



Silk River Press Release

For immediate release 26 Sept 2017

Silk River banners carried 138 miles from Kew to Southend to highlight local heritage and links with India.

After carrying the twenty-two Silk River banners 128 miles (206km) on foot and 10 miles (16km) by river, triumphant participants from ten areas along the Thames arrived in Southend on Sunday 24th Sept. Since beginning the journey in Kew Gardens 10 days previously, participants have travelled through Tower Hamlets, Greenwich & Woolwich, Barking & Dagenham, Purfleet, Dartford, Gravesend, Tilbury and East Tilbury before reaching a welcoming crowd for the finale on Southend Pier.

It's been an eventful journey, with walkers being treated to all manner of varied entertainment along the way, all designed to highlight each area's local identity as well as their connections with India in this year marking 70 years of Indian Independence.

Participants were invited on a special tour of Kew Gardens to look at live specimens of Indian plants, to follow the Silk Trail in Tower Hamlets and visit Altab Ali park, a symbol of the anti-racist movement. Over in Greenwich, there were sea shanties and stories of life on board the Cutty Sark, one of the finest trading vessels that sailed between the Thames and the Hooghly River. In Barking, stories of riverside living mixed enthusiastically with local history, while in Purfleet the RSPB nature reserve provided stark contrast to the creative hub that is High House Production Park.

Each place was full of surprises, like the pupils of Dartford Bridge Community Primary School giving a recital of the song Ruby Tuesday, on Ruby Tuesday Drive, to highlight the pop culture of Dartford. This was upstaged only hours later by a celebration in the Central Park outdoor theatre with Bhangra dancing led by energetic performers in wonderful pink costumes. Even Jeremy Kite, leader of Dartford Council joined in, along with the crowds of school children who came to show their own flags to the Silk River participants.

Delightful and unexpected things like this happened in each area, choreographed carefully by the local partners, and all designed, like the large silk banners, to demonstrate their pride of place and their own unique history.

Indian connections were present throughout, and it gave Gravesend the opportunity to show off their magnificent Sikh temple, the Guru Nanak Darbar Gudwara, whereas in Tilbury, walkers were invited to tour the historic site of Tilbury Fort, which has an identical twin in Calcutta named Fort William.

On the penultimate day in East Tilbury, connections with the Indian town of Batanagar were revealed through the Bata factory connection, with the able assistance of the Bata Heritage Centre. An injection of slapstick comedy was added to the proceedings with a performance by the locally based Complete Commedia Company.

And so, it came to be the last day in Southend-on-Sea, which was not just the end of a 10 day walk but the culmination of over a year's planning, plotting, coordinating and making. A year in which artists from each of the areas learnt how to hand paint their designs on the delicate Indian silk. A year of research and planning by the Silk River team and the many local partners to design the routes and tell their story. Tales which were inspired by the Indian story-telling tradition of Patachitra – which are pictorial in nature, painted onto large scrolls, and sung.



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So, in fitting style, Silk River walkers conquered the world's longest pleasure pier, and the project was given a rousing finale by the Mudlarks Choir and, after a speech by the local Mayor and a ceremony by the Hindu Association of Southend, the banners were waved off on the paddle steamer Waverley, the last sea-going paddle steamer in the world.

Speaking to all the Silk River partners that have made this project possible, Ali Pretty (Artistic Director) said: *"We created beautiful artworks that reflected our communities and connected us to each other. You gave us at Kinetika, our fellow walkers and our audiences a fabulous day in each place. From small seeds sown at Kew Gardens we walked for 10 days and 128 miles later we emerged at the end of the longest pier in the world in Southend carrying 22 x 6m silk scrolls where we were sent off with blessings and a song to board The Waverley sailing all the way back up the Estuary alighting at Tower Bridge – amazing!"*

Thanks to each and every one of you for your invaluable contribution to what has become an extraordinary project. I am very happy that we have nurtured a Silk River network along the Thames, one which celebrates and embraces the diversity of our population and in particular in 2017 our UK cultural connection with India.

We still have a fair few more miles to go - Diwali in Trafalgar Square, the exhibition at Kew Gardens and of course the 12-day journey along the banks of the Hooghly - that will continue to strengthen this foundation and extend to our partners in West Bengal.

If we can do this, then we can do more! It's feels very empowering and I'd like to think that we can be proud to demonstrate that artists and arts projects such as Silk River really do have a role to play in shaping our futures. Thank you for that, it's an incredible gift."

The walk might be over, but the beautiful banners will be appearing again at the following UK events:

- Sunday 15th Oct Diwali Celebration – Trafalgar Square
- Sunday 22nd Oct to Friday 27th Oct – Exhibition at Botanic Gardens Kew
- Thurs 16th Nov - Exhibition, workshop and reprise performance of the Tower Hamlets walk 'from Street to Stage' at the Brady Centre, as part of 'A Season of Bangla Drama'.

