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Vel Vel

Visual and Sound Cultures of Thaipusam in Singapore

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- ***Vel Vel*** is a richly illustrated exploration of how art, music, ritual, and community knowledge come together through the living tradition of kavadi practice, offering a dynamic portrait of Thaipusam in Singapore
- The first comprehensive visual and sound documentation of Thaipusam's kavadi culture in Singapore, developed through five years of interdisciplinary research by artist collective SISTRUM
- Features an extensive body of original photography, detailed illustrations, visual mappings, and documentation of kavadi structures, alongside research into the distinctive soundscapes and musical traditions of the procession
- Developed in close collaboration with more than 20 members of Singapore's Thaipusam community, includes interviews with kavadi makers, bearers, piercers, and musicians, foregrounding knowledge transmitted through practice and across generations
- Examines Singapore's Thaipusam tradition as a distinctive and continually evolving expression of Tamil Hindu culture, shaped by its particular social, cultural, and urban context
- Bridges art and design publishing, cultural heritage, music, ethnography, and community knowledge, making it relevant to both specialist and general audiences internationally and in Singapore
- A significant resource for designers, artists, musicians, curators, museum and heritage professionals, researchers, educators, Tamil communities and diaspora, and readers interested in South and Southeast Asian culture
- Positions Thaipusam as a living and evolving form of intangible cultural heritage, demonstrating how creative practices sustain, transmit, and continually reshape cultural knowledge.

Vel Vel: Visual and Sound Cultures of Thaipusam in Singapore offers an immersive exploration of the craft, music, and lived practices surrounding one of Singapore's most distinctive cultural festivals. At its centre is the kavadi practice, the elaborate ceremony of carrying offerings in honour of the Hindu deity Murugan. Drawing on five years of interdisciplinary research and close collaboration with the community members who participate in the procession, ***Vel Vel*** traces how kavadi are imagined, made, carried, and accompanied by music, revealing a rich body of artistic and cultural knowledge transmitted and reinterpreted across generations.

Combining original photography and detailed illustrations with visual mapping, field recordings, interviews, archival research, and documentation of kavadi structures, the book approaches Thaipusam as both visual and sonic culture. Conversations with makers, bearers, piercers, and musicians illuminate the skills, stories, creative processes, and embodied knowledge behind the procession. Bringing together design research, ethnography, and community knowledge, ***Vel Vel*** also examines how the procession transforms public space, temporarily creating a sacred corridor through Singapore's contemporary urban landscape. It presents Thaipusam as a dynamic form of intangible cultural heritage, where ritual, community, and city intersect, and a living tradition that continues to evolve while sustaining and reshaping Tamil Hindu diasporic culture, memory, and identity.

Laura Miotto is an exhibition designer and Associate Professor at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. With 20 years of experience, her work spans museums, exhibitions and cultural spaces, including the Venice Biennale, the National Museum of Singapore, and the Borneo Cultures Museum. She currently directs NTU's MA Programme in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practices. **Ramesh Krishnan** is a sound designer, music creative, and DJ based in Singapore. His work moves across exhibitions, theatre, and music festivals, combining electronic sound and field recording. Projects include the Indian Heritage Centre and Singapore Writers Festival. He founded Meshtrax, Tropika and co-founded Sistrum. **Lim Shu Min** is a designer, researcher, and educator. She specialises in projects about culture and heritage, including exhibitions for Asian Civilisations Museum and Borneo Cultures Museum. A graduate of Rhode Island School of Design, she teaches at University of the Arts Singapore.







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