

Faiza Butt, 'Not You'



'CONCEIVING SPACE'

**73 artists,
10 venues,
21 countries**

**2nd - 20th
December 2016**

Exhibitions, Installations, Performances,
Architects, Symposiums, Community
Workshops, Education, Outreach Events
and More!

Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology
The Old Town Hall in Pettah
JDA Perera University Gallery
Cathedral of Christ The Living Saviour
Slave Island Community
Theertha RedDot Gallery
Prana Lounge
ZMAX Fairway
CoCA Residency
Taj Samudra

Curated by
Alnoor Mitha

**INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA COVERAGE**



COLOMBO ART BIENNALE: CAB 2016 THEME

By *IBA Office*

Posted May 28, 2016

In *Member News*

<http://www.biennialassociation.org/2016/05/colombo-art-biennale-cab-2016-theme/>



Colombo Art Biennale 2016

www.colomboartbiennale.com

Email: Ashira@colomboartbiennale.com

Facebook: Colombo Art Biennale

Theme

Through its theme and conceptual focus “Conceiving Space”, CAB offers an artistic provocation that seeks to reimagine the traditional ‘spatial’ in relation to concept, boundaries and engagement. To artistically conceive space – as material environment, historical experience, lived reality or a sense of place – demands creative interrogation and imagination. Conceiving Space demands multiplicity in perspective and approach and seeks to ask questions of form, seeking to explore the breadth of artistic medium that can be engaged with as a provocation about what constitutes art for artists and art communities.

Artist Direction

This fourth edition of CAB has revealed “Conceiving Space” to be a fully international Biennale with a strong focus on Sri Lanka and South Asia. Artistic participants will include 20 of some of Sri Lanka’s most exciting emerging and recognized artists. CAB will also be showcasing 20 strong artists from the South Asian Region and around the globe with an emphasis on South Asia and the Diaspora.

“Conceiving Space” will present a varied collection of art works to include Visual Art, Sound Art, Architecture and Performance Art at several different locations around Colombo.

CAB 2014 brought in Performance Art as a substantial component of the Visual Art. This segment of the Biennale brought into the unlikely nooks and corners of CAB galleries across Colombo, spilling over into the streets, moments taking on, engaging with, and interrupting the notion of ‘liveness’ in performance. Performance artists interacted with visual artists in this addition to the programme was extremely well received. CAB 2016 intends to continue and expand on this.

A key feature of the CAB 2016 is the introduction of Architecture as a concept into the arena of visual art. Internationally renowned architects will be invited to work as visual artists in collaboration with the local communities. This component aims to not only interact and feed back positively into the local community, but to also create ‘new spaces’ in which multiple dialogues can occur.

For more information on the overview and concept, please click [here](#)

COLOMBO ART BIENNALE (DEC 2- 20, 2016) 'Conceiving Space' Brings Together 40 International Artists

Sep 28, 2016 Art Event by Islamic Arts Magazine

http://islamicartsmagazine.com/magazine/view/conceiving_space_brings_together_40_international_artists/

'Conceiving Space' reimagines traditional concepts of the 'spatial' in relation to boundaries and engagement

The Colombo Art Biennale (CAB) is the largest and most significant contemporary art manifestation in Sri Lanka. Established in 2009, CAB showcases contemporary art with an emphasis on Sri Lanka and the South Asian region.

The theme for CAB 2016, curated by Alnoor Mitha, is 'Conceiving Space', seeks to open up a paradigm of seeing, providing possibilities for creative production that engage with explorations of diverse senses of space. The Biennale will bring together 40 international artists including: Mithu Sen (Delhi), Pushpamala (Bangalore), Reena Kallat (Delhi), Faiza Butt (UK/Pakistan), Naiza Khan (UK/Pakistan), Ghada Khungi (Bahrain), Cristina Rodrigues (Portugal), Ruby Chisthi (US), Rajni Perera (Sri Lanka/Canada), Saskia Pintelon (Sri Lanka/Belgium), Priyantha Udagedara (Sri Lanka), Tracy Holsinger (Sri Lanka), Venuri Perera (Sri Lanka), S. P. Pushpakanthan (Sri Lanka) and Asvajit Boyle (Sri Lanka).



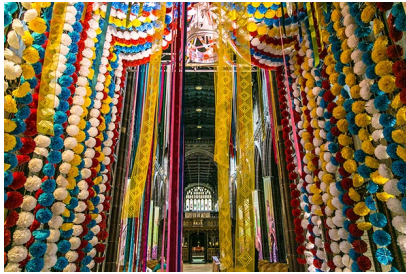
Reena Kallat, Woven Chronicle, 2015, Circuit boards, speakers, electrical wires and fittings, 10 min Single Channel Audio / Courtesy of CAB 2016

'Conceiving Space' reimagines traditional concepts of the 'spatial' in relation to boundaries and engagement; it demands a foray into space as public and private; space as protest; space as tangible and imagined; space as community, memory and legacy; space as architectural, conceptual, performative, temporal, spiritual, symbolic, intuitive and rhythmic; space as liminal and ritualistic; space as embodied and meditative, virtual and transcendent.

Integral to CAB's vision for 2016 is the establishment of dialogue between local and international artists, curator Mitha explains: "Artists are the conduits of engagement with each other and most importantly with their immediate audiences. We are increasingly living in a time that is dominated by political events that are transforming our globe, making it unsafe, creating a new paradigm that questions our humanity through conflict. However, artists bring a new light, a new wisdom that generates a genuine engagement with the visual narrative that encapsulates issues around space, memory, identity, place, and what I call the transformative architectural paradigm that brings a new experiential reality."



Asst . Prof . Dr. Alex Lehnerer, Bungalow Germania, 2014, At Venice Architecture Biennale / Courtesy of CAB 2016



Cristina Rodrigues, The Queen, 2014, At Manchester Cathedral, England, Photo by REZAKIO / Courtesy of CAB 2016

My ultimate vision is to create a South Asian artistic Hub in Colombo that is inspirational - an artistic journey that captivates the imagination whilst exploring new ideas with young people, and with the local communities who live in Sri Lanka whilst welcoming international delegates. At the end of the day, art is transformative; it brings smiles to many faces and challenges the cerebral mindset.”

CAB 2016 prioritizes community engagement and educational initiatives. Through multiple perspectives and approaches, these programmes survey a broad range of artistic media, considering artistic conceptions of space as alternatively a material environment, a historical experience, a lived reality, or as a sense of place. Participating artists include Studio Assemble (UK), Prof. Will Alsop (UK), Prof. Dr. Alex Lehnerer (Germany/Switzerland), Madelon Vriesendorp (The Netherlands), Mullegama Project (Sri Lanka), CoCA Collective (Sri Lanka), Jayne Dyer (Australia). Jean-François Boclé (France/Martinique), Cristina Rodrigues (Portugal), Mind Adventures (Sri Lanka) and Eva Priyanka-Wegener (Sri Lanka/Germany).



Studio Assemble, Yard House, 2014 / Courtesy of CAB 2016



Prof. Will Alsop, OCAD University, Courtesy of Richard Johnson

CAB 2016 will be held at over ten different sites around Colombo including, Prana Lounge, The Old Town Hall, Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, Slave Island, Theertha Red Dot Gallery. Parallel events will also be held at Barefoot Gallery, Saskia Fernando Gallery & CoCA.

