



s.c.s

We are made of salt and memory.
Our bodies hold the ocean's echo ; its rhythms, its ruptures, its grief.

S.O.S is not a slogan. It is a signal.
A distress call from coral reefs turned bone white, from waters thick with oil and plastic.
But it is also a call-in.
To gather. To feel. To make. To remember that the ocean's story is also our own.

I do not create garments. I create vessels of witnessing.
Each thread a filament of resistance. Each stitch a ritual of care.
I work with what is discarded ; waste textiles, bleach, diesel scent ; not to beautify destruction, but to hold it close.
To confront it. To transform it.

This project lives in the space between science and spirit, data and desire.
I collaborate with marine biologists, sound artists, and scent engineers not for spectacle, but for synthesis.
Together, we ask:
What does climate grief smell like?
How does a dying reef feel?
Can a canvas carry a story that policy cannot?

In workshops across continents, I invite others to co-create not as designers, but as stewards.
We touch the materials.
We speak the unspeakable.
We practice staying with the trouble.

This is not an another campaign.
It is a ceremony.
A collective act of remembrance.
An offering to the waters that raised us,
and a promise to protect what still breathes beneath the surface.

We are the ocean.
And the ocean lives within us.

Ru



Lineage

**S.O.S
Artivism
Future**

2021 - May

xpress pearl Disaster

an environmental catastrophe off Sri Lanka's coast, releasing hazardous chemicals and plastic pellets that devastated marine ecosystems and local livelihoods.

2022 - June

kāli - Resurgence

Redress Design Awards runner-up collection, draws attention to the need for ocean conservation through sustainable fashion.

2023 - April

S.O.S - Artist-In-Residence

European Marine Board Artist in Residence, merges art, fashion, and marine science to spotlight urgent ocean conservation issues.

2024 - Nov

S.O.S - Community Interactive

workshops foster ocean literacy, bridging creative design with environmental advocacy in a hands-on, communal

2024 - Nov

S.O.S - Pilot Exhibit

The crossroads of ocean advocacy and creative innovation, showing how a single multisensory installation, weaving scent, sound, and tactile experiences, can inspire entire communities to

2025 - July

S.O.S - EXPO

13-14 June 2025

European Youth Event (EYE)

European Parliament, Strasbourg

When: 13-14 June 2025

Activity: Interactive workshop with 100-150 participants (including MEPs) to create a "Unity Sail" for ocean activism, later used on an expedition vessel.

29 April - 2 May 2025

RCA SustainLAB x S.O.S.

Exhibition

Hangar Gallery, RCA
Battersea Campus

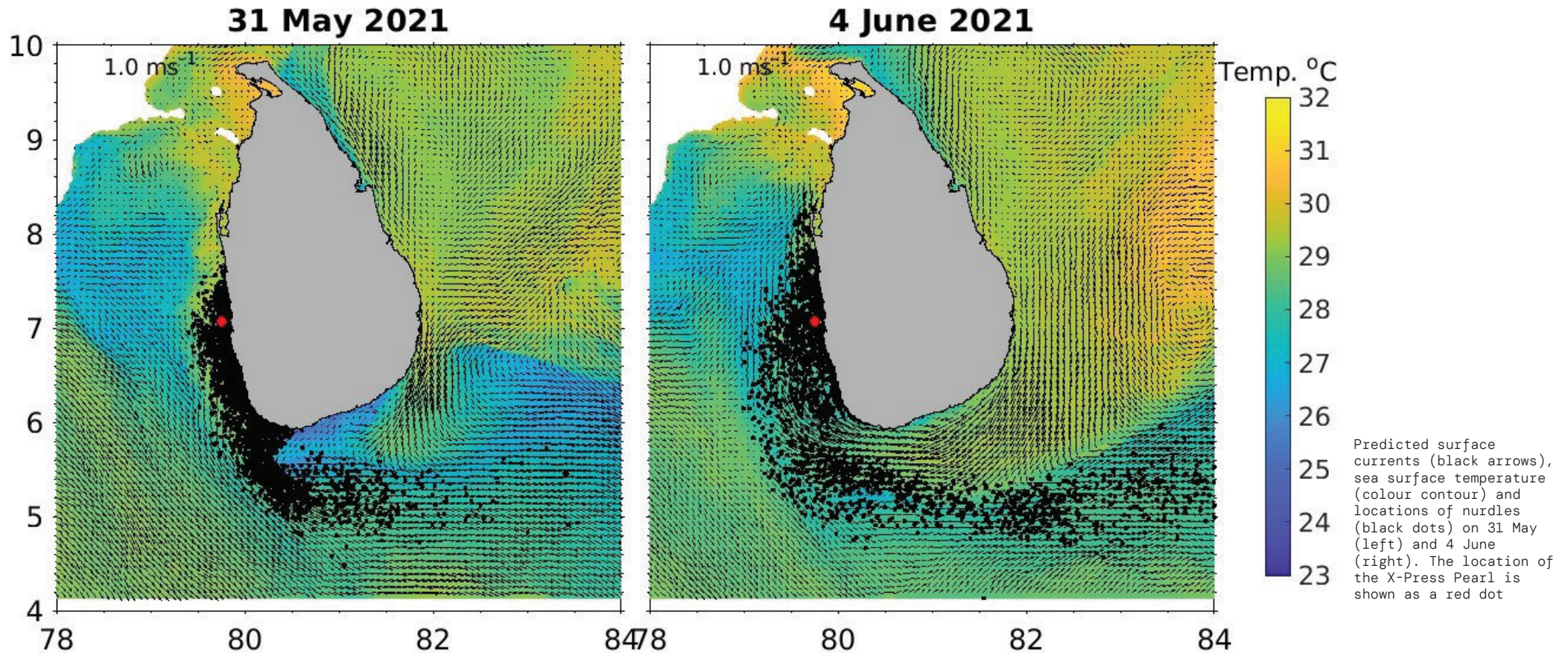
26 April 2025

S.O.S -Cyanotype Exhibition & Workshop
SEA Junction, Bangkok, Thailand

1 - 13 June 2025

UN Ocean Decade Pavilion (UNOC)

