open at Midway Contemporary Art for three months in 2025. [switches slide] And the third is the feature film version of that work, which I presented last night.

So to get into that circular time, what I'd like to do to begin [switches slide] is to start at the end. With a short excerpt of Amina Claudine Myers' title track of the film *Surrendur*, that we recorded in her living room in Hell's Kitchen in 2024 on the Hammond B3 organ.

[plays video 00:12:45:00 - 00:13:55:00]

So, for those of you that don't know about the Hammond B3, is that it requires this external amplifier called the Leslie cabinet, which has an oscillating amp within it. So the amp is literally spinning. And the first time I heard Amina perform on the B3, I think that kind of cyclical motion is what drew me in. And we recorded it and mixed it to kind of express that. I brought her a very simple gesture to riff off of, which was breaking down this word "surrendur". So I'm going to try to do that both in an immediate sense, and then also in another sense over the course of the talk, where I'm going to be offering kind of propositional definitions of this word "surrendur".

[switches slide] And the first one of those is "surrendur is destruction as care". Just to get it out of the way… "surrender" is misspelled! [laughs] The story behind that is I make drawings and I make these big drawings like the one you see here. This is just a sketch or whatever. But the first time I started working with this word, in the process… this is how I spelled it! And then I thought [laughs] [switches slide] why don't we work with that! Right? And that is a kind of consistent part of my practice, is thinking about, rather than starting from what –especially given the kind of state of things right now –what might be a kind of mythological "right" relationship

to each other and the world and things, what if we began from the wrong? Right? Like, what if the wrong itself is the kind of compost from which something more relational can grow?

And, just alongside that, another concept that I work with a lot is, like, “the murk”. Staying in the murk is actually a kind of ethic of mine in the work; Rather than resolving difficult, contradictory, complicated issues that arise, I try to formalize them, but let them still kind of swim into the murk. And to invite other people into that.

So, let's get into *Surrendur*… “Sur”, for our Spanish speaking friends: South. Right? And there was a scene that opens the film yesterday where Elias –someone I met in a park that I was hanging out with a lot in Boston, who is a K'iche' migrant from Guatemala –was thinking a lot in this work, also, as Naomi picked up on, this relationship between indigeneity and migration. Right? And how within this work, folks, from, a lot of folks from the South –and I include myself in terms of the Global South and my family being from South India –meeting in places like the Twin Cities, in Minnesota in these northern climes. So this kind of, this southern aspect comes out of the first syllable.

[switches slide] “Rend”. “Rend” meaning “to break”. Right? To understand that creation comes from destruction. Right? That we need to break things down in order to grow something new.

[switches slide] And “Dur”. Right? In this case, thinking about time or duration. Right? How especially with when we're talking about land, when we're talking about colonialism… what about the colonization of time? Right? Doesn’t art maybe provide a contingent way, contingent space to sort of get into how we can be in time, to commune in time differently together? That's something I'm looking for in my work, something I'm looking for in the process of making my work, and also the work itself. Like the experience of the film, for example.

[switches slide] And then breaking it up further, thinking about the word “endur”, right? Like what –within this context –What does it mean? What does it take to survive, to carry something through the violence of our era?

[switches slide] And then again, another type of misspelled version of “rendur”. What would it mean to articulate or render something in time? So, you know, I spelt it wrong, but I'm also kind of opening this door to other meanings coming in through the kind of destruction of this word.

[switches slide] So I also wrote, and I write poems from time to time, and make drawings from time to time. So I'm just showing you a detail of something I'll show you the full scale of in a moment. But just so you can see where some of this smaller language lies. [switches slide] I'm going to read this poem that I wrote in 2024, around the same time that I made this drawing, which is in walnut ink.

The game is a play,
A cosmic drama
In sacred geometry.
Hoop, ball, net.
Bodies courting,
Souls squeaking,
Nerves sensing.
Let my heart break fast.
Release the yolk of my sorrow
Back into creation.
Back to back,
Head to tail,
I back into joy.
Before the film coils.
The remainder, a reminder
That the universe replays
Instantly, eternally,
Unglistening, silent.
What can't be wound back
Is the remembering.
The ligaments snapping,
The cracking,
The body surrendering
During, enduring.
This goes on and on and on.

Okay, so we're going to bounce out of this cycle for a moment because the screening last night was quite moving for me. And not just because it was extremely loud. It was, [laughter] I think something was coming back from the walls of this fresco barn. It's kind of amazing to be in an architectural space that's also been kind of rendered a cave through the minerality of this material. And I think the fresco, yeah, I think the fresco was bouncing and echoing something back to us. So I thought I would drop in the one work I've made related to fresco. [switches slide] And it's from a previous cycle of work called *Atlas Unlimited*, which is a collaboration with the choreographer and artist Andros Zins-Browne, and the freedom fighter and sculptor Zakaria Almoutlak.

And I'm not going to say a lot about this, except that Zakaria is someone that we met while in Belgium, we worked with on this project where he hadn't sculpted stone since the Syrian Civil

War. He had refugee status at the time in Belgium, and we devised a way in which he could carve again, within the context of our exhibition in Belgium.

Kind of, there's a lot of different threads in this work, but what you see in the studio here is a partially carved sculpture and the poster that advertises Act Three. So this is an exhibition, but it had acts, in the sense that there was constant activation during the day. You could go see Zakaria carve, and he had stories to tell that we sort of co-wrote with him based on his own life. But there were also these more focused moments of performance. So you're going to see the very end of Act Three. [plays video 00:21:52:01 - 00:22:32:12]

[muffled laughter] So, there's a lot of funny stuff about this, actually, but I don't have time to share it all. But it was a kind of theatrical performance disguised as an unveiling ceremony, but taking place in the future, in 2028 in Palmyra, Syria. Where, like, a Russian installed dictator had been placed. Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

I want to go back to that concept of destruction as care. Because one of the things that, you know, if we think about returning Zakaria to his craft, and thinking about that as a healing moment, it was really interesting after this, was hearing him talk about how destroying this sculpture was the most kind of profound, energetic part of his relationship to it. And we felt it in the room as well. Right?

[switches slide] So here's a still, you could see some of the year there –'2028'--now, this was, like, during –this is 2018 –this was during Trump Travel Ban 1… Moreover, Zakaria was stateless at the time, he didn't have a Belgian passport yet. He still wouldn't be able to get a visa today. But this show migrated from Belgium to Chicago and then New York, and we had to think about, seriously about, well first of all, whether to still do it, since he couldn't travel with it. But then we, together we devised a way in which the sculptures can migrate through performance and sculpture in the exhibitions to come.

