
iNVENTX Creative Exhibition

SUSTAINAISSANCE IN PRACTICE: Quiet Materials, Loud Meaning

Navarasas x Navagrahas: The Cosmic Sutra of Emotion and Identity

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Abstract

This artwork, *Navarasas x Navagrahas: A Cosmic Sutra of Emotion and Identity*, explores the intersection of Indian classical aesthetics, cosmological symbolism, and contemporary visual storytelling through a cross-cultural lens. Inspired by Dr. Vimala Perumal's Navarasas photography series, which captured the emotional language of Bharatanatyam, this painting reimagines the nine rasas (emotional states) through a mythological and astrological framework by integrating the Navagrahas, the nine planetary deities in Hindu cosmology. Each dancer in the composition embodies one rasa and is conceptually linked to a corresponding graha, positioning human emotion within a cosmic order. Executed in a style influenced by Gustav Klimt, the work incorporates golden spirals, sacred geometry, and symbolic mandalas, evoking both the divine and the ornamental. The celestial background and astrological grid ground the narrative in metaphysical time and cultural space, presenting a layered interpretation of identity, fate, and emotional resonance. Situated within the thematic context of *Sustainaissance: Emotion. Expression. Identity*, this piece interrogates sustainability beyond ecology, extending into the emotional, cultural, and mythopoetic spheres. Through this work, emotion is reclaimed as a sustainable practice, and visual storytelling becomes a medium for preserving intangible heritage. By aligning rasa (emotion), graha (celestial influence), and visual form, the painting offers a new artistic sutra, in which expression becomes ritual, identity becomes constellation, and the canvas becomes cosmos.

Keywords: Navarasas; Navagrahas; Visual storytelling; Indian classical aesthetic; Cosmic symbolism

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Artist Statement

Art, to me, is not just a reflection of the world; it is a vessel through which cultural memory, emotional inheritance, and spiritual inquiry converge. In this painting, *Navarasas x Navagrahas*, I found myself on a profound journey of synthesis, merging the classical Indian aesthetics of emotion and mythology with the stylized visual lexicon of Gustav Klimt, all through the lens of the exhibition's thematic provocation: *Sustainaissance: Emotion. Expression. Identity*.

This work was born from a moment of resonance; a conversation with Dr. Vimala Perumal during her Navarasas photography exhibition two years ago. Her series, which poignantly captured the spectrum of human emotion through the expressive body language of Indian classical dance, left an indelible impression on me. There was something universally human in her exploration, yet deeply rooted in South Asian epistemologies (Perumal, 2023). Her work revealed the profound expressivity and embodied wisdom of classical Indian dance; each gesture, each glance, a poem in motion. I was struck by how these timeless emotional states; love, joy, compassion, anger, courage, fear, disgust, wonder, peace; resonate across cultures and lifetimes. Yet I found myself wondering: if *rasa* is the language of the soul, what governs its rhythm and occurrence? What unseen forces pull the emotional tides within us? How might we map the rhythms of the heart onto the movements of the heavens?

That question led me to the Navagrahas; the nine celestial archetypes in Hindu cosmology believed to influence human fate, personality, and emotional states (Sarma, 2008). In Indian metaphysics, planetary forces are seen not only as astronomical entities but as psychological and energetic influences shaping the inner landscape of the individual (Feuerstein, 2003). I discovered, lay in Hindu cosmology's Navagraha; the nine planetary deities believed to shape our personalities, fates, and inner climates. In my painting, each dancer embodies one *rasa* and is conceptually aligned with a corresponding *graha*: Shringāra (love) with Venus's sensual glow; Raudra (anger) with Mars's fiery intensity; Śānta (peace) with the Moon's gentle luminescence. By positioning emotion within a mandala of planets, I propose that our psychological states are never isolated but in constant dialogue with the macrocosm.

At the heart of the composition, nine figures in red and saffron silk drape the canvas in a circular embrace. Their bodies form a living yantra; a ritualistic grid of gesture and gaze; while a decorative ring of zodiac symbols frames them like a celestial theater. Below, an astrological chart anchors the scene to earthly time and place, reminding us that even our most intimate feelings are rooted in cultural and cosmic cycles.



Figure 1. eMotion of Navarasas: A Living Canvas Series (Perumal, 2023)

Visually, I have drawn inspiration from Gustav Klimt's "Golden Phase," embracing spirals, gilded orbs, and ornate patterns to evoke both sensuality and the divine. The background pulses with concentric suns and swirling galaxies, suggesting that emotion itself is an energetic field, ever unfolding. By merging Eastern symbolism with Western ornamental language, I aim to create a timeless realm, one foot in mythic antiquity, the other in a speculative future. *Navarasas x Navagrahas* is both a mirror and a map: a mirror reflecting the emotional complexity within each of us, and a map pointing to the constellations that shape our shared humanity. It is an invitation to sit with feeling, to recognize the unseen forces that color our lives, and to celebrate the rituals, both ancient and newly imagined, that help us navigate the ever-turning wheel of existence.

The Embodiment of the Navarasas

At the heart of the composition sit nine female figures, styled in traditional Bharatanatyam attire of red and saffron. Each dancer conveys one of the nine rasas, Shringara (love), Hasya (laughter), Karuna (compassion), Raudra (anger), Veera (heroism), Bhayanaka (fear), Bibhatsa (disgust), Adbhuta (wonder), and Shanta (peace), through distinct expressions, gestures, and body postures (Vatsyayan, 2001). These emotions do not exist in isolation but rather in fluid communion, representing how emotions intertwine in the theatre of lived experience. Each rasa has been paired with a corresponding graha, guided by mythology and psychological archetypes. For instance, Shringara aligns with Venus (Shukra), evoking sensuality and beauty; Raudra with Mars (Mangala), signifying force and intensity;

and Shanta with the Moon (Chandra), representing serenity and reflection. This pairing proposes that our emotional rhythms are in constant dialogue with the macrocosmic order, a notion echoed in both traditional Indian thought and Jungian archetypal psychology (Pattanaik, 2020).