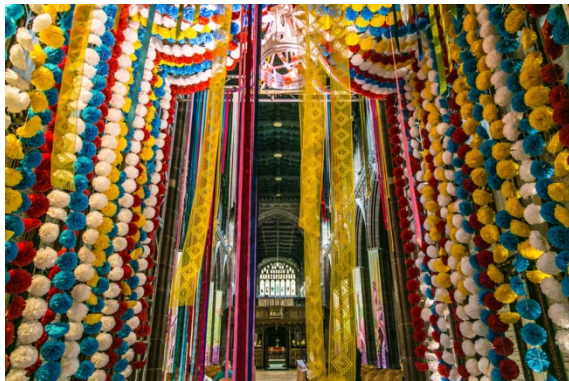
artnetnews

Exhibitions

Colombo Art Biennale 2016 Will Explore Concepts of Space

Over 40 artists will work with the theme 'Conceiving Space' for the Sri Lankan event.

<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/colombo-art-biennale-sri-lanka-conceiving-space-702245>



Cristina Rodrigues Exhibition "Women from My Country" at Manchester Cathedral. Photo REZAKIO

The theme for Sri Lanka's Colombo Art Biennale 2016 (CAB) is "Conceiving Space." It will bring 40 international artists to Colombo, the country's capital, with a focus on art from Sri Lanka and South Asia.

Curated by Alnoor Mitha, founder of Asia Triennial Manchester, the biennial seeks to reimagine traditional spatial concepts like boundaries and engagement. The participating artists, including Rajni Perera, Pushpamala N, Mithu Sen, Saskia Pintelon, and Cristina Rodrigues, will look at space in terms of community, memory, legacy, architecture, temporality, symbolic value, virtuality, and transcendence.

As part of the biennial's educational program, students from Auckland University, Sheffield Hallam University, Hertfordshire University, and architecture graduates from Sri Lanka will collaborate on a nine-day architectural workshop on Slave Island, under architects such as the 2015 Turner Prize winner, Studio Assemble.



"Artists are the conduits of engagement with each other and most importantly with their immediate audiences," Mitha said in a statement. "We are increasingly living in a time that is dominated by political events that are transforming our globe, making it unsafe, creating a new paradigm that questions our humanity through conflict. However, artists bring a new light, a new wisdom that

generates a genuine engagement with the visual narrative that encapsulates issues around space, memory, identity, place, and what I call the transformative architectural paradigm that brings a new experiential reality.”

Mitha has big plans for the biennial and Sri Lanka, and is looking to draw artists and the art world to Colombo. The country is known for its diverse colonial history—it was colonized by the Dutch, Portuguese, and British—as well as its stunning natural beauty.

“My ultimate vision is to create a South Asian artistic hub in Colombo that is inspirational—an artistic journey that captivates the imagination whilst exploring new ideas with young people, and with the local communities who live in Sri Lanka whilst welcoming international delegates,” Mitha explains in his statement. “At the end of the day, art is transformative; it brings smiles to many faces and challenges the cerebral mindset.”

CAB will be installed in ten sites around Colombo, including Theertha Red Dot Gallery, BarefootGallery, Saskia Fernando Gallery, and Prana Lounge. It will run from December to 20, 2016.



UNCOVERING THE SRI LANKAN CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE IN COLOMBO

September 30, 2016

<https://www.trafalgarblog.com/2016/09/30/uncovering-sri-lankan-contemporary-art-scene-colombo/>

Sri Lanka’s waterside capital is famous for its eclectic blend of Portuguese, British and Dutch architecture, as well as its beautiful Buddhist temples. But beyond Colombo’s colonial influences and religious sites, there’s a modern art movement that’s flourishing across the city. To get to the roots of the Sri Lankan contemporary art scene, here are some of the best places to visit on a cultural tour of the capital.

The success of the city’s contemporary art scene can be traced back to the establishment of the now-iconic art association, the Colombo ‘43 Group. Founded in 1943 by a group of artists – who at that time were a part of the Ceylon Society of Arts – and led by the photographer, cinematographer and critic, Lionel Wendt, this group is widely credited with revolutionising modern art in Sri Lanka, incorporating elements of Europe’s modern art movement within the artistic landscape of Colombo.



Key members of the Colombo ‘43 Group included four of Sri Lanka’s most eminent artists: Harold Peiris, Ivan Peries, Justin Daraniyagala and George Keyt, each of whom went on to establish their own artistic legacy.

In addition to being a founding member of the group, Harold Peiris (1904-1988) was a co-founder of the Lionel Wendt Art Centre, which to this day is dedicated to showcasing both visual and performing arts, as well as providing a space for arts workshops. He then went on to establish the Sapumal Foundation in the house he once lived and

worked in, with the art collection he donated on show. Today, the galleries are home to more than 200 paintings and drawings, and are well worth a visit for the light they shine on the development of Sri Lankan contemporary art from the 1920s up until the present day.

George Keyt (1901-1993) was another of Sri Lanka's most distinguished modern painters, taking inspiration from the cubism art movement, and in particular the artist Henri Matisse. While his work has been exhibited worldwide, visitors to the city can see many of his best works within Colombo's art collections. The [George Keyt Foundation](#), which now exists to honour the artist's work by promoting Sri Lankan art and providing opportunities for local artists, is responsible for some of the artworks on display, and plays an active role in the annual open-air art fair, [The Kala Pola](#).

One of George Keyt's most celebrated works is his famous mural at [Gothami Viharaya](#) temple, which is easily accessible from the city in its setting outside Borella, in the greater area of Colombo. It's here that the artist was invited to paint the outer walls of the house of statues to depict the life of Buddha. This is now a protected archaeological monument.

Of course, the best way to see Sri Lankan contemporary art is to visit the city's art galleries, and one of the most prominent is the [Saskia Fernando Gallery](#). This is the largest contemporary art exhibition space in Sri Lanka, exhibiting the work of both leading and up-and-coming Sri Lankan artists and lauded for being the first gallery to focus on the nation's contemporary art scene, considered key to the development of the South Asian art movement.

This evolution of Sri Lankan contemporary art has since led to new galleries in Colombo, including [Art Way Gallery](#) and [The Barefoot Gallery](#). Both galleries have outposts in Galle as well as the capital, exhibiting and selling local arts and artisanal crafts as well as providing a platform for Sri Lankan artists to show their work. The best of the local contemporary art scene can be experienced at the annual [Colombo Art Biennale](#), which offers Sri Lankan artists the opportunity to garner international attention as well as increased recognition of their works at home.

With such momentum created by decades of like-minded artists, the Sri Lankan contemporary art movement shows no sign of slowing, and it's a scene that's easily discovered by visiting the city's galleries and artistic sites.

Explore Colombo and discover local contemporary art on the [Wonders of Sri Lanka](#) trip.

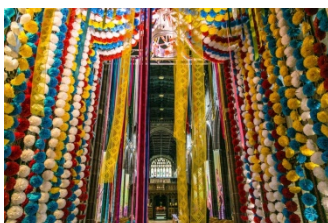
Image credits: Cover photo of a painting by Ruwan Prasanna (2015, Landscape XXVII, Acrylic on Canvas, 203x153cm) at Saskia Fernando Gallery © Saskia Fernando Gallery. The Colombo Festival of Art and Design © [Flicker / Shehal Joseph](#). Artwork by George Keyt at the Colombo National Art Gallery © [Flicker / Indi Samarajiva](#). Laki Senanayake exhibition at Barefoot Gallery © Dominic Sansoni. An exhibition at Colombo Art Biennale © [Flicker / Indi Samarajiva](#)

Aesthetica

21st November 2016

<http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/colombo-art-biennale/>

Conceiving Spaces



The fourth instalment of the Colombo Art Biennale (CAB) runs this December, the most significant contemporary art festival in Sri Lanka. Established seven years ago, the event showcases contemporary art, with an emphasis on Sri Lanka and the South Asian region. CAB this year is focused on *Conceiving Space*, the exhibition presenting the work of 64 local and international artists who have responded to the central theme; the show

consists of work from 20 emerging practitioners, three successful local artists, 11 international architects and five university student groups from across the globe. Performance is also featured as part of the Biennale, with 17 displays from Theertha Performance Platform, Sri Lanka. CAB celebrates a variety of artistic disciplines including visual multimedia installation, architects working as artists, and performance, for the expression of the central ideal, held at over ten different sites around the city.