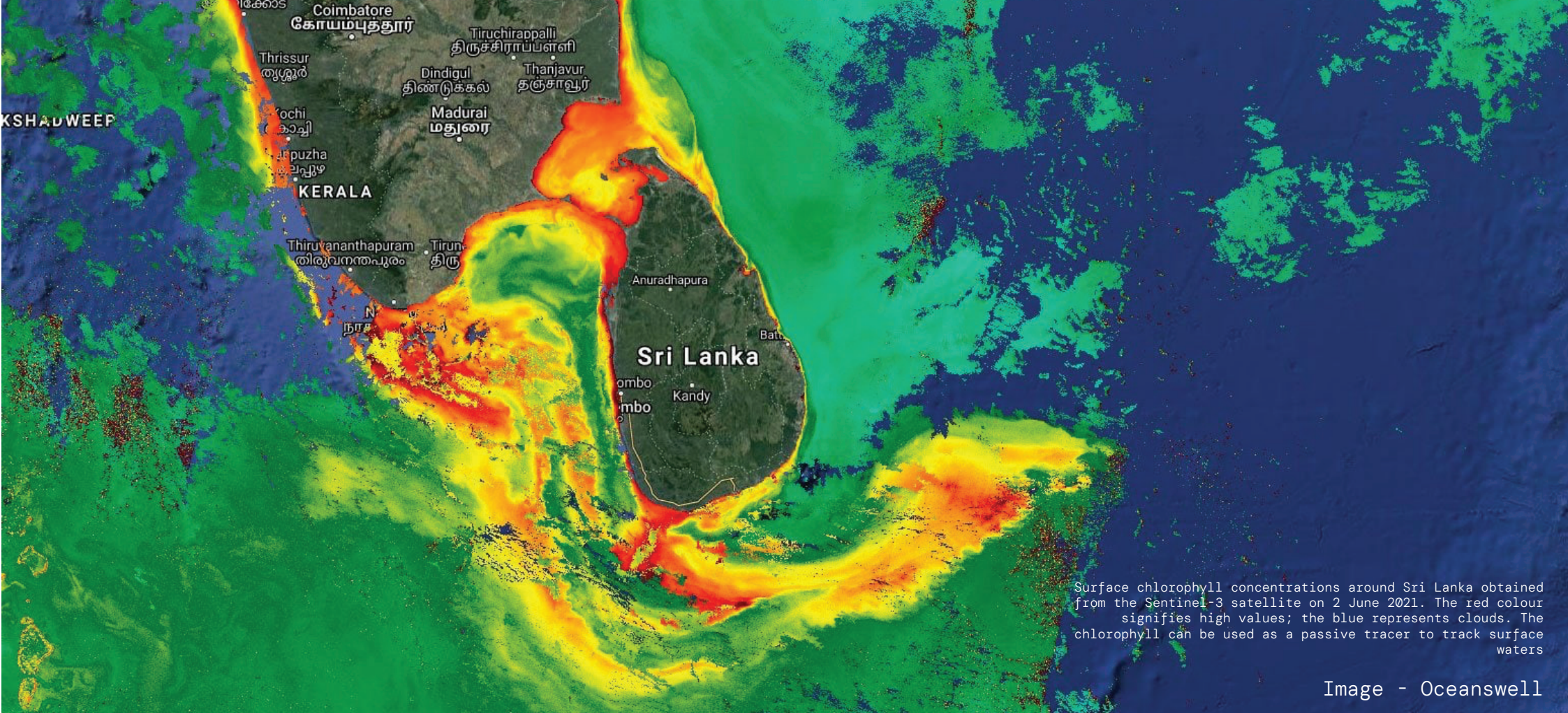
Exhibition showcasing
S.O.S. initiatives



The S.O.S - Save Our Seas project began not in a studio, but in the smouldering wake of catastrophe.

In May 2021, the X-Press Pearl cargo ship caught fire and sank off the western coast of Sri Lanka my home. The sea turned toxic with nitric acid and nurdles. Beaches were blanketed in plastic pellets, and fisherfolk lost not only their livelihoods but their living kin in the water. I remember the air choking with the scent of melted oil and burnt foam. I remember not knowing what to say, only what I felt: helplessness, rage, and a deep ancestral ache.

This moment wasn't just environmental. It was existential. It forced me to confront how deeply intertwined my identity was with the sea.



As a Sri Lankan, I come from an island long marked by oceanic trade, colonial extractions, and fragile coral borders. Now, I live on another island the UK where my fashion education continues, but where the ocean often feels distant, abstract. S.O.S is my attempt to stitch those islands back together. To make the sea visible again. To stay with its trouble across geography, across species, across grief.

I draw deeply from Donna Haraway's concept of the Chthulucene a world shaped by layered times and entangled beings. Rather than turning away from ecological collapse, she urges us to sit with it, listen to it, and imagine with rather than extract from. This has shaped every part of my practice: from the use of marine waste and scent in my garments, to the communal workshops where we reimagine plastic as a vessel of protest, not just pollution.

The ocean is not just the backdrop to this project—it is a protagonist. A witness. A wounded elder. And in returning to it through craft, scent, sound, and science, I ask others to do the same.

My research for S.O.S - Save Our Seas began with a single rupture the X-Press Pearl maritime disaster off the coast of Sri Lanka. But from that moment of chemical spill and plastic fallout, the project has widened into a layered inquiry: historical, ecological, material, and emotional.

At its core, this is a project about how we relate to the ocean not as scenery, but as kin. It asks not only what happened, but why it continues to happen, and how design might intervene at the level of feeling, memory, and collective responsibility.



Image - Pulitzer Center



kæli : resurgence



2022 - June
 kæli - Resurgence
 Redress Design Awards runner-up
 collection, draws attention to the
 need for ocean conservation
 through sustainable fashion.



kæli : resurgence



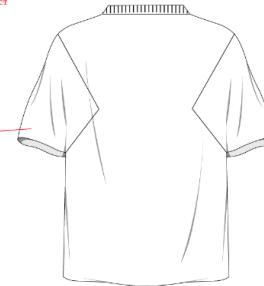
LOOK 3



POSTERS CREATING
AWARENESS WILL BE
SCREEN PRINTED
WITH LEFTOVER INK
FROM PRINTING PROCESS
- COLOUR WILL CHANGE
ACCORDING TO THE
AVAILABLE COLOUR

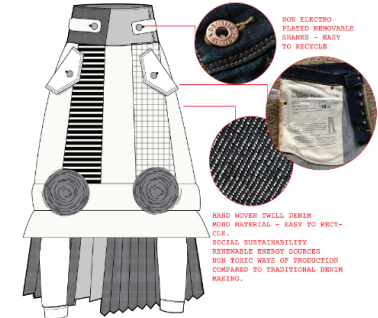


SAMPLED YARDAGE
- RECYCLED COTTON
FROM A PREVIOUS
PROJECT



COMPOSITION : 100% RECYCLED COTTON
WASH: SOFTENER & DRYER
SHRINKAGE : N/A +/-
YARN STRUCTURE: KNIT SINGLE JERSEY
THREAD : COTTON

RECYCLED COTTON LOGO T-SHIRT



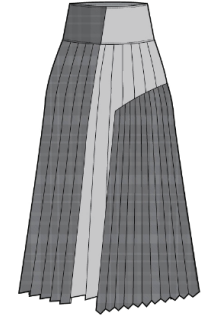
HOT ELECTRO
PLATED RENEWABLE
SHARKS - EASY
TO RECYCLE



HARD WOVEN TWILL DENIM
WORN MATERIAL - EASY TO RECY-
CLE
SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES
HOW TO RECYCLE WAYS OF PRODUCTION
COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL DENIM
MAKING.