[switches slide] So in Chicago, we had a conservator during the open hours of the gallery, trying to piece the sculpture back together. We didn't give her any pictures… or the head, actually. [laughs] We just gave her these kind of abstract shapes, and she was talking in the gallery to visitors about these stories of doing conservation in the field. I should say it's a limestone sculpture, that will be important later. And then when the work went to New York, [switches slide] we displayed the head like this. And then in the last gallery, [switches slide] you saw the partially reconstructed body. In the second week, during closed hours, we pulverized a good part of the body. And then, I don't have to explain this to you all… But we baked it for 24 hours in a kiln overnight, thereby taking all the moisture out, and then put it into water, making slaked lime. [switches slide] So for the final week of the exhibition, we had a conservator who specializes in fresco creating this fresco that was rendering the visa that Zakaria never received.

So when I say “conductor of energy”, this is kind of, this may be like a very good example of what I mean, right? That through the transformations of material, a kind of relationship to liberation, both from Zakaria's traumatic history of being involved in an armed conflict, but also this incarceration, this statelessness–like, how can the material itself, through its transformation rather than necessarily even what is representing, embody that cycle of towards, like, arcing towards liberation?

[switches slide] Okay. So, I should say… I'm working, I'm trying to work on a book that's kind of about some of these definitions. So again, when you all have feedback, it is really appreciated to, to think about what concepts resonated with you. Another one I'd like to offer is “surrendur is a practice.” And I'm going to give you three parts of this. The first of which, ah–I'll give you three parts of it that also kind of help us narrate how I got into this work with the collaborators in the *Forsythia Cycle*.

[switches slide] So the first aspect, I would call Retreat. And this was a forced retreat. [switches slide] So, it was January 2020. And, my general practitioner –I was pushing 40 –my general practitioner said, “You should play a team sport! It's good for isolated middle-aged men”, you know? So I joined the adult basketball league in my little town. And on the third game, I tore my ACL, MCL, and meniscus.

At that point, I was about to go on sabbatical to actually work on a fresco project. I was like, I want to get deeper into this and actually do it myself. I was thinking about [Diego] Rivera and the Detroit Industry Murals, but, already suffering this injury, that wasn't going to happen. So, you know, someone and I were talking earlier –maybe Olivia? –about what you do when you're injured? What happens when you're injured? And can you see the kind of retreat that, um, you're maybe even forced into, as something else?

[switches slide] So, yeah, I was, like, doing weird stuff, like, hooked up to this weird machine that would bend my knee for me. So, also, when the pandemic started, my partner and I have a young son, who at that time was four and a half years old. So between trying to take care of myself and take care of my child, I was really returned to care as not a concept, right, but an everyday necessity. So, like, how to invent things to do? Like, this is when we started putting in our garden.

[switches slide] And you can see between the last photo and this one, you can see the forsythia start to come in. This is like, this was prime garden. It's now totally ramshackle, of course… because taking care of things is hard. [switches slide] But it was my first time gardening, and my partner is the one that really has an amazing green thumb, and she was teaching me about adjacency –like how plants form mutual relationships that we can help foster in a garden. I was

also getting really into compost. [switches slide] Compost is really beautiful. Especially this time of year when, you know, you get the mix of all the browns, but also these beautiful peony petals.

[switches slide] So, this was all happening. I wasn't making art, but, you know, we had this flourishing garden. And of course, at the same time, the uprising in Minneapolis had begun and manifestations in Boston had begun. [switches slide] And we were starting to go to those and understand how to go to those. Understand what –especially at that time –what our relationship was to what was happening at that time in Minneapolis, but so far away. There was a kind of… I mean, I was addicted to my Twitter timeline, and there was so much that was coming to me, but there was also, like, a really intense nausea and voyeurism. Like, thinking that I was in this super beautiful place, able to take care of my family, and it just, yeah, it felt really, like, it felt bad. It felt bad not not knowing, at that time, like, what I could do or what to do.

So it did end up becoming a period of study in a lot of ways, like how do I even approach these questions? How do I also, really from the top, think about what is often the kind of vampirism of art. Like just because something's interesting to me doesn't mean I should, like, fly somewhere and get up in other people's business. Like, what are my intentions? What am I bringing? What are my resources?

And thinking about how… what those were, and how I could, um, disseminate them in a certain way. [switches slide] And I will say that that's what brought me to just looking around, right? Like it's not just in my head, but also like thinking with the plant relatives around us, like forsythia. And forsythia is, especially in this region, the first shrub that blooms these, like, radiant, almost fluorescent yellow flowers, while the rest of the landscape is usually quite gray and barren. And they were blooming at the same time that the uprising began. And so I'm watching the Third Precinct burn and also watching these flame yellow flowers. [switches slide] And it felt like the beginning of a symbolic language. And thinking about how [switches slide] this symbol could hold this concept of destruction as creation, destruction as cleansing, and destruction as renewal.

So we're in June of 2020 and [switches slide] closer to home, I think for the third time, the Christopher Columbus statue in Boston Harbor was beheaded. But, like, yeah, I mean, if any, and also if anyone wants to read about a compact history of that: in Tiffany Lethabo King's book, *The Black Shoals*, she talks about the many beheadings and also paintings of that statue, this particular statue.

But this happened… and then the very next day, on June 10th, 2020, this. [plays video 00:33:09:00 - 00:32:41:04]

So, as you can imagine, you know, I'm already working with the kind of destruction of sculpture as a creative act. The beheading was super exciting! It was also really different than what you see here, in the sense that folks did that action in the dead of night. No one ever claimed responsibility for it. But in a substantial way, it also animated and kind of was a part of this wave, right, of topplings of monuments, including the one here, that you see here in Saint Paul.

At the same time, thinking about the specificity of Columbus. Right? Like, Columbus in relation to some of those questions that I was asking before. It's hard to think of a, kind of, more heinous and violent arrival of a stranger. Right? Like one that almost inaugurates this era of, um, kind of atmosphere and a historical era of violence that we're still very much enmeshed in.

[switches slide] So, what I started to think about… later I would say I put this into words, but I think what I started to work with as a concept is thinking about rehearsing that type of arrival differently. Right? And the concept of Rehearsal that maybe within the form of art or creative practice in general, whether that's theater or music, that the concept of Rehearsal allows us to reimagine what might seem like a fixed and even, like, irresolvably, um, irresolvably kind of… irredeemable, let's say, way of doing things. Right? So, like I said, I was studying with friends, especially around Black and Native Studies and thinking about this connection between the uprising and the toppling of the Columbus Monument.

[switches slide] And about a year after the toppling, I wrote Mike Forcia a letter. So Mike Forcia is the American Indian Movement activist who orchestrated the toppling. He's very quick to say that he didn't do it, right? First of all, he didn't have his hands on the rope. It was the community that showed up that pulled it down. But also, he is very insistent, he's very quick to say that he was acting as an instrument of The Creator. So he doesn't like to take responsibility in any kind of heroic sense for it.