This is followed by the culmination of the whole project, a culture and heritage inspired walk along the Hooghly River in West Bengal 6-17th December. More info about this, and the whole project can be found on the project website: www.silkriver.co.uk

Silk River has been developed and delivered by Kinetika in the UK and Think Arts in India along with an international team of artists, writers and photographers and is supported by Arts Council England, British Council, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Tower Hamlets Council, Royal Borough of Greenwich, Creative Barking & Dagenham, Thurrock Council, Dartford Council, Kent County Council, Gravesham Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, Metal, Royal Opera House Thurrock Trailblazers programme, Bath Spa University and the Long Distance Walkers Association London Group. It has featured as part of the Totally Thames festival, organised by the Thames Festival Trust, and the UK/India 2017 season curated by the British Council.

Ends.



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Notes to the Editor

More details about the Silk River walks:

- Silk River website: www.silkriver.co.uk
- UK Walks: <http://www.silkriver.co.uk/UK-walks/>
- India Walks: <http://www.silkriver.co.uk/india-walks/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/silkriverkinetika/>

Twitter #SilkRiver

<https://twitter.com/SilkRiver2017>

Instagram #SilkRiver

<https://www.instagram.com/kinetikapeople>

About Silk River

www.silkriver.co.uk

Silk River is an ambitious project which explores the unique relationship between London and Kolkata through artistic exchange between communities along the Thames Estuary and India's Hooghly River. Kinetika's Artistic Director Ali Pretty, with associate Artistic Director Ruchira Das (Think Arts, India) and an international team of artists, writers and photographers, will capture and interpret the experience of journeying along these two mighty rivers.

Working in 20 locations from Murshidabad to Batanagar (Hooghly) and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew to Southend (Thames) to reinterpret a shared heritage, Kinetika's Silk River will raise cultural awareness of the Indo-British relationship through engaging diaspora communities who live alongside both rivers.

Silk River culminates along the Thames between 15-24 Sept and along the Hooghly 7-17 Dec 2017 with two river walks where the stories of the 20 locations will be revealed to local, national and international audiences through the showing of 20 giant hand-painted Bengali silk scrolls and accompanying performances.

Silk River Walk London took place 15-24 Sept 2017

<http://www.silkriver.co.uk/UK-walks/>

- Fri 15th – Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
- Sat 16th – Tower Hamlets
- Sun 17th – Greenwich
- Mon 18th – Barking and Dagenham
- Tues 19th – Purfleet
- Weds 20th – Dartford
- Thurs 21st – Gravesend
- Fri 22nd – Tilbury
- Sat 23rd – East Tilbury
- Sun 24th – Southend



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Silk River Walk India 6-17 December 2017

<http://www.silkriver.co.uk/india-walks/>

- Tues 5th - Arrive in Kolkata and travel by train to Azimganj, Murshidabad
- Weds 6th - Azimganj, Barikothi & seminar on placemaking
- Thurs 7th - Silk River walks begins: Azimganj to Hazarduari
- Fri 8th - International artists exchange workshop on board boat from Murshidabad to Krishnanagar
- Sat 9th - Krishnanagar visit to sculptors studios and local artists and former Indigo Estate
- Sun 10th - Boat to Chandannagar, exchange with lighting artists
- Mon 11th - Chandannagar to Barrackpore
- Tues 12th - Barrackpore
- Weds 13th - Kumortuli, Jorasanko and Marble Palace, North Kolkata
- Thurs 14th - Tour of Burrabazaar and Howrah
- Fri 15th - Visit to Kidderpore docks and tour of Batanagar
- Sat 16th - Botanic Gardens, Kolkata
- Sun 17th - Finale Procession from Princep Ghat to central Kolkata

About Kinetika

www.kinetikaonline.co.uk

Kinetika is an internationally renowned company with an 18-year track record of combining world-class design with community projects to produce spectacular outdoor events that engage diverse audiences wherever they work. Founded by artist Ali Pretty in 1997, and inspired by her training in carnival arts in Trinidad and India, Kinetika now has an unrivalled reputation for working with local communities on projects that change the way people feel about where they live. From local community events in shopping centres, ceremonial boulevards and local high streets, to the Great Wall of China and the heart of Kolkata.

The charitable arm, Kinetika People, is known for its high quality community engagement work, running participatory programmes, workshops and artist training schemes, which aim to nurture new artistic talent and engage communities, raising aspirations and building a sense of place. The commercial arm, Kinetika Design Studio, has been commissioned to create work for ceremonies at high profile events including FIFA World Cup 2009, the London Paralympic games/Team GB Parade in 2012 and the European Games 2015.

About UK/India 2017

UK/India2017 is a year-long celebration of the long-standing relationship between India and the UK, which will see a vast programme of cultural exchange and activity take place in cities across both countries. Silk River is part of the UK/India 2017 programme. Working with a huge number of partners and institutions, the British Council is developing a programme of cultural activity which will connect and inspire people in both countries; and strengthen and celebrate the UK and India's cultural ties. For more information on UK/India 2017 please visit www.britishcouncil.in

For media enquiries, imagery and interview requests please contact:

Edwina Rigby

Marketing Director, Silk River

edwina@kinetika.co.uk

+44 (0) 7970 685281



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