FULLY DECONSTRUCTED JACKET
INTO A SKIRT - UP-CYCLING
WORN MATERIAL-RECYCLABLE



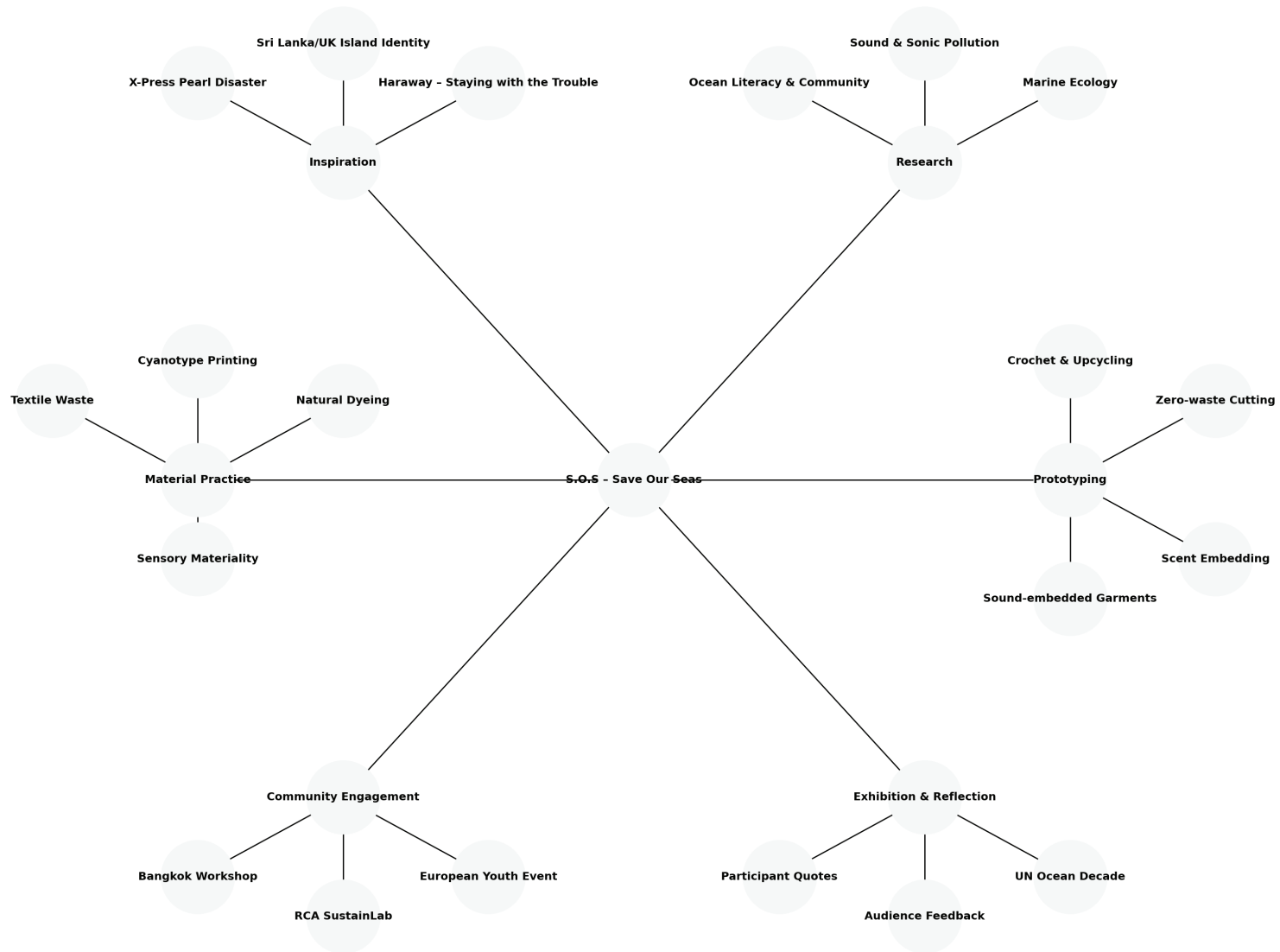
COMPOSITION : 100% COTTON
WASH: SOFTENER & DRYER
SHRINKAGE : 12% +/-
YARN STRUCTURE: TWILL 3/1
THREAD : LYOCCELL

DECONSTRUCTED DENIM/HANDLOOM SKIRT

2022 - June
kæli - Resurgence

Redress Design Awards runner-up collection, draws attention to the need for ocean conservation through sustainable fashion.

Mind map



Key Research Questions answered through the project

How can multisensory fashion practices make marine degradation visible & tangible to everyday audiences?

What forms of material storytelling can translate ecological data into emotional knowledge?

Can craft, sound, and scent function as modes of protest or mourning in the Anthropocene?

What are the shared colonial legacies between island nations like Sri Lanka and Britain in terms of ecological extraction, waste, and trade?

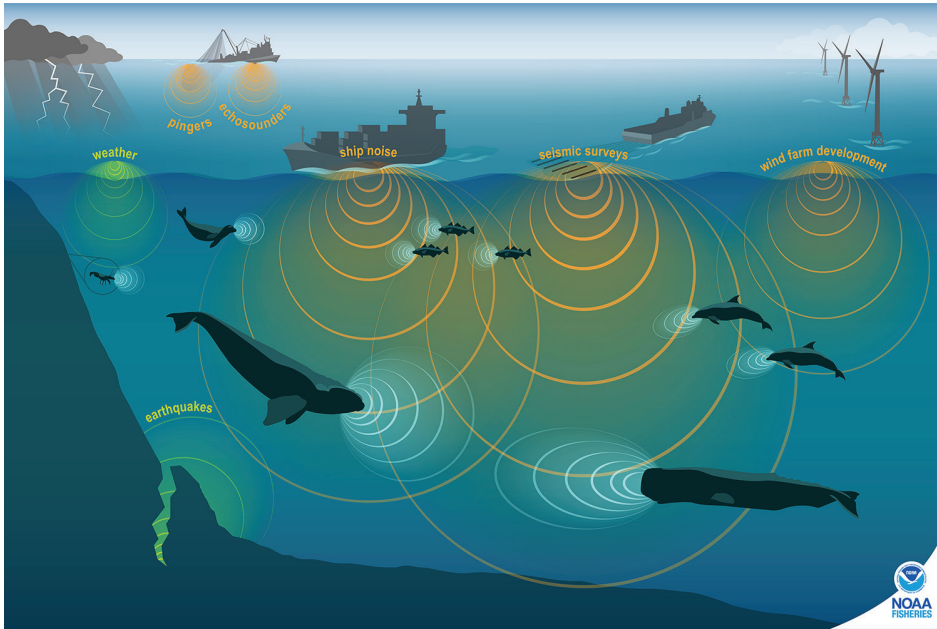
How might participatory workshops foster ocean literacy while deconstructing the myth of human separation from nature?