But there was a restorative justice process that went on, um, and he was never… he was charged but never convicted… and his address was in public record. So I wrote him this handwritten letter, essentially thanking him. Meanwhile, I had done my first institutional exhibition after grad school in 2009 at Midway Contemporary Art in Minneapolis, and they had invited me to come do what they were calling an off-site project. So I was coming to do a site visit, I wrote him this letter, and basically said, it would be amazing to meet. I also enclosed this picture of the Goddess Durga as a kind of offering of what I felt was the divine feminine energy of destruction that was manifest in that act, you know–well, I won't go into that yet. So what I'll do now is I'll play, like a four-and-a-half-minute clip from the film. So if you saw the film last night, you'll see this again, but I want to kind of break down some of the things that are going on here. So, we'll watch that clip now.

[plays video 00:36:19:00 - 00:41:10:00]

So first, just in terms of thinking about Rehearsal, right? We are in a park in Boston reenacting this meeting that took place in an encampment for unhoused native folks in the Seward neighborhood in Minneapolis. So, you know, this is not–to say what it's not–it's not about some kind of accuracy, right? It's about us trying to also remember what happened together. And we can get into the kind of, cinematic, filmic dimensions of it in a bit…

[switches slide] But it does bring up this other relationship to the forsythia for me, which is, again, this question. It becomes a kind of a symbol of a stranger as well. Forsythia is not native to Turtle Island. It has Asian and European variants. It was kind of brought here in the ornamental garden boom of the 19th century. And a lot of what I'm thinking through in the work is how a stranger can arrive in a way that contributes something as well. And I, and I do… I really like that word. And I'm not, I'd be interested in hearing how it sounds to you all later. And you know, the, the riff from The Cure's "Killing an Arab" at the beginning. Right? Which is also based on Camus' novel *The Stranger*. I guess there's a lot of Easter eggs in this, but, um, I'll get to some of them.

So, there's a kind of thicket of [switches slide] misrecognitions happening in this scene. I was first, and certainly most powerfully, brought into a kind of discourse of misrecognition, identity, and also just a kind of rage around, um, racial embodiment by–in college, when I first read the work of Frantz Fanon [switches slide] in specific *Black Skin, White Masks*, and I'm just going to put up [switches slide], you can read to yourself or read later if you haven't read–Chapter Five. This is one of the most important works of writing for me, in existence. The way that Fanon dramatizes this moment of being both locked into his exteriority–when he's pointed at by a child on the Paris metro and identified, right? And the way that that rubs up against how he feels…Who he, how he thinks of himself; he's a trained psychiatrist. He's working–first of all, he's also a French citizen, he's from Martinique which is a part of France, it's a department of France. And he has this moment where this offhand comment by a white child completely throws him into a tailspin of trying to understand this relationship between who he thinks he is and how he's identified from without.

Other influences that inform this passage. [switches slide] I want to thank Maliyamungu for pointing out to me, at the New York premiere, how you saw the resonance with *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*. Probably one of the most influential films on my practice, by William Greaves. And it's a very different way in which he's exploring this thicket, right? He's performing a very specific role of a filmmaker who's also put on camera. I've always been struck at the kind of queerness of his performance in this film and why he's positioning that in relationship to the way, first of all, how to make a film and also, how to represent a Black director's relationship to white actors. Again, if you haven't seen it, put it on your syllabus.

And then also, a friend, a former mentor: [switches slide] William Pope.L. And especially his *Skin Set* drawings, which I just want to shout out–if you're in New York the next few months, The Drawing Center is about to open an exhibition, a retrospective of his drawings. I think his drawing practice is incredible–The image you see here is from one of his really famous crawls through New York, but the two drawings are from this really big series that he did that really also broke down color. Right? This question of how, you know, this sort of arbitrariness of how color and race are aligned. And he does it through such wild, humorous, and expressive line work.

But it should also be said that, you know, all three of these artists and writers are contending with anti-Blackness, right? And that's a very different thing than the type of objectification, identification, misrecognition that I experience. And in fact, why I want to put this forward is that when Mike says–and I was very intentional to put this line in twice–when Mike says, "At first when I saw you, I thought this Black kid was walking up." Right? Like, that, the entire field of the visual is saturated in a kind of anti-Blackness here, right? That even in protecting his community in that encampment, there is a sense that a Black kid walking up represents a threat, right? Like how to address that in relationship to the genealogy of this work? Right? Which sees itself in alliance with an uprising that is in defense of Black life.

This is kind of what I mean when I said before that this is not a contradiction that I can resolve. In fact, it's one that we all live in. Like, this room is saturated in, this school is saturated in, this society is saturated in… and it's a really open question for me. And one that, again, I would love to talk about if folks are up for it. Because, like, for example, when in Toronto, the incredible poet M. NourbeSe Philip and I were in discussion and this is what we were talking about. We were talking about the question of anti-Blackness and home. And it's raised throughout the film in different ways, like even when Mike asks–and we'll get into this a little bit later–"Where are you from?" You know, the question of where you are from, for folks whose lineage was sold into slavery, it's a different question, for example, than my family. And I'll show you, like, my attempts to kind of understand where I'm from. But, can a film, can a work, can a discourse, can a room, hold these kind of contradictions? This is, like, something that I'm invested in. And even invested in the discomfort of.

So that's one part of the thicket. [switches slide] The other part is this Indian/Indian thing that develops, right? And, in some ways, like, a lot of this developed around humor with me and Mike, like, inevitably, right? Like, first of all, like, going back to the kind of arbitrariness of language and the way "surrendur" is breaking down, like, why are we Indians? You know, like, what does this mean? Like, does this… is this just a mistake? And I've heard people, I've heard, I've heard people kind of apologize for, let's say, inappropriately sharing the space of Indian before. But this is kind of an example of what I'm interested in, in terms of the murk and the wrong. Like, can even Columbus's heinous arrival here, like, is something that's redeemable from

it, this completely, incorrect shared space of the word Indian? Can something bloom there? Right? Can we find, either through the humor or recognition of the humor around there–like, for example, the first time I went to The Bad River Reservation where Mike is from, he introduced me to every single one of his friends and relatives with the same joke, "You guys ever seen a real Indian before?"... and actually no one had. Just, like, my people aren't, like, leaving their community very much. So this was, like, this is something that I'm interested in, right? Is there, is there a deeper form of recognition [switches slide] that can come out of even these seemingly trivial linguistic relationships?

[switches slide] So getting into that question of "Where are you from?" I said a little bit about it, but, you know, anyone that lives under white supremacy in a body that's racialized, we know the discomfort this question often causes. You know, when it's asked in a certain way, especially when it's asked by someone who has white privilege, and there's this kind of almost border guard or checkpoint energy to it. I certainly experienced that many times. And then, Mike, you know, getting to know Mike, getting to know him through this work, introducing him to people, and seeing him time and time again, ask this question in a way that was, for me, radically different. Like, he was asking, right, as someone who knows where he's from–Bad River–he was asking, like, where we're really from.