The Biennale, curated by Almoor Mitha, seeks to provide opportunities for artistic expression and creative production, with the focus of the event taking root in the theme of *Conceiving Space*. This foundational concept to the exhibitions allows both artists and visitors alike to explore diverse senses of space. CAB feature artists such as Priyantha Udagedara, Mithu Sen, Naiza Khan, Cristina Rodrigues, and Asvagit Boyle.

CAB's focus on local artists as well as those who are internationally renowned is central to the vision of the 2016 chapter, there exists a vision for the establishment of a dialogue between native and global artists. Mitha notes: "My ultimate vision is to create a South Asian Artistic Hub in Colombo that is inspirational – an artistic journey that captivates the imagination whilst exploring new ideas with young people, and with the local communities who live in Sri Lanka whilst welcoming international delegates. At the end of the day, art is transformative; it brings smiles to many faces and challenges the cerebral mindset."

As part of the event numerous community engagement and education outreach projects are occurring both before, throughout, and beyond the festival. Community members of Slave Island, Colombo, produce work with recognised artists and architects, programmes run by Mullegema Art Centre, Theertha Performance Platform and the Collective of Contemporary Artists also feature.

The Colombo Art Biennale, 2016. 2-22 December. Find out more: www.colomboartbiennale.com

Credits

1. Cristina Rodriguez Exhibition (2016). Courtesy of Colombo Art Biennale

ARTATTACK

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CELEBRATING SOUTH ASIAN ART: INTERVIEW WITH ANNOUSHKA HEMPEL,
FOUNDER OF THE COLOMBO ART BIENNALE

<https://artattackapp.wordpress.com/2016/11/23/colombo-art-biennale-2016-annoushka-hempel/>

2nd December marks the opening of the much anticipated, 4th annual Colombo Art Biennale (CAB), the world's largest and most significant celebration of contemporary South Asian art and culture.

Attracting over 2,500 visitors in its last edition, this year's CAB, which is themed 'Conceiving Space' is curated by **Alnoor Mitha** and seeks to reimagine traditional concepts of the 'spatial' in relation to boundaries and engagement. It will focus on emerging talent, including over 60 international and local artists, among them **Faiza Butt** (UK/Pakistan), **Cristina Rodrigues** (Portuguese) and **Chila Kumari Burman** (British/Asian).

Dr. Priyantha Udagedara



Abdul Halik Azeez



The event itself, was founded by gallerist and cultural ambassador **Annoushka Hempel** in 2009, its mission being to raise the profile of artists in this fast developing market. We are so happy to have had the opportunity so speak with Annoushka about the upcoming edition and to have her insight on what is certain to be among the top cultural experiences of the year!

Annoushka Hempel



ArtAttack: What inspired you to found the Colombo Art Biennale?

Annoushka Hempel: CAB was founded in early 2009 in the midst of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, at a time and climate when being an artist was even more challenging than ever. In spite of this, it was only artists who were able to express themselves freely due to active censorship. It struck me that many of the artists' works I was seeing hidden in their studios was powerful and impressive. It was evident that many Sri Lankans were not aware of the local artistic talent. It seemed only right to give these artists the visibility they deserved. It was perhaps the craziest time to begin such a project but also an important time in terms of it being a project with a strong vision and mission: 'To bring different artists of different cultural backgrounds and different schools of thought together under one roof and unite them under one theme 'Imagining Peace'..

AA: Is there anything you are particularly excited about in this year's event?

AH: The development of the fourth edition of the Colombo Art Biennale sees CAB as a South Asian hub in terms contemporary art. 'Conceiving Space' features a diverse and invigorating line-up of creatives spanning from visual and performance platforms to architects engaging with local communities, and interactive workshops as well as an array of exciting social events.

High profile artists and architects such as 2015 Turner Art Prize winners Studio Assemble, Venice Architecture Biennale German Pavilion representative Alex Lehnerer, Dutch artist Madelon Vriesendorp, RA OBE Will Alsop, Balmond Studio as well as 2010 Sovereign Prize Winner Pala Polupithiya amongst others will be collaborating and working with local community members of Slave Island through workshops

to conceive spaces in which artistic activity is created and displayed to bring both members of local and international communities together through the arts.

Rajni Perera



With an additional focus on South Asia and emerging Sri Lankan talent, artists have been asked to re-imagine and 'conceive space' in which new levels of engagement and dialogues can take place. Visitors will be able to experience this through our carefully curated, dynamic programme.

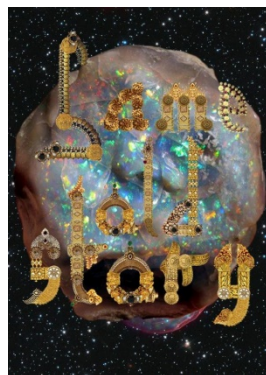
AA: Do you find that South Asian arts are underrepresented globally? And if so, how do you hope the CAB will help to change this?

AH: When travelling to art events around the world and whilst in discussion art professionals about contemporary art of Asia, it seems that countries from Japan all the way down to Thailand are included in the discussion. However South Asia, with maybe the exception of India, tends to be excluded from the Asian Art bag. The work of artists from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have much to share in terms of their strong narrative context. However, it is only with the grouping of them together and by presenting the individuality of their works in a collective manner, that the arts from the South Asian region could be given the visibility they deserve.

AA: Who are some of the established artists working as mentors this year?

AH: These are particularly artists originating from the Theertha artist collective, such as **Jagath Weeresinghe, Pala Polupitiya** and **Bandu Manamperi** to name a few.

Faiza Butt



Fira Rahman



The 2016 Colombo Art Biennale will take place across 10 different famous sites around Colombo; 2-20 December, 2016; For more information: <http://colomboartbiennale.com/> – India Irving



Founder Annoushka Hempel tells us about the Colombo Art Biennale

December 1, 2016 by [Mark Westall](#)

<http://fadmagazine.com/2016/12/01/founder-annoushka-hempel-tells-us-about-the-colombo-art-biennale/>

This December sees the fourth edition of the Colombo Art Biennale (CAB), the world's largest and most significant celebration of contemporary South Asian art and culture. Attracting over 2,500 visitors in its last edition, this year organizers expect it to be the most popular year to date.

We caught up with its founder Annoushka Hempel to find out more about Colombo Art Biennale and this years edition.



Cristina Rodrigues Exhibition "WOMEN FROM MY COUNTRY" at Manchester Cathedral photography by REZAKIO

1 Can you tell us about the history of Colombo Art Biennale?

I grew up and studied in London, and art has always been my passion. I moved to Sri Lanka ten years ago with my family, and set up the first [gallery in Galle](#). In 2009, I founded the Colombo Art Biennale, with the brilliant [Jagath Weerasinghe](#). It was during a time that Sri Lanka was in the midst of the armed conflict, and when being an artist was even more challenging than ever: they were unable to express themselves freely due to all the active censorship laws. It was perhaps the craziest time to begin such a project but also an important time in terms of it being something with a strong vision and mission: to bring together different artists of different cultural backgrounds and different schools of thought under one roof and one theme 'Imagining Peace'.