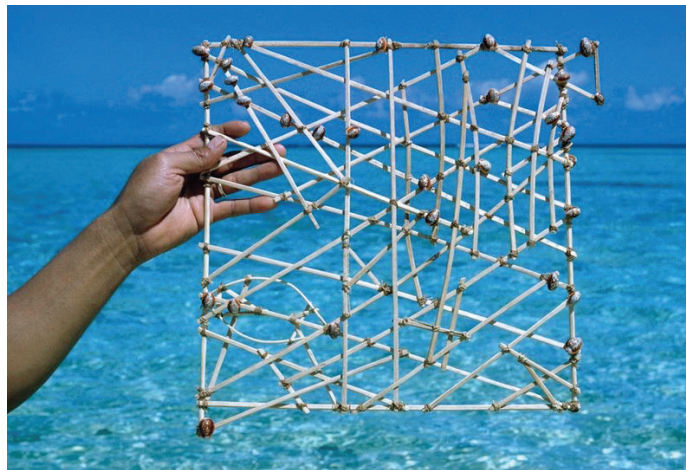
Material Memory - Sourcing and reworking marine waste (e.g., plastic bottles, oil-stained textiles) into garments using cyanotype, upcycling, crochet, and traditional pattern-cutting.



Marine Science & Sound Collaboration with marine biologists and sound artists to translate coral bleaching, sonar disturbance, and species loss into visual and sonic layers..



Sound pollution graph by NOAA



Marshallese shell map of islands



Sound barrier - Textile created with the inspiration from the indigenous map and scientific data of cetacean entrapment.

The Sounds of Silence: Regime Shifts Impoverish Marine Soundscapes
Tullio Rossi, Sean D. Connell, Ivan Nagelkerken Springer Netherlands

The Impacts of Anthropogenic Ocean Noise on Cetaceans and Implications for Management
L.S. Weilgart
National Research Council of Canada

Passive Acoustic Monitoring of Cetaceans
Walter M. X. Zimmer

Community Engagement - Facilitating hands-on workshops across Asia and Europe that bridge art and advocacy, using fashion to localise global issues.



Seachange Workshop - Bangkok Arts & Cultural Center



Seachange Workshop - Bangkok Arts & Cultural Center

Scent as Protest - Working with scent engineers to contrast "clean ocean" and "polluted harbour" profiles-used in garments and installations to evoke visceral response..



Spiritual and Mythic Oceanic Narratives - Referencing ocean deities, rituals, and ecological grief from South Asian folklore to enrich symbolic content..



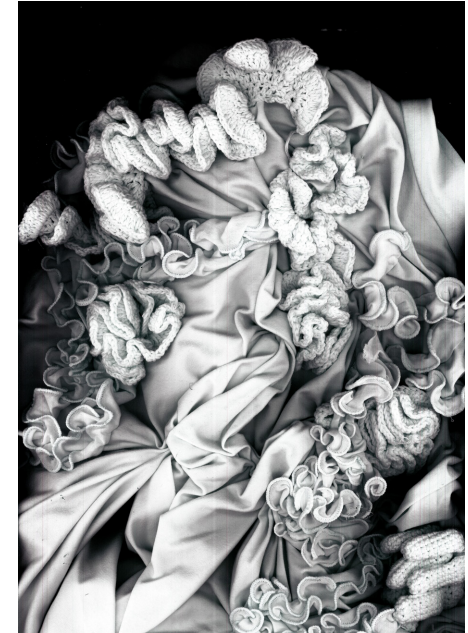
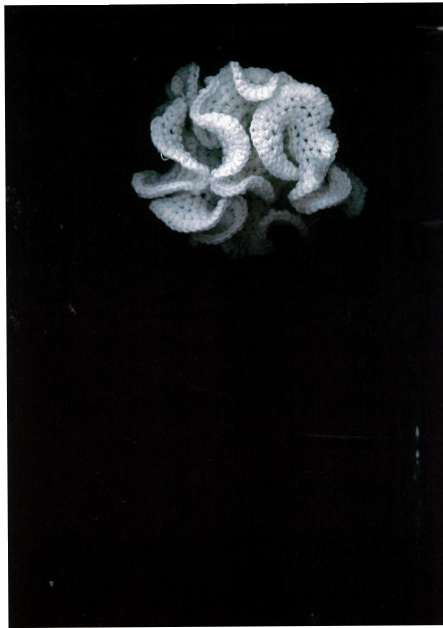
Upulvan (Sinhala:උපුල්වන් දෙවියෝ Pali: Uppalavanna; Sanskrit: Utpalavarna), also known as Vishnu (Vishnu deviyo) is a guardian deity (Pali: Khettapala; Sanskrit: Kshetrapala) of Sri Lanka



Ecology, Philosophy, and Oceanic Relationality

My philosophical and ecological grounding for S.O.S - Save Our Seas begins with Haraway (2016), whose work *Staying with the Trouble* deeply informs the project's conceptual direction. Her idea of the Chthulucene and the call to "make kin" with the more-than-human world serves as a foundation for my use of craft as a relational, slow, and grieving practice. This is complemented by regional ecological references such as Debelius (1999), whose *Indian Ocean Reef Guide* provided a rich visual taxonomy of coral reef species across South Asia and East Africa. These references shaped both my material choices and symbolic embroidery motifs. to this project—it is a protagonist. A witness. A wounded elder. And in returning to it through craft, scent, sound, and science, I ask others to do the same.





Scanned garment

Envision a clothing which shifts from bright reef colours, such as lime green, coral pink, and tea, to a stark white at the hem. The vibrant, dynamic tapestry of coral is embodied by each embroidered design, which starts off lush and detailed. The threads get looser and lose colour as the eye moves below, simulating the bleaching catastrophe that corals go through when water temperatures increase and symbiotic algae are evicted. The midsection's delicately woven netting suggests that sea life is suffocated by plastic detritus and microplastics. The thin, tattered fabric at the edge of the garment becomes a silent, moving reminder of reefs lost to warmer seas, begging for our shared protection.



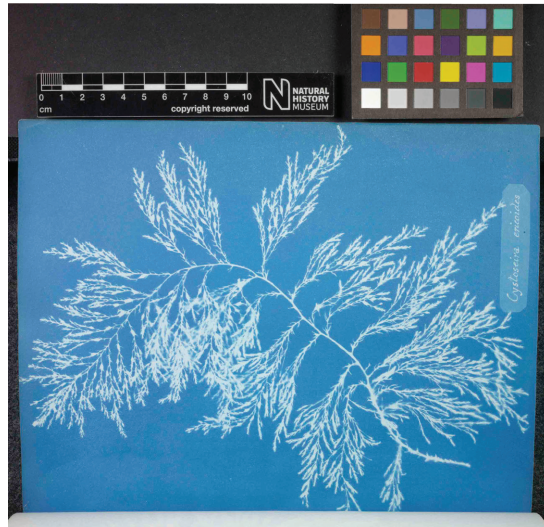
Oilspill textile development

Kirtisinghe's (1978) *Sea Shells of Sri Lanka* allowed me to revisit my childhood connection to the sea, weaving cultural memory into sculptural forms. Similarly, Anderson (1996) offered insights into common reef fish species in Sri Lanka, grounding my speculative design narratives in lived marine ecology. Alford, Peterson, and Green (2015), in their edited volume on oil spill disasters, provided a sobering analysis of ecological trauma—offering a technical framework for understanding the long-term effects of the X-Press Pearl incident that inspired this project.