So when I was like, "I'm from LA, I'm from Massachusetts", he kept saying, "No," right, he kept refusing those answers and he wanted to know where I was from. And, you know, that's been really, that's been something I've learned a lot from. And it's not something that I necessarily do, but it's something that, it's something that's certainly a part of the work. So I want–ah–to we'll go back to that. I want to get into this one other clip and, we'll listen to that and go from there.

[plays video 00:51:08:00 - 00:54:17:00]

[switches slide] So, you know, this almost like, offhand joke that became a running gag with us. I was really interested in what would happen if we amplified that into the situation of this procession. I'm going to get more into the 2022 performance that this was a part of later. But this kind of sense of amplification, the sense of rehearsal, the sense of testing possible solidarities, that was a lot of what that was about for me.

[switches slide] And if we think about this relationship of surrendur as a practice, [switches slide] the third term I want to introduce is Reconnection. And how do we actually, when we're in space together after we meet, how do we form and find those relationships? A lot of it, in the process of making *In The River* was through play. And so I'm going to show you some of, like, the behind the scenes from making the performance. You're going to hear things that ended up becoming a part of the soundscape of the film. A lot of it was really improvisational, like even in

the first clip, you'll see Sam Aros Mitchell who's one of our, one of the movement and choreography and dance people in the ensemble, he also just like, brought his electric guitar to rehearsal once and was messing around with feedback that ended up becoming a sonic motif for the film. But yeah, getting into space together, using compensated and cared for time and space to establish these new ways of relating to one another.

[plays video 00:55:53:00 - 00:57:11:00]

[switches slide] So, just to introduce you to some of the people you're seeing here, Lakota "Hokie" Clairmont was one of the drummers at the actual take down that day on June 10th, 2020. It's also a really well known powwow drummer. You got Leila Awadallah is a dancer and choreographer. Lela Pierce, Douglas R. Ewart, the Jamaican sonic sculptor/artist, just, social composer. Brilliant, just brilliant radiant soul that was one of the, like, kind of beating hearts of this project that was playing the sax and… kind of want to get into some of the filmmaking aspect through showing you some of these images. Right?

So, like, part one of the performance took place at the Capitol, you can see that's the pedestal where the Christopher Columbus monument once stood, and we held this circle as a part of it. And part of how I planned it [switches slide] was to create this choreography that also incorporates media. So you'll see all kinds of things here, including, you know, the movement of the actual performers, but also the movement of the cameras and even the sound people and photographers. So when I started to edit the film, instead of having any kind of script or written work, I went back to drawing and I drew on some of this line work.

[switches slide] This is, this was a drawing that I showed in that 2025 show, called *Surrendur*. And, one thing I knew from the beginning is that I wanted there to build into the structure of the film, a kind of distance between image and sound. So I just started to like, list images on one side and sounds on the other, and started to speculate about how they would relate and resonate.

And just to give you a few other of my influences… [switches slides] Soviet montage is a really big influence on my work. So thinking about especially Dziga Vertov and, you know, this kind of cyclonic–I think that his montage, it sort of, like, it feels like a revolution is never ending in its kind of movement. It doesn't resolve itself. But of course, also [switches slides] Eisenstein and the way that, like, images hit one another. The way the sounds and images hit one another.

And throughout this process, I was collecting the kind of images and sounds that you saw in that behind-the-scenes. But I was also collecting just random–random and not so random videos that I was screencapping from Twitter–and, and also my, my mom was sending me, like, my mom sent me this YouTube video [switches slide] of a very, very famous South Indian singer named S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, who, almost like his voice, sounds like this unreachable place of home

for me because my parents were always listening to his music, his songs, as a kid growing up in Los Angeles. But he actually contracted Covid. And you hear this in the film, but I'll show you a clip of the original. He sang this, like, almost this ode to coronavirus that he posted to YouTube. Right? So I'll show you a clip of that, and then I'll also show you this image of–that became another sonic motif, it's really buried deep in the mix, but it's the sound of a Palestinian man in East Jerusalem destroying his own home because–by orders of the Israeli army–but also because if he didn't do it himself, they would have charged him to destroy his home.

[plays video 01:00:57:15 - 01:01:34:14]

[switches slide] Okay, so the question in editing and thinking about this montage… first, it was really based in sound and editing sound before image. But there was also always this connection: How do we render–how do we render this kind of… the way that social media has actually accelerated some of this movement? Right. The images of the beheaded Columbus statue in Boston actually animated actions on the ground in the Twin Cities that the social media aspect of it, like, was also instrumental in my arrival there. You know, the way that that video made me feel… what I felt in my body actually felt like I was experiencing a kind of call.

But this was the questions, like, can… can a further manipulation of the media… can a certain type of finding a form in image and sound in montage actually help distribute that call? You know, can there be a form that holds and disseminates that call? I, you know, one of the other sonic motifs, it's this random–it's called an arc flash. Again, it was just something I saw on Twitter, but you hear it many times in the film, and it's kind of a, partly about this electrical charge that can move through media, it can move through a network and animate material change.

[plays video 01:02:55:15 - 01:03:16:14. During the screenshotted video, a text message notification appears on the top of the screen from Karthik's mom]

[laughter] [switches slide] You all, you all know about that. Okay. A lot of messages coming in and out. You know, It's it's it's like, "pshhh", okay. [Umming melodically] [laughter continues] Okay. So, yeah. It's mom time. It's mom time. We're getting to mom time. Here we go. Woo. [Gestures hands] Oh, it's all just like [exhales emphatically].

[Clears throat] Everybody calm. Okay. Anyway. [Gestures to his laptop] Getting into this sequence from *Surrendur,* I'm going to play this clip, and I want, I want to get to the sound edit that you'll hear at the end. Okay. So I'll just roll this.

[plays video 01:03:57:15 - 01:04:52:14]

So on the kind of deeper side of this Indian/Indian connection is this moment for me where Mike is taking me to Bad River for the first time. I'm shooting, you know, this, I mean, it was an incredible experience. Like, bald eagle, like everything–I felt like I was just, like, holding on to the Bolex for dear life, in a way. But he's also later describing this deep feeling of being home there.

[switches slide] And what you're hearing in the edit is a private recording from before the *In The River* performance, of a kind of prayer circle that was just for the ensemble and family members. And Leila Awadallah offered words that are actually at the beginning of the film. If you saw last night, Sheldon Knoll, our Dakota friend who gave us permission to do the performance and also did the land acknowledgment, but my mom, I also invited her to do something, and I had no idea what she was going to do. But she gave this, like, motivational speech–she sang, which she's never s–I've never heard her sing my entire life, and she's like, singing in this group for the first time. [laughs] It's kind of incredible. But she also led us in this chant of Om, right, which is the primordial word in Hinduism, right? So in the, in the sonic edit, for me, there was like a kind of revelatory moment when this sense of home that Mike is articulating around the place that he's most deeply from, and then this expansive invocation of Om–that is not just said by one person, but said and then repeated, like held in this circle.