We wanted to provoke the notion of artists as being catalysts of change, and it went very well. Since then, CAB has grown from strength to strength and we continue to showcase the talent of South Asian and International artists, across this beautiful city.

2 Does Sri Lanka need its own art fair?

There is so much artistic and creative talent in this region that we feel the world should have the opportunity to experience and enjoy. Sri Lanka itself is well positioned geographically and in terms of visitor interest, as it is so beautiful, so as a place to have a South Asian biennale, it is perfect. At the moment, it is still very much

an emerging arts market – Sri Lanka only has five commercial galleries, which would mean it could be slightly early days to host its own fair as such. However, the continued interest from international collectors, gallerists and dealers, and the growing number of arts organisations including CAB means that it may not be long until we see an art fair here develop. We would very much support that.



Studio Assemble project

3 This year you have a new architecture section, can you tell us about some of the highlights.

We are very excited about the 2016 edition with its architecture programme,

1 [Studio Assemble](#)

directed by Gihan Karunaratne. The programme will align with CAB 2016's overarching theme of community engagement, and will see various sites across Colombo come alive with international and local arts and architecture groups working with the locals on projects designed to be sustainable and bring people together. To name a few highlights, 2015 Turner Prize winners [Studio Assemble](#) will be running a one week workshop with the wonderful Dutch artist [Madelon Vriesendorp](#), working closely with the local community in creating intricate art forms. [Ciriacidis Lehnerer Architekten](#), a Zurich based architectural practice who represented Germany in the 2014 the International Architectural Biennale in Venice, will be creating a project on Slave Island. This is an area – as the name would suggest – with a difficult political history which the community today is still affected by. Projects here will include a birds-eye view model of the island being created, and architecture students creating toys and costumes for the local children. The whole programme will culminate in a 'Great Feast' – a celebration of food, dance, music between CAB participants and the Slave Island community members, certainly an event not to be missed.

4 Where's the best place to stay to access all the events and performances during CAB?

Colombo is a relatively easy place to make your way around, and local transport is readily available. Colombo 7th and Colombo 3rd – where the [Cinnamon Gardens](#) and [Colpetty](#) are – would be good locations to stay so as to be near CAB's programme. That being said, it is such a beautiful city that I feel most areas would bring something of their own for visitors, and at the same time make it easy to experience the biennale.

Colombo Art Biennale 2nd – 20th December Find Out More: colomboartbiennale.com

Amuse

ART & DESIGN

December 5, 2016

7 South Asian Artists You Need to Know All showing at this month's Colombo Art Biennale

Written by CHARLOTTE JANSEN

<https://amuse-i-d.vice.com/7-south-asian-artists-you-need-to-know/>



Sri Lanka – known as the “teardrop of India” – is a destination for tea plantations, string hoppers, surfing and the temple that contains Buddha's tooth. Its contemporary arts scene, however, is still off-the-beaten track and its capital Colombo is relatively undiscovered compared to other South Asian cities like New Delhi, Dhaka or Kochi.

The Colombo Biennale, now in its 4th edition, is changing that by inviting Sri Lankan artists and architects to exhibit all over the city alongside peers from across Asia and Europe. The three-week long programme spotlights Sri Lanka's local art scene and connects it with what's happening more widely in South Asia, and beyond.

With its historic ports and long history of colonialism, Sri Lanka has always been a place of convergence with a complex heritage (Tamil, Sinhala and European) that's not always been peaceful, but is now in the process of rebirth. The Biennale's 2016 theme of “Conceiving Space” reflects this feeling. As it opens, we take a closer look at some of the participating visual artists from the South Asian region catching our eye in Colombo

Gayan Prageeth



Gayan Prageeth was born in 1980, and grew up with Sri Lanka's particularly brutal Civil War, – a conflict that began in 1983 and ended in 2009, the same year he graduated from Colombo's University of the Visual and Performing Arts. It's hardly surprising that the country's fraught political past and residual post-war problems surface in the artist's paintings and installations, that often reflect on the significant events that have shaped the island's recent history.

For a solo exhibition at leading Colombo gallery Saskia Fernando earlier this year, Prageeth (who has received national prizes for his work) created a series of paintings and ready-mades of steel buckets, referring to the Black July riots in Colombo in July 1983, during which people belonging to the Tamil ethnic group were identified based on the way they pronounced the Sinhala word for bucket. Those who failed to pronounce it correctly were attacked. Thousands lost their lives in the ensuing brutalities. saskiafernandogallery.com

Samsul Alam Helal

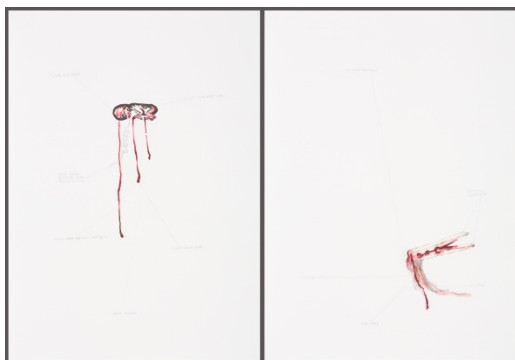


Photographer Samsul Alam Helal is a graduate of Dhaka's Pathshala South Asian Institute, a school that has been reinventing documentary photography and film in Bangladesh, encouraging young artists to tell their own stories in their own way. Helal's portrait photographs focus on the peripheral communities of the Bangladeshi capital, telling stories with compelling pictures that are full of drama, vivid colour and movement.

His *Open Stage* series was shot in a moveable photography studio, the photographer inviting residents from the poor working class community of Old Dhaka to have their picture taken in their own space. In *Hirja*, meanwhile, Helal turns the camera on the capital's transgender community in a visual narrative that blends fantasy and reality. Through Helal's lens, the overlooked and neglected people in his society are starting to be seen by the world, on their own

terms. samsulalamhelal.com

Mithu Sen



Mithu Sen has received multiple awards and has exhibited her work everywhere from Berlin to Taipei, but you won't find much about her online. That's partly because she likes to subvert the capitalist systems of the art world. Her website, for example, is part of an ongoing project called "Free Mithu", where she offers an artwork in exchange for a love letter.

It's the embodiment of the strange eroticism that characterises her work. Ranging from poetry, to barely-there strokes of watercolour or ink on paper, or room-sized installations, New Delhi-based Sen's language is fluid and ever evolving, fitting for speaking about sex, friendship, sexuality and gender. mithusen.com

Faiza Butt



Born in Lahore, and now based in London, Faiza Butt's politically-charged art deals with taboo, female sexuality, gender and decoration, drawing on ancient iconography and art-making traditions in Islamic culture as much as the media and advertising that surrounds us.