Acoustic ocean pollution scanned & distorted collage

The acoustic dimension of S.O.S was strongly influenced by Rossi, Connell, and Nagelkerken (2017), whose article The sounds of silence explores how ecosystem collapse impoverishes marine soundscapes. This insight shaped the structure of my underwater sound compositions. Complementing this, Weilgart (2007) offered a more focused study on anthropogenic ocean noise, particularly its impact on cetaceans—providing scientific grounding for the use of sonar and ship acoustics in my installations. Zimmer (2011) provided practical knowledge on passive acoustic monitoring, helping me understand how marine scientists record and interpret underwater environments.



The visual methodology of S.O.S was shaped by Atkins (1843-1853), whose *Photographs of British Algae* is considered the first book to use photography for scientific documentation. I adapted her cyanotype method to print marine waste—specifically plastic bottles—reframing pollution as a new kind of specimen. This gesture is echoed in the poetic language of Duncan (1834), whose *Mariner's Chronicle* chronicled historical sea disasters. His dramatic, archival tone helped frame my narrative approach, turning catastrophe into a form of mourning through textile storytelling.

Closer to home, Hewavisenthi's (1994) bibliography on marine turtles of Sri Lanka served as a research tool connecting the global ocean crisis to specific Sri Lankan conservation efforts—underscoring the geographic and cultural specificity of this project's roots.



Queen Alexandra's House London - Spring Showcase

Materiality is at the heart of S.O.S - Save Our Seas not just as a visual language, but as a philosophy of entanglement. Every fibre, stain, and crack in my work speaks to the ocean's memory: what it has absorbed, what it has lost, and what it still carries.

I begin with what has been discarded. Reclaimed textiles—factory off-cuts, collecting beach waste; objects in exhile.



Beach waste - Pothuvil Beach Sri Lanka (near my home)



Beach waste - Pattaya Beach Thailand (Tourist destination)



Seachange Workshop - Bangkok Arts & Cultural Center

A key process in this project has been the use of cyanotype printing, inspired by Anna Atkins. I collect marine debris such as plastic bottles, nets, and dead seagrass, and use them as stencils in sun-exposed prints. The resulting Prussian blue images function like ecological x-rays—imprints of a world in crisis.

Other techniques include zero-waste pattern cutting, crochet inspired by bleached coral forms, ruffling to mimic ocean currents, and patchworking with industrial waste.





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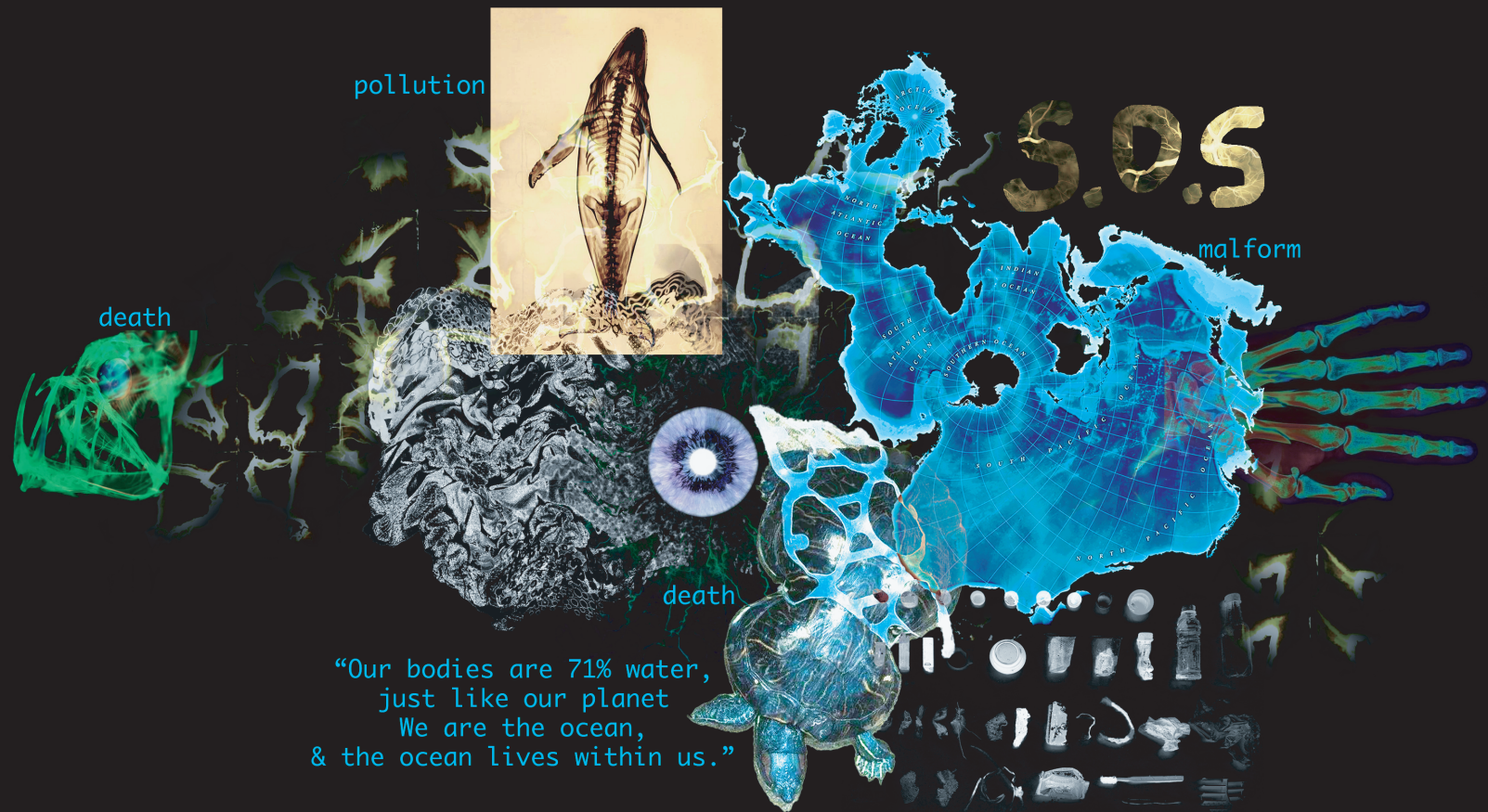
To further amplify the sensory dimensions, I've experimented with infusing textiles with scent distilled ocean profiles ranging from fresh coastal algae to the acrid tones of oil-contaminated harbours. Materials are also chosen based on their reaction to environmental exposure: how they bleach, stain, crack, or erode with salt, heat, and time.