[switches slide and a silent video plays from 01:06:38 to 01: 08:17 while Pandian continues speaking] It, of course, has, like, pushed me to think about where I'm from. And in the process of making this film, I went to the… to India for the first time in over a decade. This is, like, kind of where my dad tells us that we're from, you know, and I went to…we went to a temple where the priest who is a bike mechanic, who was called back to the village to become the priest–which is also because of our low caste–I should say… we're not Brahmins, so, like, anyone can be a priest, you know, it's cool. But he told us that our souls would return to this temple when we died. And that was intense. This is a river called the Thamirabarani, which my dad described as the lifeblood of the Tirunelveli district. But it also brings in other forms of surrender.

When I told my brother about this project, he thought that it was a combination of the villages that my mom and dad are from, which I never even thought of. [switches slide] My mom is from a village called Surendai, and my dad is from a village called Pudur. And so he was like, "Oh, it's obviously Surendur." I was like, "Okay." So that, that happened.

And then, you know, my mom is basically my guru. You know, we've been talking through this whole process about prayer, about, you know, about spirituality, about making your own practice. And she went on–this was just a few weeks ago–she went on this whole riff about surrendur and how "sudden" in Tamil is "refuge". So, you know, I–again–I keep unsettling the meanings and they keep… new things keep coming to it, and I'm quite happy about that.

[switches slide] So I'm going to get into one of the parts of the film that she's in, and it's one that I think… yeah, I definitely could use… It's… a lot of things are in the mix, but this one I think is worth drawing out. So during the procession of over 100 people, my mom saw someone that was sitting on the side of the road, and she was crying, and she released my friend's hand, who was walking with her and making sure she was okay, and she went to her [switches slide] and she drew her in to the procession. Like, she hadn't been at the beginning of the, of the performance. She was, she was–but she was drawn in by my mom. I'm going to play you a really short recording of my mom talking about this and then the clip, because I think there's something, yeah, important that comes out of it.

[plays video 01:09:09:15 - 01:11:12:14]

So when she's talking about this Tamil word "karunai" which means kindness, this is what really jumped out to me, because you know, we can talk about relationality, you know, all these, like, multi-syllabic words, but really, like, when we think about what making kin is, right, and it's, and it's, even it's deep etymological relationship to kindness, right–that, that this feeling of kindness came into my mom, passed through her and passed to this woman. And I'm going to play the clip now. So we, we, we worked with Unicorn Riot to live stream the performance, and Unicorn Riot was live streaming the uprising. No one for the whole two hours of the performance looked into the camera except this woman. And you'll see what she says.

[plays video 01:12:06:00 - 01:12:49:14]

[switches slide] So I think it's really important that we stay with her words, and the depth of what she's articulating here. Right? Because there's this connection that's obviously, like, natal between my mother and I–like, she gave birth to me. This person doesn't even know, for all I know that we're related. But she articulates this thing that she says, "I didn't birth you, but I love you."

And to me there's something so important in this thing that she says, right? That it does not have to be about that kind of…this narrow conception of family. Right? It doesn't have to be about even, like, a reproductive sense of what it means to mother or show motherly love. Right? And here, you know, [switches slide] thinking with people like Joy James, who writes really powerfully on the Captive Maternal, but also other activists. Right? Like, this is Ravyn Wngz, who in Toronto in 2020, along with a group of other folks, splashed this pink paint on one of the colonial monuments there.

[plays video 01:14:00:00 - 01:16:16:14]

I think it's really incredible the way that Ravyn Wngz is talking about technology. [switches slide] And that'll just bring me to the last section of the talk, which is thinking through surrendur as a technology of homecoming. I'm going to show you a few images of the exhibition version of *Surrendur.* [switches slide] This is the drawing you saw before. [switches slide] It's, Midway Contemporary Art is in a kind of just newly renovated building that used to be a garage. We made this [switches slide] curtain that you'd have to pass through in order to go in. It has a lot of this fiber optic cable that comes in and out, as a motif in the film. And I'll just show a quick clip of Mike talking about it. So… to catch people up.

[plays video 01:17:00:00 - 01:18:10:14]

So that question of the message or the call being transmitted by the fiber optic cable that connects us to the creator and each other. In some ways, you can think of that as the intention of this body of work. [switches slide] So I'll show you a quick walkthrough of the exhibition. And then we'll, we'll head towards the end here.

[plays video 01:18:34:00 - 01:20:42:14]

[switches slide] So, the idea of creating these platforms actually draws a little bit on the show that I mentioned earlier, which was 15 years earlier–at a previous building Midway had– where this rammed… I created, with a team of folks there…this rammed earth platform that people could see the films that were projected from these columns into the corners from. [switches slide] And again, just sort of like giving you some more of my influences. Diana Thater was one of my closest advisors as a graduate student, and really thinking about the presence of projectors as almost embodied beings in the space yielded a lot of these sculptural ideas in my work. [switches slide] But also how performance requires architectural and set elements.

This is Part Three of *In The River*, where I created a 1:1 scale [switches slide] deconstructed version of the architecture that supports the monument, the Columbus monument, and we, like, turned it upside down and left and right and use that to perform on. Those panels [switches slide] are actually a part. Again, this is sort of, like, the cycling and recycling. [walks up to screen and points] All of these light gray panels are deconstructed elements from that set. And even this kind of circular version of the film is sort of like the broken, fiber optic cable.

The architecture–the platforms draws on [switches slide] especially, like, Hindu river architecture. This is a classic example from the Ganga river in Varanasi. The way that steps are created into the riverbank to go down to bathe. I was thinking about the connection between not only the two images of film, of the film, but also how people would actually be able to look at each other if they were sitting on opposite platforms.

[switches slide] Why am I showing this? Okay, I think I know.

[plays video 01:22:40:00 - 01:22:42:14]

[switches through a few slides quickly] You know what? We're going to pass through this. I'll just finish up with the installation here. And, you know, there's these body shaped portals–again, influences Ana Mendieta, Pope.L coming back with *Hole Theory*… actually, the show is dedicated to Pope. One of which [switches slide] was filled with water. And the other has these plants that are growing from a site–[switches slide]–I'm going to skip this too… These plants that are growing from a site called Wákaŋ Típi Awáŋyaŋkapi, which is a Dakota land stewardship organization. So they kind of donated soil from their site. The grow lights fostered whatever was already there to grow, and then we returned the plants that grew in the exhibition to their site. [switches slides in quick succession] Ah, yeah. Yeah. I'm going to skip that... and, yeah. Let's go to the end.

Okay. So to close the show we took the projections down and we did a performance called *Echolocation*. And the kind of horizon of this work that I'm interested in right now is to make more films, but also to kind of make a band. A band that would consist of me, Erica, Douglas, and Mike. And so this was our first, sort of, attempt at that. It was the one time I went into the water.

[switches slide] And I'm going to finish by reading a poem that I wrote last month.