Having studied art in Pakistan and at the Slade, Butt's technique is also dyadic, using pointillism and digital software. Following on from an exhibition in London in the spring, Butt opened the latest leg of a touring exhibition of her work *Paracosm* at the Attenborough Arts Centre in Leicester in October. grossvenorgallery.com

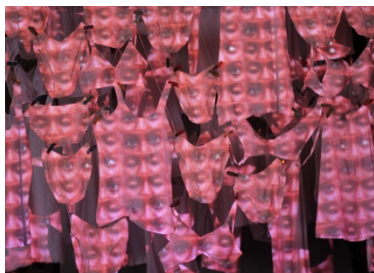
Reena Saini Kallat



You never know what to expect with Reena Saini Kallat, which is why she's one to watch. Some of her works only last a few seconds and some are barely detectable at all. She has written stories in the sand with salt, and sewn her mother's recipes in braille onto saris. At a special exhibition at the Busan Biennale in Korea, last month, she connected the animals, flora and fauna of different countries to present the relationships between the world's terrains in a different way.

Connections — symbolised by her frequent use of cables, threads, wires, even hyphens — are what Kallat is concerned with. The Mumbai-based artist constantly shifts between media (in the past she's turned her hand to photography, sculpture, drawing and video) express her search for the best language to connect her ideas to their audience, while also showing us that forms and ideas can be fleeting. Kallat's work is also on view at the MoMA, New York until 22nd January. reenakallat.com

Danushka Marasinghe



Tens of pairs of inescapable eyes, disembodied and blinking, hanging on torn scraps of rope and fabric, seem to seek you out wherever you stand. The video projection for *EYES* was selected by Colombo Biennale founder Annoushka Hempel (who also runs two galleries in Sri Lanka, in Colombo's Cinnamon Gardens and in the coastal city of Galle Fort) for a survey on contemporary Sri Lankan art at London's Brunei gallery in 2014.

It put the experimental practice of the Negombo-born artist in the context of a generation of young Sri Lankan artists known as the Collective of Contemporary Artists, or CoCA, who are gaining recognition both inside and outside their country. Like Prageeth, Marasinghe grew up during the civil war, and his videos, performances and new media installations, are a part of a post-war Sri Lanka, not healed from too recent wounds, but finding their own independent voice in a time of nascent peacefulness.

Aroosa Rana

Lahore based Aroosa Rana has exhibited widely in her home country of Pakistan, as well as in Dhaka and Delhi. Currently completing her Masters, and teaching art alongside her own practice, Rana has recently gravitated from painting towards photography and video, as way to explore a persistent question about our daily digital life: who is watching and who is being watched? Digital simulation, bootleg brands, docu-dramas and virtual reality are all sources for Rana's work that merges fact and fiction, holding a mirror up to our contemporary experience.

Colombo Art Biennale runs until 20th December colomboartbiennale.com



5 Questions: Anoli Perera

<https://elephantmag.com/5-questions-anoli-perera/>

Text by Charlotte Jansen

This month saw the opening of the 4th edition of Sri Lanka's only major international art event, the Colombo Art Biennale (CAB). Founded by former Londoner Annoushka Hempel, who runs two art galleries in Sri Lanka — her home for the past decade — the biennale invites artists to exhibit at venues across Sri Lanka's capital, in the hope of building interest on a local and international level in the art that's being produced in the country.

Colombo-born Anoli Perera is among the artists who have participated in the biennale's previous three editions, but who is not taking part this year. Her work, mainly rendered in fabric, takes a long time to complete — meaning, she explains, she can't take on too many projects at once, and two new works will be shown at the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa later this month.

Perera — who also writes on art and organises workshops in Sri Lanka — is now based in Rajagiriya, and is a founding member of Theertha Collective, who have coordinated cross-cultural exchanges through workshops and events in Sri Lanka since 2000. Choosing very specific materials to talk about the social issues facing her as a woman in her context, Perera's sculptures, installations and paintings also refer to universal experiences of being a woman. Take *Second Skin: Elastic Dress*, (presented at the 2012 biennale): using scarlet elastic straps stitched by hand into loops, Perera's sculpture and photo-performance is a monument to the constant cycle of change a woman's body goes through.

I spoke to Perera about the impact of the biennale in her home country, women artists in Sri Lanka, and why she chose art over her initial studies in political science.

What does it mean to you as a Sri Lankan artist to have this biennale in Colombo?

I am not officially participating in this year's CAB. I participated in 2009, 2012 and 2014. But it was great to take part in the past CAB events and it allowed me to be part of a crucial event that is placing Sri Lanka as a serious art location in the regional and international art community. It is also an event that brings a lot of discussion, debate and interaction with individuals from an expanded art community which brings in what is happening outside of Sri Lanka. That can expand intellectual and artistic horizons for artists, and make one think afresh about one's own art practice. For a country that is surrounded by a very comforting sea and that is very comfortable in a small art community, events like CAB are necessary to reconsider our own comfort levels. It's a good intervention in the local art scene to reinvigorate us all, artists and the art audience.

You have worked a lot with the female experience in the past decade in your practice: what issues most concern women now in Sri Lanka in your view?

In Sri Lanka, like the rest of the world, we have gender issues. Society and culture puts many restrictions on women in comparison to men. A major responsibility is put on the woman to nurture the family and to bring up children within the household, irrespective of whether she is also doing a full-time job. This limits her freedom to make choices for her own liberation and independence. In Sri Lanka, the number of female students in most university programmes is higher than the male students. Over the past decades, women have got economic independence and many women have become equal partners in bringing income to the family. In the case of women who go to the middle eastern countries (mostly as maids) to earn, they have become the main income generators for their family. Still, the social and family responsibilities remain unchanged for them and one could not see the male partner in the family taking greater responsibility and participating in domestic chores.

Domestic violence still is high, divorced women are still seen as unacceptable, women as single parents are not encouraged, freedom of making decisions by a woman about their predicament is still questioned, social and family expectations are often needed to be carried by the woman irrespective of her wishes. I also feel that sometimes women themselves are hesitant to make their independent choices even when the freedom exists.

Yet Sri Lanka also made advancements that still haven't been realized in many countries in the West, too.

Sri Lanka can be a place of contradiction. Sri Lanka also is a country that voted in the world's first woman prime minister four decades ago and had our first woman president a decade ago. Looking at what is happening in the so-called 'developed democracies' such as the USA, Sri Lanka has been way ahead in breaking the glass ceilings with regard to women in politics.

Do you feel women artists working in Sri Lanka now have a strong presence in the arts scene?

A large number of artists working in the art community are women. That doesn't necessarily mean that most of them are engaged in critical and socially engaging art practices. The number of women artists who give a serious commitment to their art practice as professional artists and are willing to work against all odds to establish their presence in the art community are still few. I find that the art practices of most

women are vulnerable and can easily be disrupted by the social pressures of family duties.

You're also a cultural organiser and writer, who moved into the arts from political science. What drew you to creative expression and do you think it's an effective way to make a change?

I guess I was aware of my creative ability and had a fondness for drawing throughout. I naturally gravitated towards art when the moment was right and found major satisfaction taking art full time as a profession. I think artists have the power to introduce or challenge an idea effectively. An artist can be an educationalist and art is an educational and civilizational tool. It has the potential to plant a seed of change in a community and let it take its natural process to grow. But artists do not have the power to command the same attention (of people) that politicians have. An artist needs to be a populist (a cult figure) or an activist to mobilize people. If you are either, then the change you will initiate is not because you are an artist. But artists can be good critics and intervenors to show the possibilities of change in a system.

colomboartbiennale.com

Wallpaper*

Community values: Colombo Art Biennale's collaborative architecture programme

ARCHITECTURE / 22 DEC 2016 / BY HARRIET THORPE

<http://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/colombo-art-biennale-collaborative-architecture-programme>



Gihan Karunaratne, architect and curator of the Architecture Programme, worked with the participating architects and students to open up a dialogue with the community about the built environment of Slave Island

Architecture studios Ciriacidiehnerer Architekten, Studio Assemble and Balmond Studio have participated in the Architects Programme of the fourth Colombo Art Biennale in Sri Lanka, exploring the theme 'Conceiving Space'. They join a wider group of architects, artists, professionals and academics, including Hirante Welandawe and Juhani Pallasmaa among others, in the community-orientated programme led by architect and academic Gihan Karunaratne.