This research is tactile, speculative, and open-ended. It is not just about how things look, but how they feel, how they smell, and how they decay. In this way, each material becomes a co-author in the storytelling process a collaborator in staying with the trouble. Connecting the global ocean crisis to specific Sri Lankan conservation efforts—underscoring the geographic and cultural specificity of this project's roots.

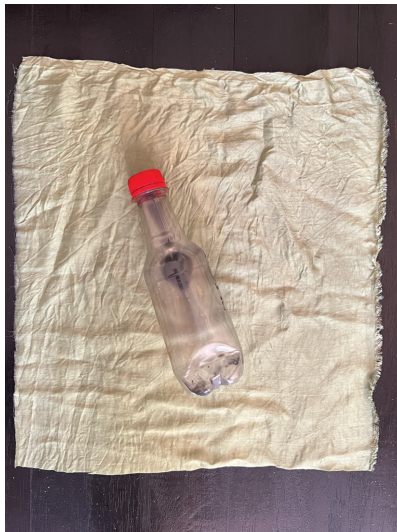
RCA EXPO - With IFF programme Lead adding scent into the wearable pollution garment.

Visual Moodboard

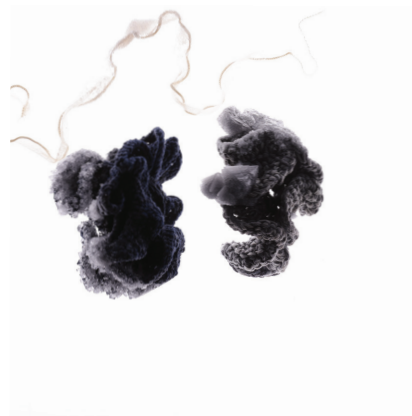
Image collection: reefs, bleached coral, archival maps, plastic waste.



Textile Experiments (1)
Cyanotype trials with marine objects and waste.



Textile Experiments (2)
Crystal / Cotton / Silk / Ceramic / Porcelain / Glass /
Leather/Linen/ Tule / Wool / Marino



Garment Development (1)

From sketch to prototype: pollution / coral bleaching-inspired garments.



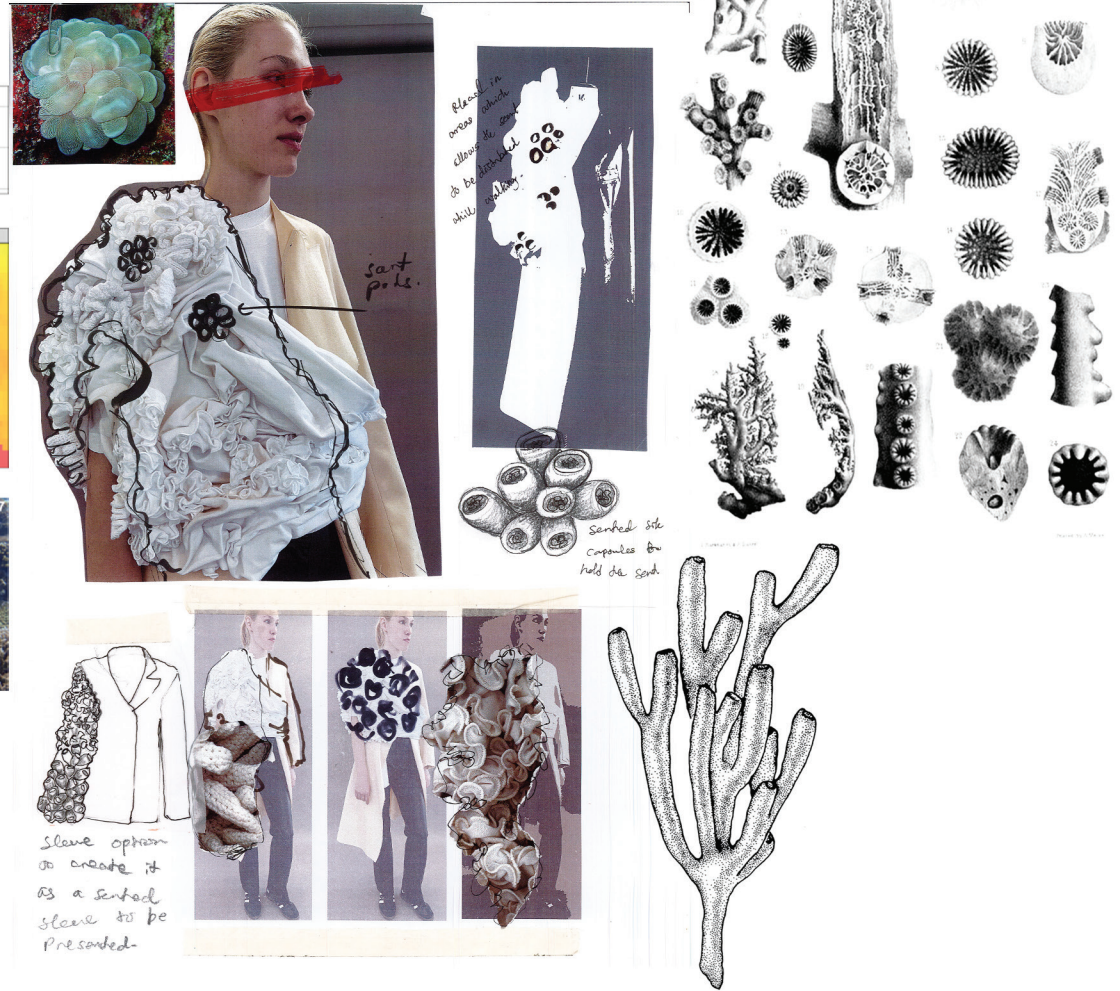
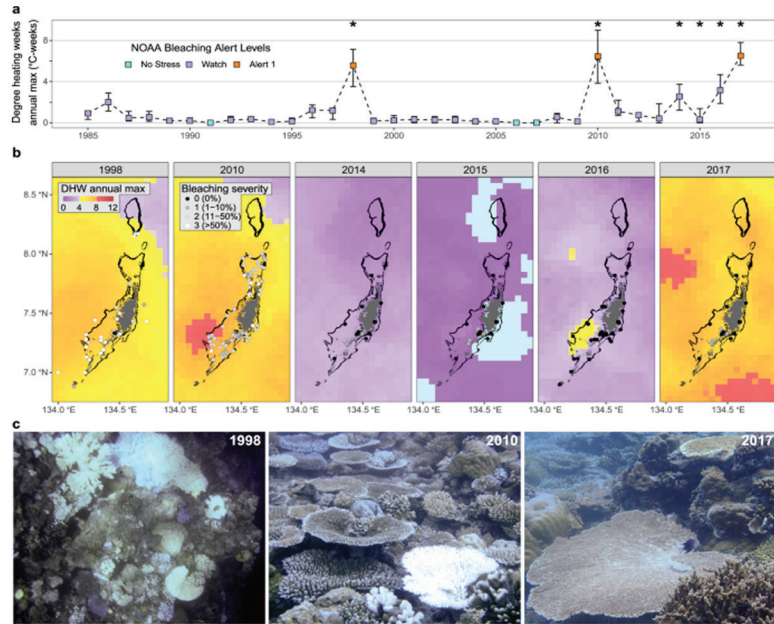
Garment Development (1)