> We have so much to grieve.
> As the earth warms, melting the ice pack of our accumulated pain,
> Let our tears flow down from the mountains and flood the deltas.
> From the Mississippi to the Madu Mati
> From the blues to the bowel
> Let's sing songs of love and liberation.
> Into the circles of care
> We draw from our mothers cheeks
> A mandala of mourning and human sacrifice
> A technology that's sows something,
> Something from all this sadness.
> I don't want to be alone.
> Shedding my skin and saltwater slews.
> Beat me firmly, but gently,
> Until my seeds scatter across the surface of this water.
> Generations of ripples
> Sending love into guilt,

Love into shame,
Love into semi-permeable membranes of fear,
Isolation, death.
There is motion in the ocean,
But also bodies caught in the kinks of fiber optic cables laid across impossible distances in the deep, wet darkness,
Transmitting tiny slivers of light, data, spam, porn,
A single pixel which could have been a meeting.
What I crave is the silence,
The quiet at the heart of all things.
The space between these letters,
Their genetic element.
There's fire at the edge of every threshold,
Fed by vanity, ego, email.
I want to let it all go
And find the blue flame of beginning again.

What is this thing I feel inside of me?
A dictionary of dicta,
Of dickless probing around the shape that is coming into being.
Faultless, utterly flawed, guileless
Ducts open, ready to receive the radiance of God's love,
Unfiltered, unbrewed matcha,
The essence of Spring.
Eternally ready for ceremony.
Eternally ready.
Tasted but never served.
Ever serving but always filtered.

Nirvana is an ever receding 90s.
Even when I'm turned, I'm turned towards the past.
Sweat drenched, flawless abs draped in flannel,
Climbing the rafters.
This specific grain of video.
That's my kink.
I meditate on compression,
Lines of resolution, aspect ratio,
Academy leader
As I once again wait for the lab, for the Fedex, for the feedback
To tell me my real name

Forever at the will call between here and there,
Now and then,
This and everything else.

Thank you. [applause, lights turn on]

Audience member: Hi. I'm right here. [raises hand] Thank you. I have a lot of thoughts and questions, and I'm going to do my best to synthesize, and I hope you have patience and I wish I could draw columns of all the things I'm trying to consolidate. My background is in public programming, and I know you're an educator, so I think that's the framing of how I'm going to try to ask my questions.

Column one is thinking about still abstraction, moving abstraction, written abstraction. And then,

Pandian: Sorry, can you, I'm , I'm getting I'm getting my, my notating ready here.

Audience member: Okay.

Pandian: Can you say that column again? [muffled laughter]

Audience member: Column one: Still abstraction,

Pandian: Yeah.

Audience member: Moving abstraction,

Pandian: Okay.

Audience member: Written abstraction.

Pandian: Okay.

Audience member: And then I'm thinking about legibility– in terms of content, in terms of sound, in terms of language. And then I'm thinking about the importance of the artist being present to ensure audience connects, relates, and understands.

And for me, how important it was for you to be present to talk to us tonight. Because I think last night I did not get it. I don't think I had the tools or the awareness or the understanding to understand the layers and Easter eggs and relationship building over a long period of time that was necessary in order to give the offering that you did.

So I guess the, the bigger question is really thinking about the importance of legibility and the artist's role–whether they want that or don't want that–for an audience to connect the work. And allowing it to just be fragments, notes of a song, or traces. Versus complete comprehension. Is that comprehensible?

Pandian: Yeah, I got the columns, we're good. Let's do this.

Audience member: Okay, Thank you.

Pandian: Okay, so. Thank you for that. [Grabs head with both hands and pauses for a moment] I felt like I was going on a bit, so I did skip something that I'm going to mention right now, which is a big part of the film, which is the The Anishinaabe Seven Fires Prophecy, which, you know, so part of how… [switches through slides] Let me just go to the slide if that's okay. Yeah.

Okay, so I think this is a good place to start because it's connected to here. The Anishinaabe people left the upper Midwest, probably due to some kind of weather event. Ice age, mini ice age, thousands of years ago and came to the Northeast, like, literally where we are. And their prophets then told them that they needed to find the place where the food goes on water, and they went on a centuries long migration back to their homeland, like back to the home that Mike was saying was so deep and resonant for him.

Okay. And again, I know this is all new information, but I'm going to give it because it's going to, I think, relate to your question. So, this sense of those words where the food grows on water being a kind of technology that is carried through a thousand years of movement, but that leads people back home. I–and I'm not saying I'm successful at this, but one of my strategies with the work is, like, can the form of the film itself hold fragments–not only of information, which is–I'll agree with you, it doesn't like foreground and make as accessible or explicit to all audiences that we can imagine in this moment, as it could. But what it feels like my responsibility was–first, as someone who's not–first of all, like, this is part of my role as the stranger, right? I'm not from the Twin Cities, I'm not Anishinaabe. I'm not Black. Like, the whole mix of these, the, the kind of brew of what was animating this work like, it felt to me like my job was to be a kind of conductor, to find a form that could carry some of these fragments into a future that might need this…not only, like, information, but this energy.

So the film prioritizes quite often, like, energy over information. And I feel like there are other people that are doing some of the information work–and certainly are better at it than I could be–but what is my specific calling? I felt, you know, like, for example, when Mike was–Mike and I first met, he was like, I think I should do a TED Talk. And, you know, we had a… that was the beginning of a conversation about form, right? The TED Talk is a form, and you could imagine it

getting like… actually prizes accessibility. But one of my suspicions about the way media works right now is that things that take off and go viral, they also have this to like very quick decay, and they don't necessarily move us anymore. So it's like a spike [gestures] and then it goes down. I…I'm trying to make something here that has a different graph. [gestures] Right? And one that I'm trying to imagine–not to be like, whatever about it–but, like, I'm trying to imagine into a future where fragments of this can be actually like… that this work needs to stand out in ways that aren't, I don't know, they're maybe not even legible to me so much.

I mean, I, I hear you that I can parse a lot of my intentions out, but this is one of the things that I do struggle with. Where the work tells… it narrates itself in a certain way. And I can do this. I can disentangle it for you. But I'm not sure that, I'm not sure that this is the most important thing: to explain it as an artwork.

There is, well, a couple ways of describing it for me are, like… I was thinking about minerals, I was thinking about stones, I was thinking about the striations of a thing and how they encode meaning, encode meaning, encode history in a way that's, like, not legible unless you're like a geologist in a specific way, but that you hold that intensity. Like it's crystalline. It's crystallized.

I grew up with the animated Transformers, and they used to do this thing where they would have energon cubes, like, they would need that to survive. They would, like, put this cube of energy in their bodies, and they could, like, function again. And I feel that, like, in some weird way, this film is meant to animate that kind of energetic moment.

So I think that's a legibility question. And the artist presence question… to some degree. Happy to take follow ups. I mean, abstraction, [taps hand on podium] I don't know, like, part of this for me also has to do with the words and categories–especially around esthetics that we use in art–sometimes can feel really, like, historically myopic, you know? Like, there's things that we might call abstract that we don't because there's been centuries of symbolic language built up around them.