Centred on the location of Slave Island, chosen because of its complex ethnic history and layered material culture, Karunaratne looked to create a platform for the discussion of the urban environment on a site-specific level, with the aim to bring positive benefits to the community. 'I have always been interested in how people in Sri Lanka use spaces with such limited resources,' says Karunaratne. 'Most of the art and architecture exhibitions and education platforms in Sri Lanka are only available to a certain type of demographic. We wanted to make something that is accessible to anyone and everyone.'

'Together with a local wood carver we represent Slave Island's built status quo, not as vulnerable urban context up for development, but as an entity and project in itself,' says Professor Alex Lehnerer of Ciriacidis Lehnerer Architekten

Each of the architectural projects found ways to engage the community and are permanent installations. Professor Alex Lehnerer of Ciriacidis Lehnerer Architekten led a project titled 'As of Twenty Sixteen' in collaboration with a team of international architecture students, which saw the realisation of an architectural model of the community made by local woodcarvers and displayed as a permanent public work. 'Our intention is to provide a physical snapshot of the area's contemporary morphology. Over time the model will naturally become a historical artefact as the area, with its houses as index of its inhabitants, will continue to change and develop,' says Lehnerer.

Finding ways to visualise and communicate the importance of community space, Finnish architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa with Alberto Foyo and Tony van Raat also built an architectural model of 1:50 scale of the existing Nawala Community Centre, developing ideas for the future of the centre.

'The communities and the acts have taught each other things, so they have learnt from each other. Hopefully they can continue to collaborate and bring their new skills forward in their every day life,' says curator Giban Karunaratne of the Architects Programme

Studio Assemble and Dutch artist Madelon Vrisendorp devised a series of workshops for the making of objects from street decorations to costumes, all inspired by the material culture and craft of Sri Lanka, while, looking for ways to enhance the lived experience of the individual in the community of Slave Island, Hirante Welandawe of H W Architects created 'sky gardens' on scaffolded islands above the streets, opening up green space within the urban environment.

Working more conceptually, Balmond Studio created a video work operated by an algorithm titled *Ethera*, which was a meditation on how pattern and sequence form in the architectural environment, questioning the extent of the presence of an omnipotent creator.

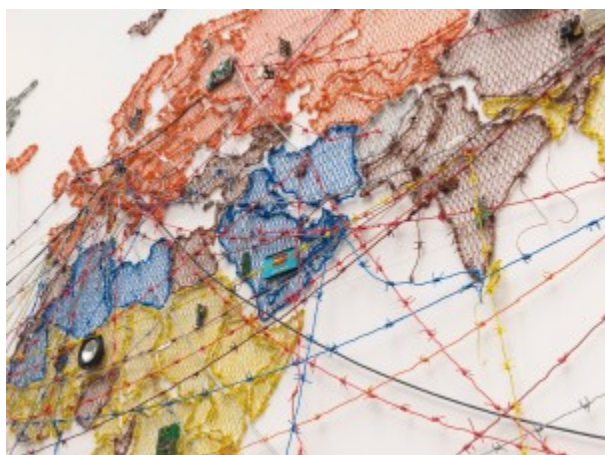
INFORMATION

For more information, visit the Colombo Art Biennale website



Colombo Art Biennale | Opens 2 December 2016

<http://www.artnowpakistan.com/colombo-art-biennale-opens-2-december-2016/>



Colombo Art Biennale 2016

Conceiving Space | 2nd – 20th December 2016

The 4th edition of the Colombo Art Biennale (CAB) 2016, themed ‘Conceiving Space’, will be held from the 2nd-20th December 2016. CAB is the largest and most significant contemporary art festival in Sri Lanka. Established in 2009, CAB showcases contemporary art with an emphasis on Sri Lanka and the South Asian region. This year the Biennale will showcase 64 local and international artists – including 20 emerging and 3 established local artists – 11 international architects, 5 international university student groups and 17 performance artists from Theertha Performance Platform, Sri Lanka.

CAB will feature a variety of artistic expressions,

including: visual multimedia installations, performance art, and architects working as artists. This year we will also see unique collaborative community engagement projects produced by established artists and architects and community members residing in Slave Island, Colombo.

The events of CAB 2016, curated by Alnoor Mitha, takes root from the theme ‘Conceiving Space’, which seeks to open up a paradigm of seeing, providing possibilities for creative production that engage with explorations of diverse senses of space. The Biennale will bring together artists including: Priyantha Udagedara (Sri Lanka), S. P. Pushpakanthan (Sri Lanka), Mithu Sen (Delhi), Pushpamala (Bangalore), Reena Kallat (Delhi), Faiza Butt (UK/Pakistan), Naiza Khan (UK/Pakistan), Ghada Khunji (Bahrain), Cristina Rodrigues (Portugal), Rajni Perera (Sri Lanka/Canada), Saskia Pintelon (Sri Lanka/Belgium), Venuri Perera (Sri Lanka), and Asvajit Boyle (Sri Lanka), to name a few of our international and local artists.

Integral to CAB’s vision for 2016 is the establishment of dialogue between local and international artists, curator Mitha explains:

“We are increasingly living in a time that is dominated by political events that are transforming our globe, making it unsafe, creating a new paradigm that questions our humanity through conflict. However, artists bring a new light, a new wisdom that generates a genuine engagement with the visual narrative that encapsulates issues around space, memory, identity, place, and what I call the transformative architectural paradigm that brings a new experiential reality.

My ultimate vision is to create a South Asian Artistic Hub in Colombo that is inspirational – an artistic journey that captivates the imagination whilst exploring new ideas with young people, and with the local communities who live in Sri Lanka whilst welcoming international delegates. At the end of the day, art is transformative; it brings smiles to many faces and challenges the cerebral mindset.”

CAB are also excited to announce numerous community engagement and education outreach programmes conducted prior to, and throughout, the biennale, which will also extend beyond the festival; this includes projects by Mullegema Art Centre, Jayne Dyer in collaboration with Unity Mission Trust, Theertha Performance Platform and the Collective of Contemporary Artists (CoCA). The Architect's programme, featuring Studio Assemble with Madelon Vriesendorp, Ciriacidis Lehnerer Architekten and Prof. Will Alsop along with Hirante Welandawe, will also be an integral component of CAB's community engagement and educational outreach.

CAB 2016 will be held at over 10 different sites around Colombo including, Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, The Old Town Hall in Pettah, JDA Perera University Gallery, Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, Slave Island Community, Theertha Red Dot Gallery, Prana Lounge, Barefoot Gallery & CoCA Residency.

- See more at: <http://www.artnowpakistan.com/colombo-art-biennale-opens-2-december-2016/#sthash.2AMySoeD.dpuf>



Sri Lankan art festival led by University researcher
Colombo Art Biennale runs until December 20
<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/news/news-items/4907/>



EXPERTISE from within the Manchester School of Art is helping to lead an international art festival in Sri Lanka.

Senior Research Fellow Alnoor Mitha is curating the 4th edition of the Colombo Art Biennale (CAB) 2016 themed 'Conceiving Space', held from 2nd-20th December 2016.