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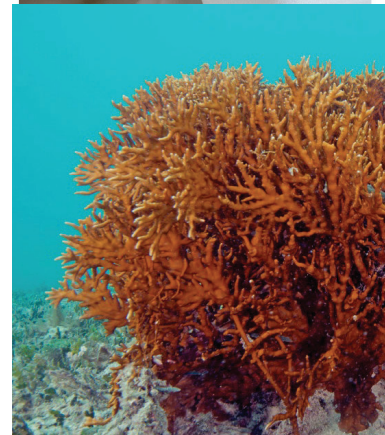
Inspired by scientific data of increase in bleaching annual events

Inspired by scientific data of increase in bleaching annual events



Garment Development (2)

Inspired by scientific data of increase in bleaching annual events



Garment Development & scent development
Created with IFF collaboration - Satire take on fashion & pollution



EAU DE POLLUTION

Fragrance of the Anthropocene

INGREDIENTS

(Based on estimated composition of marine plastic pollution)

Fishing Gear (nets, lines, ropes—mostly nylon & HDPE)—	46%
Packaging (bags, wrappers, bottles, containers—LDPE, PET, PP)	
Microplastics (from cosmetics, fibres, tyre wear)	11%
Cigarette Filters (cellulose acetate)	9%
Household Plastics (toys, utensils, electronics casings)	5%
Polystyrene (disposable cups, foam packaging)	4%
Other Industrial Plastics & Residues	8%

TOP NOTES: *Sea breeze tainted with petrochemical sweetness*

HEART NOTES: *Cracked packaging, synthetic florals, sunscreen*

BASE NOTES: *Fossil fuels, lost nets, and slow decay*

WARNING: This fragrance contains no natural ingredients.

Persistent. Bioaccumulative. Non-biodegradable.

Expected shelf life: 400–1,000 years

DISTILLED BY HUMANITY™

BOTTLED BY THE OCEAN

Not safe for marine ecosystems.

Sensing the Sea: Designing Participatory Encounters

The workshops within S.O.S - Save Our Seas are not just skill-sharing sessions. They are designed as relational ecosystems—spaces where people, materials, stories, and scientific facts are entangled. My methodology is influenced by Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which rejects the idea of isolated actors (like “the artist” or “the audience”) and instead maps networks of agency across humans and non-humans alike. In this framework, plastic bottles, coral fragments, scent molecules, and even ambient sound all become active participants in the co-creation process.

The materials used in these workshops are not neutral they are witnesses. I source beach waste collected from coastal clean-ups, including plastic fragments, fishing nets, and synthetic textile scraps. These discarded items, once adrift in the ocean, become tools for storytelling. Alongside them, I introduce remnants from the fashion industry—factory off-cuts, damaged samples, and worn garments—inviting participants to upcycle them into something new. This act of reworking serves two purposes: it raises awareness of circular fashion systems, and it critiques the fashion industry’s role in the crisis.

Fast fashion, often shipped across oceans on cargo vessels, is a hidden contributor to marine degradation not only through textile pollution, but through the fossil fuels and waste generated in transit. In response, I use fashion not just as medium, but as message a tactile, wearable form of advocacy. Participants learn that changing a hem or repairing a tear is not just an act of sustainability it’s an act of resistance. A refusal to let clothing become ocean waste. A reminder that what we wear is connected to what we consume & what we protect.

Workshops begin with sensory disruption. Participants are immersed in environments infused with the scent of diesel-soaked harbours or the soundscape of underwater sonar, shipping noise, and distant whale calls. This intentional overload sets the tone: the ocean is not silent, and neither is its grief. Rather than being told about environmental collapse, participants are sensually pulled into it.





Zero waste workshop - Sri Lanka



From there, the session flows through phases of response, reflection, and reimagining:

1. Response Phase

Participants are asked to respond instinctively through drawing, writing, or simply describing what they feel after exposure to the sound/scent environment. This stage breaks the surface between the rational and emotional.

2. Material Engagement Phase

Using waste materials such as discarded fabric, single-use plastic, and thread, participants are invited to co-create textile artefacts that reflect their emotional or ecological response. No sewing experience is needed—simple gestures like knotting, wrapping, or cutting become symbolic acts of resistance or repair.

3. Story-Mapping & Conversation

Participants map their creations onto a shared “Ocean Table,” where personal stories and scientific facts are interwoven. This becomes a moment of community storytelling and collective processing, often revealing unexpected parallels between distant geographies and local experiences.

4. Collective Assembly

The final act is co-constructing a larger shared piece (e.g., a sail, banner, coral net), later exhibited as part of the S.O.S installation. This is not an outcome-driven product, but a gesture of unity—material evidence of many small hands responding to one vast grief.

Throughout each workshop, I act not as a leader but as a facilitator of relations—between bodies, between elements, between memories. These encounters are slow, sensory, and open-ended. They leave room for both grief and imagination.





Bangkok Workshop
SEA Junction event highlights: cyanotype printing & storytelling.



Community Reflections

Quotes and insights from participants.

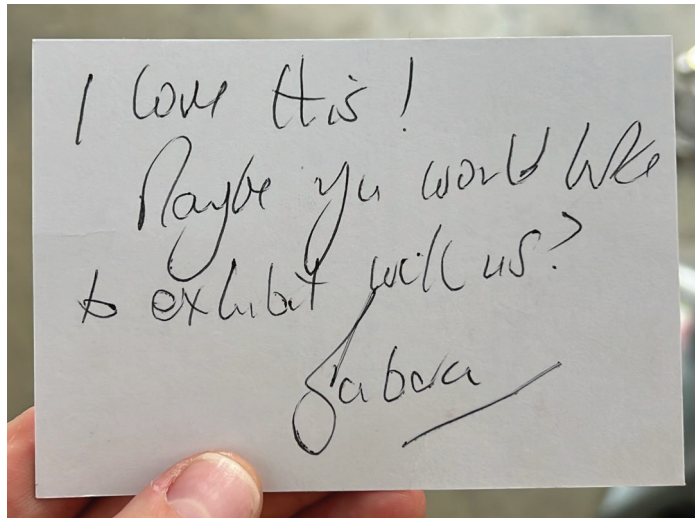


The British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka remarked that the combination of smell, sound, and tactile experiences "Polluted smell was particularly horrendous and this definitely helped to put things in perspective" on ocean conservation.



Dr. Asha De Vos - "Art is a wonderful tool that can help us make science more accessible. The more accessible it is, the more people will understand how the world functions and become custodians for our ocean and planet."