And again, not to be grandiose about it, but I am interested in this question and, I'll return… actually connecting it to the Seven Fires prophecy… one one part of the Seven Fires prophecy is that it foretells the emergence of a new people. And it's essentially like, you know, a kind of rainbow people, like, where black, brown, white, all the different races that are currently living in Turtle Island figure out a way to synthesize their different cultures and lead to some kind of mutually supportive situation.

When Mike tells me about that period, I'm thinking about the uprising and seeing the kind of radical possibilities that were open by, like, people. You'd see it on the block, you'd see it on social media, you'd see it everywhere, like just people behaving completely differently. Just,

like, prioritizing feeding each other or prioritizing like, yeah, I mean, like looting, but looting to feed each other. Like looting diapers to take care of your kids. Like, I think that the possibility of trying to develop a nascent, symbolic language for that emergent new culture, knowing that it wouldn't be legible. Right? Because I don't even know, like where do symbols come from? Can you try to make symbols that might be grabbed on by other people to, like, hitch interesting ideas to? Like that's, that's the gambit in some way that very well might fail too. And I'm actually, like, really comfortable with the risk of that failure.

Audience member: Hi. I, I guess to go kind of off that, but like, [inaudible] what you ended with– also my allergies, I sound so stuffed up. I'm not as sick as I sound everybody! [laughs] I guess I'm wondering… you're saying you're okay with that failing, but I'm wondering what that means. What that means? One, what failure means in that instance? And then two, if failure me– if we're coming to a definition of failure as something that means it's not doing the work that you wanted it to do, especially with some subject matter that is so important–what does that do for you as an artist? Just like dealing with, like, rougher subjects and subjects that are, like, more touchy and, like, personal and based on race and things like that?

Pandian: Yeah. Thank you for that. I mean, I think when I say failure, I just mean also like, not trying to make something for everyone. Because, like what…who is everyone? And what… the culture seems to be moving in ways that I'm really uncomfortable with. Around, like, the metrics of what, I don't know, like what speaks to people actually, or what is perceived to speak to people. Or what's measurable about speaking to people. So when I say failure, I don't mean… I guess I mean, I am not trying to make this something that's–I mean, I'm not trying to make it like, well, if I, let me put it in a positive way… I made decisions that I knew, just like, I knew certain people wouldn't be up for. You know? And I made those decisions because I, I felt a deep sense of accountability to myself and my collaborators.

And first and foremost, it was the social space of making the performance and the protocols of, like, always checking in with each other. Like, how did we do that? Like, the kind of tenderness of the subject matter, constantly like negotiating this as a group, like co-writing, like feeling things out, fucking up, coming back to the table, like, practicing the kind of community we wanted to build within the process of making the work.

And then with like eight terabytes of data for two years…first and foremost, like, being accountable to myself. Because this is a work that I made. You know, even though I made it with all these people, it's like, actually, it was important to me that, you know, it has my name on it. Not because of the authorship, actually because the responsibility. Like, I made these decisions, editorially especially, and to me, I had to feel that cycle of energy coming back to me first, sitting there again and again and missing it again and again, not getting it again and again and abandoning it, but then finding these, like, connective tissues.

And like, you know… that represent maybe in my mind, like how this fiber optic cable is like making these really disparate connections. Right? So I think that my, my role as a stranger actually facilitates that, in the sense that I'm… I don't represent, and I'm also not like a part of [sighs] in some ways, like, the way that–especially in film–the way community is used is this really empty signifier of, like, "Have you checked these X, Y, and Z boxes so we can, like, not accept your film into the festival or give you funding" which is usually what happens anyway. It's just like… I guess what I'm trying to say is that, that, I think the part of the practice of making it has to do with the accountability of the group, and that's who I really made the work for.

This is a different moment for me, because I've never tried to present a film or distribute a film cinematically. And it's, like, also, it's not really, like, [laughs] it's not getting distribution… you know, it's like, this isn't a film that also, I don't know. I mean, it's, it doesn't…It just feels like it's from–both an era of filmmaking that I was influenced by, that I never lived through, especially the way that, like, Soviet filmmaking cycled back into avant garde filmmaking in the, especially in the late 50s to the 70s– so, like, I was deeply influenced by even why is it, like, 4:3? You know, that's like, that's the 16 mm, like, form that I understood. What, like, how these political… how political cinema looked. Like, the frame in which political cinema existed and lived in the spaces where you're in the room with a 16 mm projector watching some, like, terribly decayed print, struggling to understand, like what, like struggling to feel the urgency of a moment that's not your own. I think I'm, I think in a way I'm trying to do that for a future that might want it.

Audience member: Hello.

Pandian: Hi.

Audience member: I'm just curious as to why it's so important for you to be part of something that, like, why is it so important for you to understand something that you struggle to understand. Or like, why that's so present in your work.

Pandian: Sorry, what's that last part?

Audience member: Like, why, is that so present in your work, that you're trying to figure out something that you can't understand?

Pandian: Yeah. [inhales deeply] I mean, I just, I think in a, in a really sincere way, I think that the world is magical and deep and really beyond my comprehension. And that there are a number of systems that we, that govern most of our–I don't want to speak for anyone else–in my everyday life that hold me away from the kind of beauty of non-understanding. Like, I think we–

I think I need to–again, I speak for myself–but I feel like I want to, like, what's the word I'm usin–I'm thinking of… like re–not re-mystify exactly, but re-enchant. Right? Like, I feel this need for us to recover some of the deepest knowledge that the earth and the spiritual realm holds for us. It's like it requires a re-enchantment. It requires a desire to let–to surrender knowledge. It requires for me, like, it's not it– I'm not interested in design, for example.

Like, I don't think that… I'm not interested in trying to design our way out of the predicaments that feel like they're harming me and my people and my friends. I think that there's somewhere deeper, like underground, that they're constantly burrowing into to show me the way. So this is me joining them.

This is me. This is me going to this places that even like, fuck up my life in some ways, you know, like, um, yeah. I mean, like the, this film I made while going up for tenure at Harvard, you know, and I just got denied tenure two months ago. But I'd fucking take this film any day, like, I want to take, like being in the heart of the very world that tries to render knowledge objective and instrumentalizable and weaponizeable like to render knowledge as a weapon, essentially of domination. I, I don't, I never felt like it was even a choice. Like I had to make the thing that I believed in and the thing I believe in is really hard to describe. You know, it's really evasive. It's something I'm still looking for, and I feel totally both unsettled in my journey to find it and also unsettled by it in a way that doesn't it–it doesn't scare me. It actually makes me feel, makes me feel less alone.