CAB is the largest and most significant contemporary art festival in Sri Lanka. Established in 2009, CAB showcases contemporary art with an emphasis on Sri Lanka and the South Asian region. This year the Biennale will showcase 64 local and international artists, (including 20 emerging and 3 established local artists), 11 international architects, 5 international university student groups and 17 performance artists from Theertha Performance Platform, Sri Lanka. CAB will feature a variety of artistic expressions, including: visual multimedia installations, performance art, and architects working as artists.

Exploration

The events of CAB 2016 takes root from the theme 'Conceiving Space', which seeks to open up a paradigm of seeing, providing possibilities for creative production that engage with explorations of diverse senses of space.

Alnoor said: “We are increasingly living in a time that is dominated by political events that are transforming our globe, making it unsafe, creating a new paradigm that questions our humanity through conflict. However, artists bring a new light, a new wisdom that generates a genuine engagement with the visual narrative that encapsulates issues around space, memory, identity, place, and what I call the transformative architectural paradigm that brings a new experiential reality.

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The Biennale will bring together artists from over Asia and the world.

Community engagement

There will be numerous community engagement and education outreach programmes conducted prior to, and throughout the biennale which will also extend beyond the festival, by Mullegema Art Centre, Jayne Dyer in collaboration with Unity Mission Trust, Theertha Performance Platform, Collective of Contemporary Artists (CoCA).

The Architect’s programmes featuring Studio Assemble with Madelon Vriesendorp, and Ciriacidis Lehnerer Architekten as well as Will Alsop along with Hirante Welandawe will also be an integral component of the community engagement and educational outreach programmes.

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For more information, visit: www.colomboartbiennale.com



[Stitch in time: Portuguese diaspora artist Cristina Rodrigues – in conversation](#)

Posted on 04/02/2017

<http://artradarjournal.com/>

Artist's collaborative installations revive at-risk traditions.

Portuguese diaspora artist and architect Cristina Rodrigues uses quirky collection of donated materials and interest in historical monuments to explore contemporary narratives. *Art Radar* speaks to the artist who has also recently shown at the Colombo Art Biennale in Sri Lanka.



Cristina Rodrigues, “The Shroud”, 2016, a large-scale art installation conceived for Colombo Art Biennale 2016, exhibited at the Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, linen, satin ribbons, silk fringes and acrylic paint. Photo: Marco Coutinho Longo. Image courtesy the artist.

Cristina Rodrigues earned a degree in Architecture (1998) before completing her Masters Degree in medieval and renaissance history from the University of Porto, Portugal (2004). After moving to Manchester, the United Kingdom, Rodrigues lectured at university and was awarded a PhD research grant from Manchester School of Art. Her work has been exhibited worldwide, including installations at **Guangdong Museum Of Art**, Museu do Design e da Moda (Portugal), Tatton Park Mansion (United Kingdom) and S. Clemente Palace, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). Most recently, her work was installed in the Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, in Colombo (Sri Lanka) as part of the **Colombo Art Biennale**. Rodrigues’ work merges oral traditions with textiles in architecturally rich locales. The artist often explores **“the role of women in contemporary society”** and the role migration has upon urban and rural communities. *Art Radar* caught up with the artist to learn more about her processes and how she works with artisans to protect and preserve cultural identities.

Your studies span architecture, medieval and renaissance history and contemporary art. Do you bring these diverse interests together in your artwork? How?

My academic journey provided me with all the necessary tools to produce work from a conceptual stage to its final shape. I sincerely believe that if I was not an architect I wouldn’t be able to do what I do! When I entered school in 1998, degree projects were all rigorously hand-drawn and this provided me with the ideal foundation and methods of research and design that I still use today. Also, being an architect made me particularly sensible to three very important themes that are the basis to my work still today – memory, scale and the relationship of an artwork with its surroundings.

I am involved in all stages when producing a new artwork – from its initial design, to its planning and execution. I also am intensely involved in the selection of exhibition venues, as well as the design and

planning of my solo shows. In many cases, the artworks respond directly to the architectural space, so I design my shows like an architectural project – with plans, façades, three-dimensional drawings, etc. A great example of this is my latest creation “The Shroud”, exhibited at Colombo Cathedral for Colombo Art Biennale 2016 (CAB). This particular installation was designed and conceptualised after the selection of the venue, with attempts to establish a profound dialogue with the architectural space through the narrative, design and aesthetic elements such as the hand-prints on the linen cloths.

Also during my training as an architect, photography was an important tool to register the different sites before, during and after any intervention. Photography was part of the process of recording the memory of the place and later it would be useful to me as an artistic tool and a form of expression. In 2009, I started photographing rural settings in the interior of Portugal. That same year, I moved to Manchester. The contrasting realities of this urban centre and the Portuguese rural landscapes I had left behind were very striking. In a new country and surrounded by different people, I felt the need to register something that would link me to my provenance. I felt a certain nostalgia every time I would visit Portugal. Photography was a tool with which to register this stage in my life and also a lens through which I could look at a specific reality.

Another one of my interests, which I have cultivated from a young age, is Medieval and Renaissance history. I was always fascinated by historical monuments, especially cathedrals and monasteries. My first two solo contemporary art exhibitions took place in a cathedral and a monastery respectively: “The Blanket” (Idanha version) a large-scale art installation exhibited at the Cathedral of *Idanha-a-Velha* and “My Country Through Your Eyes” exhibited at Jeronimos Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage) both held in Portugal in 2013. The works exhibited in these spaces establish a profound dialogue with the architectural space.

[Click here to watch “The Shroud” by Cristina Rodrigues on YouTube](#)

Please tell us the impetus behind your logo.

From 2006 to 2008, I lived between the Algarve region in southern Portugal and Seville, in Spain. During this time, I was studying at *Universidad de Sevilla*. I became absolutely fascinated with *Hispano-Moresque* tiles. These types of tiles and their different variations can only be found in the South of Portugal and Spain. The patterns and colours in these tiles are extremely rich and eye-catching. I started using these patterns in my drawings. The Portuguese word for tile is *azulejo* and it derives from the Arabic word *zellige*. In 2010, I created my logo inspired by the central motif from the *Hispano-Moresque* tiles represented in a single colour – Royal Blue. The central motif is an abstract representation of stars.



Block print of Cristina Rodrigues' logo at the Manchester Cathedral. Photo: RezaKio. Image courtesy the artist.

You were awarded a research grant for the Arts Humanities Research Council in 2011. What research did you pursue for that grant? Did your work change after this project? How?

In 2011, I started my PhD studies at Manchester School of Art. After several years of collecting photographs in rural Portugal, I decided to study these locations in detail. The effects of several years of migration of the younger generations to main urban centres such as Porto and Lisbon and to other countries in Europe left physical marks in the territory. The evidence of human decline could be found in the abandoned buildings, streets and plots of land, to an extent that some of these places looked like ghost villages where it was difficult to see a human soul. This was the face of depression.

I was awarded a research grant by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to develop my ongoing research project about the study and register Portuguese territories with low population density. My research inspired me to create some of my most poignant contemporary art work.

My artistic approach to social inclusion in settings affected by human and environmental desertification presents a new model for transforming oral traditions into something tangible through collaboration between artists and artisans, and by (re)presenting this knowledge (back) in new ways to rural and urban centres. It has been a journey across architecture and art, Portugal and England and also a journey from urban to rural Portugal. It shows that it is possible to retain an authorial voice as an artist, whilst developing a model for participation and social inclusion rooted in issues which are shared by a whole nation. It presents a form of practice-led research that cherishes the art, as well as the people who live and work alongside the artist.