A Dialogue with the Cosmos

The circular composition, evocative of both a womb and a cosmos, represents the cyclical nature of time, birth, death, transformation, and rebirth. The dancers are encased in a golden ring embedded with zodiacal motifs and planetary symbols, referencing the Navagraha mandala and the janma kundali or astrological birth chart. Below them, an astrological grid maps the cosmos from an earthly vantage point, rooting the spiritual in the material. As Chakrabarti (2013) notes, in traditional Indian cosmology, the divine and terrestrial are not separate realms but entwined layers of the same existential plane.

Klimt and the Ornamental Universe

Stylistically, the painting draws inspiration from Gustav Klimt's "Golden Phase", his lush visual language of spirals, sacred geometry, and gilded backgrounds that merge the divine and the sensual (Weidinger, 2008). Though Klimt's visual vocabulary emerged from a Western context, it resonates with the ornamental intricacy and spiritual symbolism of Indian art, especially in temple frescoes and miniature painting traditions. The celestial background teems with spiraling suns, radiant orbs, and cosmic seeds, suggesting both galaxies and emotional interiors. The Klimtian aesthetic allows the painting to exist simultaneously in the mythic past and a speculative future, a timeless realm where expression, ritual, and cosmology converge.



Figure 2. Painting of "Navarasas x Navagrahas"

Identity, Sustainability and Rebirth

As a work emerging under the umbrella of Sustainaissance, this painting meditates on identity, not as fixed, but as a dynamic constellation of emotion, ancestry, and cosmological relation. In a world marked by cultural fragmentation and ecological precarity, returning to indigenous aesthetic frameworks becomes an act of emotional and cultural sustainability (Hess, 2015).

This piece invites viewers to consider sustainability beyond the ecological, to encompass the preservation of *rasa*, the stories of our ancestors, and the cosmic languages that once shaped civilizations. Can emotional literacy be a form of ecological consciousness? Can myth be a regenerative force? In this light, *Navarasas x Navagrahas* reclaims expression as a sacred practice, where emotion is not ephemeral but eternal, coded into our memory, our rituals, and our stars.

Conclusion

This painting is not merely a visual composition but a meditative offering, a celestial map of emotional intelligence, an homage to feminine divinity, and a contemplative fusion of body, cosmos, and ornament. It invites the viewer to see the self not as an isolated entity but as a vibrating thread in the greater weave of the universe.

As Klimt once gilded the divine in gold, I seek to honour the sacred in cultural memory, in emotional truth, and in visual storytelling. May this work serve as mirror, mandala, and map, for those seeking harmony between past and present, self and universe, form and spirit.

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Authors' Bio

Yuan Wei is currently pursuing her PhD at Multimedia University, Malaysia, within the Faculty of Creative Multimedia. Her research centers on the study of Chinese animation, examining its cultural roots, technological advancements, and evolving visual language. She explores how traditional Chinese cultural elements are represented and transformed in contemporary animated works, particularly in the context of globalization and technological innovation. Yuan's work delves deeply into how animation technology can be used to preserve and promote cultural identity while embracing modern storytelling techniques. She is passionate about bridging the gap between tradition and innovation in the animation industry. She has co-authored several research publications and actively participates in academic conferences and colloquiums.

Vimala Perumal, P.Tech., PhD. is an accomplished academic, filmmaker, and visual artist whose cross-disciplinary practice bridges scholarly research, cinematic storytelling, and experimental photography. As Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Creative Multimedia at Multimedia University, she leads postgraduate programs while actively engaging in creative production and research. Born to an Indian father and a Chinese mother, Dr. Vimala's identity is shaped by the quiet dialogue between two rich cultures. This duality nurtures a deep emotional sensitivity in her storytelling — a space where memory,

belonging, and identity intertwine. Her work becomes a reflection of an inner world shaped by contrast and connection, where every narrative pulse carries the weight of heritage and the tenderness of lived experience. Her filmmaking career spans both mainstream success and artistic innovation. *Vedigundu Pasangge* (2016), a historical comedy, became the first Malaysian Tamil film to gross over RM1 million at the box office. Her critically acclaimed television series *Tamilechumy* broke national viewership records, cementing her influence in popular media. These achievements are balanced by her pioneering experimental work, beginning with *e-Motion: A Living Canvas* (2008), an early exploration of emotion through digital and performance media. In the realm of photography, Dr. Vimala has developed a signature style that blends cinematic technique with cultural introspection. Her series *Revisited e-Motion: Navarasas* (2023) and *The Yin and Yang* (2024) visualized classical Indian and Chinese-Malaysian emotional concepts through still imagery. These projects laid the foundation for her latest body of work, *Rebirth of eMotion: A Living Canvas of Panchabhuta* (2024), which fuses Bharatanatyam, slow-shutter photography, and environmental philosophy to explore the five great elements. Dr. Vimala's contributions have earned international recognition through exhibitions, academic publications, and film festival selections. She continues to nurture the next generation of media artists, while advancing her interdisciplinary vision — one that integrates pedagogy, cinematic practice, and visual art research into a cohesive and evolving creative journey.