Audience member: Hi Karthik, it's Adi in the back here. Thanks for the talk. And, and really enjoying this discussion afterwards, so far. I'm really curious about these ideas that I'm thinking about of, like, rehearsal versus ritual or performance versus theater and these containers and how you navigate the editing process of your films. After the fact or, or in the, in the fact or how you muddle through this. And I'm not sure if you're willing to integrate this, but curious about also like *Four Songs Without Z* and working with Andros and Zakaria on like that editing process as well. And, yeah, I don't know how that might contradict or how does that ever, friction, that friction with these kind of open performance spaces with, with possibilities of, um, of a lot of this work you're doing with so many people, all these relations, what happens in that kind of, when you get behind, the computer or, or whatever it is?

Pandian: Yeah, yeah. Thanks for bringing up *Four Songs Without Z.* So, *Four Songs Without Z* is a short, it's a digital project. In short, it's related to the *Atlas Unlimited* cycle. And without seeing too much about it, I will say that, like, it got me back in the saddle with editing. Zakaria essentially, like, didn't have any physical artifacts of his previous life, because he couldn't take them with him on his journey. And so we were like, scouring YouTube to look for videos that represented or touched on or adjacent to experiences that he'd had. And that really did help me like, get into I hadn't I've never edited something like 90 minutes. But it really informed my use

of the social media clips and the way that these things that just sort of like flowing through that fiber optic cable, like the literal fiber optic cable in some ways, like, they're just like streaming, and you can grab on to, like, how to hinge that to something really specific and hopefully have them both inform each other.

And then the question of a rehearsal and ritual and ceremony–Yeah, it's it's, you know, like getting, like, Andros is someone who really helped me get into performance. I was not I mean, I've done some in, undergrad, graduate school, but Andros was like a really incredibly generous, collaborator who basically, like, help me understand what, like what was possible in these spaces.

One thing I'll just say, like in a really practical framework is that, okay. So I, you know, I finished grad school, I had a show at an exhibition in LA and then, like a year later, I had the solo show at the Whitney–there is like, I'd never gotten paid for my artwork once, you know, I didn't get paid an artist fee to have a solo show at the Whitney–there was like, I never, I never got paid. They paid for the expenses of the materials. But, like, I didn't even know that you could, like, make money off of artwork or something. I mean, obviously I knew people bought and sold objects, but like, were there other ways to do this? Like in, in a market-based country like this in the mid-2000, no one I knew was getting an artist fee for anything.

So going to Belgium and seeing that people were being paid and fed to be in these open spaces of creation, um, it was really transformative. And I think at first, like, I can't get into these questions of, like, rehearsal ritual or ceremony without, like, establishing some baseline of care. So we did that. You know, we also provided childcare and elder care funds for anyone that had dependents. And then it was like, okay, now we can get in, like, into what this mean. Because we had to learn each other's relationships, all these words, like mine was very emergent too. At this time. I was, like, talking to my mom a lot about prayer, a lot about ceremony, about how she created her own prayer practice, talking to Erica constantly about her. She a really visionary practice. Mike's relationship to prayer and how it animated his movement towards the takedown that night. So I don't know. I don't know if I have much more to say about it other than it's, it's like my commitment to exploring this form is really ongoing, but I'm really figuring it out still in an iterative way.

Audience Member: I really loved the pillars, but they also kind of, um, they sort of poked a responsibility to share. I have a question, and I want to express the responsibility that I felt, um, to share about the premiere in New York and what was moving about it. First just, it was a premiere at, like, a pretty Lo-Fi Community Festival. And in, sort of the column of the artists, of the presence of the artist, thinking about the presence of the community, and every community leader that is seen in the film was present at the premiere. And they were at they were, they, they sort of were also in front of us at the end, and they were sharing about the experience and what

was mostly moving about the screening is the fact that they felt, it was sort of like a 1 to 1, that the film held the experience that they had gone through, and that they expressed that. And that it was like total understanding for them, because they felt that the spiritual journey was held in the film. And I thought that was really magical, because in that moment, it all made sense to me too. And that also somehow the film continues to hold the true presence of the community as it continues to travel. So I wanted to share that because I just ,I feel it in my stomach. And then I wanted to ask how the process moved your son because he was always with you.

Pandian: Hm, mm, wow…Thank you so much for sharing that. You know, it's weird, right, that we do these things and then… I just really appreciate you sharing your experience from the audience of that, um, screening, because it really, it's like a real nourishment to hear that. And, and maybe just want to say about this show [points to screen], um, you know, since I don't live in the Twin Cities and Mike and Erica do, they were there all the time. Like, it was really interesting. Like, I kind of I'm not super interested in making exhibitions right now, to be honest. But having the show up for three months, they were just hanging out there all the time. They're bringing all their friends and they're just hanging out. That was the thing. It wasn't like… the energy was flowing through it and it was like they see, you know, they were able to point to those sections that especially they wanted to show people, but, um, that's a, it's a kind of a different topic, but I will say that the social, these social spaces that we're traveling together and how they're playing out differently are really, it's a really interesting thing for me.

My son…um, the ages of 4 to 10 are really different [laughter]. So, man, like, yeah, four, it was, like, really imaginative play and I didn't even know it was happening. So we didn't, he didn't know it was happening. Right? Like we definitely took him to a lot of intense things. Like he remembers it. He was making signs, but it didn't–I don't know how it imprinted on him. When I started taking him to Minneapolis, you know, these become his uncles, like Douglas Ewart is his uncle, Mike Forcia is his uncle, and he would recall them. We would talk about it at bedtime. It was, like, part of that dream work of the work was that integration. Marching together. That procession was like a really special moment in our relationship, in our life. A lot of times, like, we're actually, he's a little bit like, we kind of like, we're a little like this sometimes [makes gesture of butting heads with fists] And. But he, we were so connected for that March. Yeah. It's, it makes me emotional thinking about it because I know it was a big, is something that he really.

Well, it's like from all the levels. Like, I was just hanging out with my mom in LA, and we were talking about this thing. She has this incredible capacity to show that kindness, that Karuṇā. But, you know, she does that often to like people. She thinks on the plane, you know, she draws out, draws out things they're suffering around, and she really helps them. Like I call her air guru. And we were talking together about like, why, you know, not why, but like, it was so interesting that in this circumstance, in a city that she's not, doesn't know, like what made it possible for her,

what was the context that made it possible for her to express that deep capacity for kindness that she has?

And to me, it was like something about being in this group that was so energized by this, like, belief in reimagining the world. And I hope that's in, I know that's in him. I don't know how he articulates it, but as he becomes older, it's like, we keep going, you know, this thing doesn't end. Like he came to the exhibition last year, and it's just like, you know, it's like seeing your family. And it's so important to me, especially that he has, like my mentors, can also be his mentors in that way. Just by being in Douglas Ewart's house, like sitting at the foot of someone, around their bell collection, who's like, shooting the shit with his grandma and, like, you know, it's… I think that these are some of the things that I feel disconnected from, not, not being raised myself in India, or raising our family in India, and I feel like we're finding that sense of village and family like, through this work in a way that I didn't anticipate at the beginning of this.

[applause]

END OF RECORDING