

# ZEMÍ

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## 1 Program Notes

Zemí is a participatory textile interface and interactive archive system exploring how embodied interaction and techno-textile processes can reposition domestic objects as instruments of collective memory.

Carpets are quiet witnesses to human life. They hold the weight of bodies, conversations, grief, celebration, and time itself, everyday surfaces that absorb and retain traces of lived experience, often across generations. This familiarity is central to their role as an instrument. A carpet invites contact without instruction; it is a surface people already know how to use. As an interface, the carpet also distributes interaction across the whole body. Its horizontal, grounded orientation supports weight, balance, and collective presence, allowing multiple participants to engage simultaneously.

Across cultures, carpets appear in folklore as magical surfaces, vehicles of travel, transformation, and passage between worlds. The title Zemí draws from Taíno (Indigenous Caribbean) cosmology, where Zemí are spirit-beings embodied in objects, landscapes, and crafted forms. Here, the carpet is reimagined as such a living object: a responsive, sensor-embedded surface brought to life through interaction. Woven with patterns inspired by Taíno (Puerto Rican), Indonesian, and Celtic symbology, lineages shaped through island histories, migration, and exchange, the carpet's ornamentation operates as interface. These patterns map onto an embedded sensor matrix, structuring zones of interaction and guiding movement across the instrument, where symbolic form becomes compositional topology.

Blending ancient symbolic languages with interactive technologies, Zemí transforms a familiar domestic object into a site of collective memory, care, and creative agency, an instrument that is played not only with the hands, but with the whole body, communities in motion.



Figure 1 Maria Sappho performing Zemí at hcmf// 2025 © hcmf//

## 2 Project Description

The carpet operates as both sensing surface and cultural object. Historically associated with accumulative memory, ritual practice, and feminised labour, it mediates between domestic and cosmological domains. This framing positions the carpet as a cosmotechnical object (Hui & Lemmens, 2021), linking bodies, environments, and belief systems.

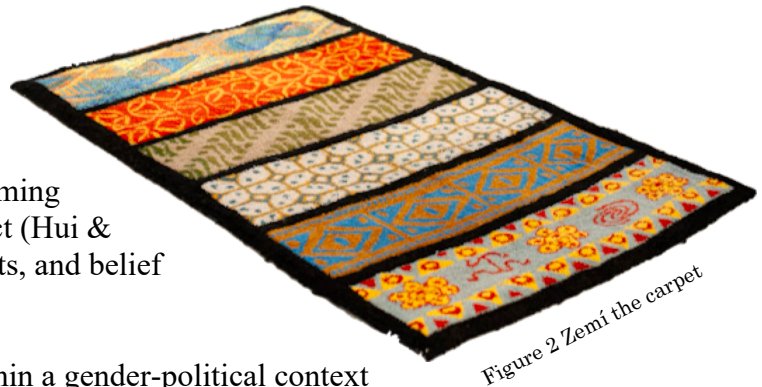


Figure 2 Zemi the carpet

Developed through a residency in Jakarta within a gender-political context involving Indonesian, Celtic, and Puerto Rican women artists, the visual design integrates diasporic textile knowledge systems. The title references Taíno understandings of *zemí* as spirit-beings inhabiting material forms (Rouse, 1992), aligning with posthuman perspectives that position objects as active participants in relational systems (Harman, 2018), while also engaging Indigenous ontologies which precede and challenge these frameworks (Todd, 2015).

Technically, the system consists of a pressure-sensitive textile matrix that captures bodily weight and movement as continuous input data. These inputs control playback, layering, and transformation of a multimodal archive of field recordings, songs, spoken narratives, and video. The archive evolves between presentations, often incorporating locally gathered materials. Participants engage in full-body, real-time compositional interaction without requiring prior musical training. The work contributes to research on full-body musical interfaces, textile-based interaction design, participatory archive systems, and distributed models of musical agency (Ho et al., 2025; Zielinski & Winthrop-Young, 2015).

Originally developed for Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and the Perempuan Komponis residency Networking Archive, *Zemí* premiered at Ruang Pameran Planetarium, Taman Ismail Marzuki (Jakarta, Indonesia, 2024). It has since been presented at Fak'ugesi Festival (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2024) Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK, 2025) and Share Festival (Turn, Italy, 2025), where it received the Share Prize Award.



Figure 3 Audience Member with *Zemí*, Share Festival, Italy, 2025

### 3 Performance Notes

Visitors are invited to remove their shoes before stepping onto the carpet. Interaction is based on slow shifts of weight and attentive movement, which shape the sound and visuals in the space. Pausing, leaning, or standing in different patterned areas produces changes in the evolving audio-visual environment.

The instrument supports multiple simultaneous users, enabling overlapping gestures and collective authorship through shared spatial interaction. Awareness of others forms part of the shared performance ecology.

Listening/noticing impact in the space is as important as the movement. Engagement varies widely: children roll, dance, and move playfully across the surface; others approach slowly and methodically, mapping its terrain; some developed brief improvised performances. At the

same time, the carpet's domestic form can produce moments of hesitation. Shoes became a small but telling negotiation, exposing how cultural codes shape our willingness to step, touch, and intervene (both in an art context and in a domestic one too).

### 4 Technical Notes

Zemí can be presented in multiple formats, for live performance or installation, including audio-only, audio-visual, or archive-generative versions. The system is quick to setup and consists of a pressure-sensitive textile interface connected to a computer-based audio-visual system. It requires a flat floor surface, moderate listening levels, and a standard speaker and projection or screen setup.

In some presentations, a microphone is available for visitors to contribute spoken, sung, or performed material, which may be incorporated into the evolving archive.

There is no correct way to perform. The invitation is to move with care and curiosity, noticing how your presence shapes the environment, and how it responds in return. Zemí is both instrument and host.

### 5 Media Link(s)

- Video 1 live performance: <https://youtu.be/rxJpWOPdG8U>
- Video 2 Workshops and installation: <https://youtu.be/29HZMs8Jx28>

### Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and Perempuan Komponis 'networking archive' residency.



Figure 4 Children playing Zemí

## Ethical Standards

Audience participation in Zemí is voluntary. In presentations where a microphone is active, contributions are only recorded when a participant deliberately initiates the interaction. Clear signage and/or invigilation informs visitors that spoken, sung, or performed material may be recorded and incorporated into the evolving archive of the work. Participants may choose not to contribute and may engage solely through movement interaction.

## References

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