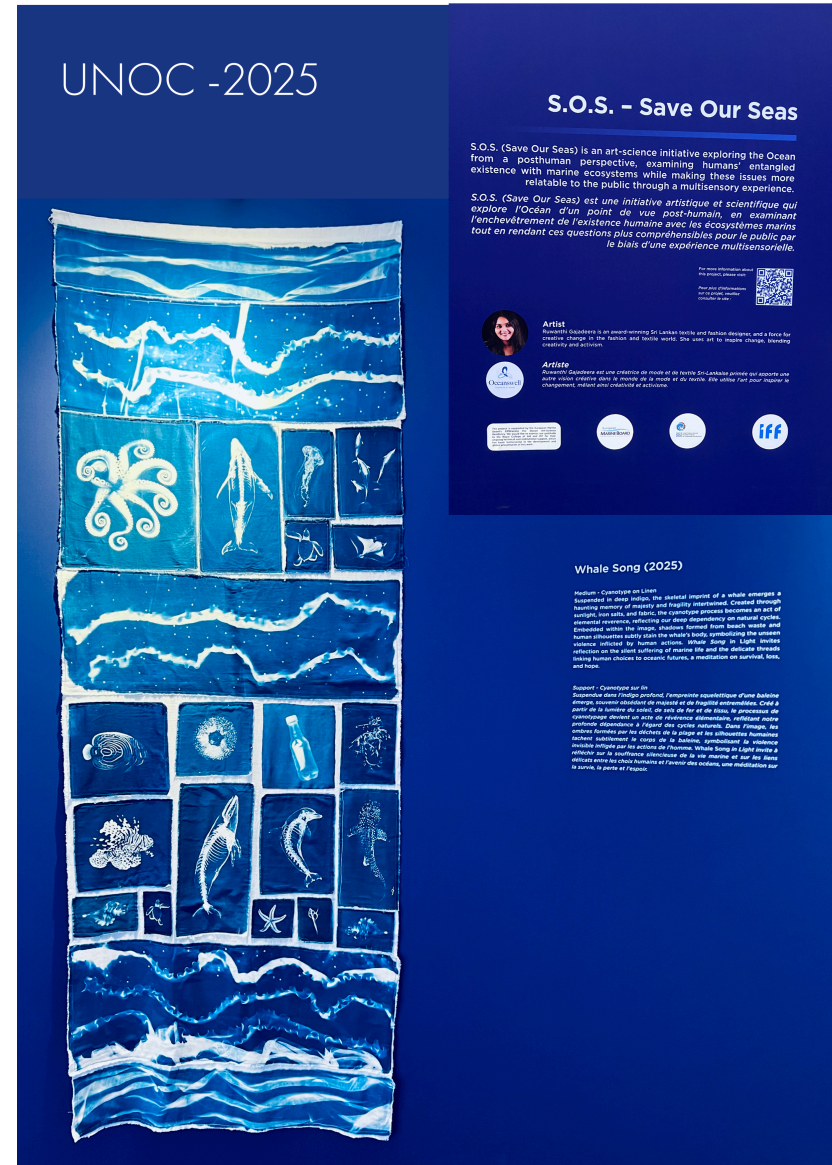
RCA SustainLab Showcase



Personal message from Barbara Candler



A photograph of two women standing in front of a large, curved blue wall. The wall features the text 'European Pavilion' in a smaller font above the large, stylized words 'Digital Ocean'. Below this, it says 'Nice | France' and '2 - 13 JUNE 2025'. The woman on the left is wearing a white polo shirt and light-colored trousers, while the woman on the right is wearing a black sleeveless top and black trousers. They are both smiling. The background shows a large, arched glass and steel structure, likely part of a convention center or exhibition hall.



European Youth Event(EYE) European Parliament - Stasbourg, France
Workshop documentation, Unity Sail images, and interactions with MEPs.



European Parliament Member - Thomas Bajada
(General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean)



Enduring Networks and Collaborations

Multiple long-term interdisciplinary partnerships have been forged, including:

Ongoing collaboration with Dr. Asha de Vos on ocean literacy and public engagement strategies.

Development of ocean conservation-themed material artifacts with Flora McLean (millinery), Zixuan Zhang (ceramics), and Angela Thwaites (glass).

Educational initiatives with Wilcock Nursery targeting early childhood sustainability education.

Regional collaboration with SEA Junction in Bangkok to foster transnational ocean literacy.

Institutional partnerships with NEMO, Planet Reimagined, the UN Ocean Decade, and the EU Parliament, ensuring global amplification.

Technical innovations with IFF (olfactory elements) and Joe Hurts (sound engineering).

Integration of S.O.S methodologies into RCA's Grand Challenge programme, embedding interdisciplinary ocean conservation education.

These relationships have already sparked follow-up exhibitions, workshops, and youth-led activism platforms.

Funding, Practice, and Policy Influence

While direct funding or policy changes are long-term goals, immediate shifts are visible:

Invitations to exhibit and workshop at the EU Parliament's European Youth Event.

Endorsement and feature by UN Ocean Conference Digital Pavillion.

Growing interest among fashion designers and RCA departments to institutionalize sustainability within the curriculum and design practices.

Anecdotal evidence of increased environmental commitment among participants.

A Hungarian EU delegate at the exhibition poignantly stated, "Smelling the clean ocean scent transported me back to my childhood." Such emotional reactivations exemplify the project's power to rekindle lost relationships between humans and oceans, a critical precondition for fostering stewardship and transformative action.

Conclusion



Conclusion

S.O.S - Save Our Seas reimagined ocean conservation through a political ecology and material activism lens, making the unseen violences against the ocean visible, tangible, and emotionally undeniable. By strengthening the human-ocean relationship through sensory immersion, emotional storytelling, and community-building, the project transcended traditional environmental messaging, laying fertile ground for sustained behavioral, institutional, and systemic change.

This initiative not only highlighted the critical need for transdisciplinary collaboration between science and art but also demonstrated the transformative power of material engagement in reshaping public attitudes towards sustainability. Through the use of sustainable materials, multisensory exhibits, and participatory workshops, S.O.S fostered an emotional reconnection between humans and the marine world – a connection that is essential for long-term ocean stewardship.

Looking forward, S.O.S - Save Our Seas will proactively seek to expand its reach into new geographical regions. Discussions are underway to introduce the project to Hong Kong, Japan, and India, building regional dialogues on ocean literacy. Additionally, efforts will focus on developing partnerships in Africa and Latin America – regions whose marine ecosystems are critically important yet often underrepresented in global ocean advocacy conversations. By embracing these new collaborations, S.O.S aims to cultivate a truly global movement of artistic activism for ocean conservation.

Finally, with deep appreciation, S.O.S recognises the European Marine Board's visionary support through the EMBracing the Ocean residency. Their commitment to fostering dialogue between art and science echoes the interdisciplinary spirit of the RCA MA Fashion programme, where material-led research, ecological consciousness, and critical storytelling converge. This collaboration laid the groundwork for S.O.S to grow; not only as a body of work, but as an evolving platform for regenerative thinking. As the project continues to expand, it carries forward this shared ethos: to challenge, to connect, and to reimagine fashion as a tool for ecological justice.



Patrick McDowell Taking part in the community canvas
Recipient Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design 2025

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