



## Silk River Press Release

For Immediate Release  
19th December 2017

### “A living bridge between two countries” – artists from West Bengal and Thames have taken part “in one of the most important projects of the Year of UK/India Culture.”

Silk River has been in the making for over two years, involving 20 communities along the banks of the rivers Thames and the Hooghly, engaging thousands of participants and teams of artists in both the UK and India. On Saturday 16 December 2017 the ‘Journey of Surprises’ ended with a spectacular finale at Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata, India.

Representatives from the 10 river Thames communities that took part joined members from the 10 river Hooghly communities to parade the large hand-painted silk flags to the Victoria Memorial for a closing ceremony to mark this incredible collaboration through the Silk River programme of cultural exchange. They were accompanied by a multitude of different dancers and musicians, even some bagpipes!

The communities represented were from: Murshidabad, Krishnanagar, Chandanagore, Howrah, Burrabazar, Barrackpore/ Serampore, Jorosanko, Kidderpore, Batanagar, Botanic Gardens. And in the UK from: Kew Gardens, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich/Woolwich, Barking/Dagenham, Purfleet, Dartford, Gravesend, Tilbury, East Tilbury, and Southend.

In attendance at the closing ceremony was British High Commissioner to India Sir Dominic Asquith, who said:

*“It’s been inspiring what we’ve been seeing, not just the colours but the enthusiasm, the amount of determination and commitment over the years to make this a reality...It’s what I call the **living bridge** – it is bringing communities together in the UK and in India in a way that is really relevant to the communities that they exist in.”*

British Council India Director Alan Gemmell OBE was specially in Kolkata for the Closing Ceremony and thanked everyone involved:

*“I’m at the final event for **one of the most important projects that we’ve had in the Year of Culture**. Silk River has connected 20 communities in Kolkata and London and been at the heart of our mission to use the Year of Culture to celebrate the modern day relationship between our two countries, to connect with people and to inspire them to build a relationship for the next 70 years. It’s been a wonderful event, it’s been an incredible project and we’re so, so grateful to everyone involved. Thank you very much.”*

Silk River in India has been brought together by Kinetika, UK and partners in India – ThinkArts, Murshidabad Heritage Development Society, Rural Crafts Hubs of West Bengal, Crafts Council of India West Bengal, West Bengal Tourism, Future Hope. It is supported by Arts Council England and British Council.

There is now an exhibition of the 20 scrolls at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, from 19-31 December 2017 after which they will return to the UK.

#### Silk River in Numbers

(numbers are combined UK/India totals)

132m Hand woven silk from West Bengal  
192 Artists to make scrolls  
31 schools  
26 walk leaders  
20 communities  
2 years in the making



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## About Silk River

[www.silkriver.co.uk](http://www.silkriver.co.uk)

### #SilkRiver

Silk River has been an ambitious project which explored 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 Directors Korak Ghosh and Ruchira Das (Think Arts, India) and an international team of artists, writers and photographers, captured and interpreted 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 raised cultural awareness of the Indo-British relationship through engaging diaspora communities who live alongside both rivers.

Silk River culminated along the Thames between 15-24 Sept and the Silk River India walk took place along the Hooghly 6-16 Dec 2017. During the walks, the stories of the 20 locations were revealed to local, national and international audiences through the showing of the 20 giant hand-painted Bengali silk scrolls and accompanying performances.

### Facebook

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

### Twitter

<https://twitter.com/SilkRiver2017>

### Instagram

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

## Silk River India Walk

In December 2017, an eleven-day performative walk took place alongside the river Hooghly, India, from Azimganj, Murshidabad to Batanagar, Kolkata. On boat and by foot, participants engaged with contemporary artists, historians, writers and musicians, and participated in curated events comprising of talks, workshops and film screenings. More details can be found here: <http://www.silkriver.co.uk/india-walks/>

Kevin Rushby, an eminent travel journalist for The Guardian joined the walks and has written a daily blog – see his posts from the Silk River walks here: <http://www.silkriver.co.uk/latest-news-blog/>

The Silk River India Walk began on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 2017, jointly with the Murshidabad Heritage Festival at the historic location of Azimganj. The next two days saw an international community gathering together to discover and explore the rich heritage of the region through walks, seminars and cultural programmes.

The journey from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Dec was an opportunity for artistic exchange using Silk River as a case study. The salon on 8<sup>th</sup> was led by Ali Pretty, artistic director Silk River, independent cultural producer Elizabeth Lynch, Korak Ghosh, artistic director Silk River India and Ruchira Das Silk River India project director. Indian artists were invited to this exchange with 15 visiting artists from the UK, as they traveled from Krishnanagar to Chandannagar.

**Ali Pretty, Kinetika's Artistic Director** said: "It was my first visit to India in 1984 that inspired me to work in the arts, using them as a tool for social change and community development. Silk



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River builds on my experience over the last 30 years, bringing together communities from the UK and India for a meaningful exchange of stories and ideas. By sharing and celebrating the similar histories and narratives between the River Thames and India's Hooghly River, the Silk River Project encourages the celebration of rich local history, and engages communities to take part in re-imagining the river."

**Korak Ghosh, Silk River India Walk Director** said "Silk River is to me 'a tale' of two cities. Many set aside a particular time every year to remember their mutual interdependence with their river. London, among other festivities has a month-long celebration with Totally Thames. I want the same for Kolkata, and my involvement with this unique event, Silk River, gives me an opportunity to remember our Hooghly. We are sure that this will go a long way in making people conscious of the river, its importance and its heritage. Hopefully, it will also help us all to reinterpret and understand why we need to preserve this special bond.

**Ruchira Das, Artistic Director, ThinkArts** said "Silk River has provided all of us at ThinkArts, an opportunity to engage with children, work with artists, and discover stories of our heritage – each of these being elements of our core philosophy. We have particularly enjoyed working with school students along the river. Silk River has enabled them to rediscover their own town, heritage, culture and their connection to the river, they are eager to share their responses with people during the walk in December."

**Alan Gemmell, Director British Council India** said: "Silk River has threaded communities and craftsmanship along the rivers Hooghly and the Thames, creating curiosity about the rivers, the people and their culture – achieving exactly what the Year of Culture between UK and India sets out to do. The project connects, inspires and celebrates the two countries in a unique way and I am certain the India Walks in December will be remembered as a milestone in the city's cultural calendar.

### About Kinetika [www.kinetikaonline.co.uk](http://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](http://www.britishcouncil.in)

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