In 2012, I founded and curated the itinerant exhibition entitled **"21st Century Rural Museum"**. This exhibition grew out of my research. Selected Portuguese and British artists were invited to create artworks about the Portuguese rural world. The exhibition encapsulated their vision in a physical space where narratives were brought to life in a quest to engage the public in the debate about the importance of rural regeneration. The show was structured with a variety of displays – photos, sculptures, installations, drawings, etc. – and made up a narrative that showed tales of rural Portugal to urban audiences.

The research grant by the Arts and Humanities Research Council gave me the possibility to focus exclusively in my artistic practice. For one entire year, I was able to do many field visits to rural areas in Portugal, photograph and interview the local population. This allowed me to raise several questions about how collaborative art-ethnography can be an approach to social inclusion in settings affected by human and environmental desertification. As a result of the intense research process that involved extensive participant observation, I conceptualised and produced several art installations and sculptures such as: the versions of the art installation entitled "The Blanket"; the three versions of the sculptures "Dressed Mooresses"; the sculpture entitled "The Chapel" and the photography installations "The People's Wall"; "My Country Through Your Eyes" and "Women From My Country".



Cristina Rodrigues, "Dressed Mooress III" from the "My Country Through Your Eyes" installation at Jeronimos Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage), in Lisbon, Portugal, 2013, iron, satin ribbons and cotton lace, 2.00m (height) x 1.50m (diameter). Photograph: André Castanheira. Image courtesy the artist.

Your work combines culture, oral traditions and textiles. Please explain how you use materials to depict oral traditions. What challenges do you have transforming something that is from an oral tradition into something that is tangible?

When I was an architecture student, I was trained to renounce decoration. Minimalism was the main architectural style: everything should be stripped to its essential. This always intrigued me and felt this way of teaching was a kind of style dictatorship. At home I would see my mother and grandmother valuing traditional decorated objects – ceramics, rugs, lace coverlets and other soft furnishings – which would be described at school as decadent, distasteful and sometimes hideous. But the women in my family loved these objects because these were passed on from mother to daughter, from one generation to the other.

I started collecting these objects, especially those that no one wanted. Today everyone around me knows I collect the quirkiest objects. My art studio receives many donations from old factories, people who are in the process of refurbishing their homes, etc. These donations consist mainly of old furniture, old textiles, old stamps and new materials – cotton lace reels, satin ribbon reels, knives, fabrics, shoes, etc. The provenance of the materials and objects is very important to me, so every time something “new” enters the studio, its origin and previous owner is registered in a log book.

I also collect stories. My many field visits, and recorded interviews with locals allowed me to collect their stories that inspire the narratives in my artworks. In my experience, the entire process of creating a work that represents certain oral traditions is very fluid. I always start with participant observation, being immersed in a certain community and directly listening to the people involved. Only after many conversations, I recognise stories and objects that are relevant to them. In many cases I use these objects – displace them – as a form of depicting their stories and the centre of my artistic narrative.



Cristina Rodrigues, "The Shroud" (detail), a large-scale art installation conceived for Colombo Art Biennale 2016, exhibited at the Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2016, linen, satin ribbons, silk fringes and acrylic paint. Photo: Marco Coutinho Longo. Image courtesy the artist.

For your public, in situ installations, I'm curious to know how the process works: how much of the work do you do yourself – from the initial concept, to the installation, to the printing/painting/sewing?

My art studio receives many public commissions every year. I always think about the initial concept before I start designing the idea. The first drawings are normally free-hand drawings and sketches but I always produce more rigorous drawings or use professional software after. I think of art installations and sculptures as if they were architectural projects, so I design everything exhaustively in order to make the idea/concept accessible not only to myself but also to others who collaborate with me.

The vast majority of the art installations I have designed are produced in collaboration with different groups of artisans – for example, "The Shroud" produced especially for [Colombo Art Biennale](#). This artwork was produced in partnership with a group of Portuguese linen weavers from Varzea de Calde. The women involved in this project planted, harvested, transformed and produced the linen. The 100 percent hand-crafted linen was produced in traditional looms similar to the ones used to produce the original Shroud of Turin. After production, the linen was all hand-stamped by myself at my art studio in Castelo Branco, Portugal. In total, I stamped 66 metres of hand-crafted linen. The original stamp used in the fabric has the same design as my logo, and it symbolises a star – "among the stars".

Different projects involve the contributors at different levels of the production process. Another good example is the series of sculptures entitled "Enlightenment". The two original versions of this sculpture, one in black and one in white, exhibited for the first time at Manchester Cathedral, United Kingdom, from July to September 2014, were all decorated with glass and crystal beads by myself and a group of migrant women from the different communities residing in the city. During several months, I decorated these large-scale iron chandeliers alongside those women.



Cristina Rodrigues, "The Shroud", a large-scale art installation conceived for Colombo Art Biennale 2016, exhibited at the Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2016, linen, satin ribbons, silk fringes and acrylic paint. Photo: Marco Coutinho Longo. Image courtesy the artist.

One of the reoccurring narratives of your work includes the migration of people from rural to urban settings. Please talk about the importance of retaining and protecting a culture's social identity and how your work seeks to do this.

To me it is important to register oral traditions concerning poetry, folk music, ways of making different crafts, because some of these subjects remain untouched. Writing and reflecting about oral traditions in Portugal made me understand how truly universal local actions are – for example, the way of producing hand-crafted linen with a loom is transversal to many cultures.

I start by registering the ways of making, and then create something entirely new using traditional hand-crafted materials. I don't think about my work as a way of preserving a 'culture's social identity'. It is only a way of looking at a certain reality and registering it. Understanding about a 'culture's social identity' enables me to understand more about myself as part of the whole. I register and then create something new, using actions that are learned locally but are universal in meaning.



Cristina Rodrigues, "Enlightenment II" from the "Women From My Country" installation at Manchester Cathedral, England, 2014, iron, stainless steel, ceramic angels and crystal beads, 2.10m (height) x 1.80m (diameter). Photo: RezaKio. Image courtesy the artist.

In an interview with Rajesh Punj for *Sculpture Magazine*, you mention that it is crucial for your work to be both relevant locally and globally. Name some aspects or themes of your work that are universal and relevant across time periods and cultures.

I was born in Porto, the second largest city in Portugal. Only when I moved to the south of the country in 2006, did I start visiting rural locations more often. During these visits, I realised that several Portuguese cultural traditions were completely unknown to myself. As a response, I started registering these visits in my photographs and also started recording my conversations with locals.

Later in 2010, I started collecting objects that were significant to these rural communities, such as the *adufe*, a traditional musical instrument from the central region of Portugal, which originates from a large Persian framed drum. The women who play the *adufe* rehearse on a weekly basis and perform several times a year in local and national festivities, concerts and processions. I was particularly interested in the rehearsals, when women gather themselves to play the *adufe*, rehearse new musical themes and share personal histories. When observing the women's interactions during the rehearsals I realised that a simple object like the *adufe* had the power of bringing women together to share narratives, poetry and music.

Considering the importance of this instrument, I have created the first version of an installation entitled "The Blanket" in April 2013. "The Blanket" is a symbol of women and motherhood and an homage to the role of women in society. A mother covers her child with a blanket. I created a gigantic blanket made with *adufes*, a musical instrument locally played by women. Crossing local symbols (the *adufe*) with transcultural behaviours (a mother covering her child with a blanket) the artwork attempts to be a reverence to all women in contemporary society.



Cristina Rodrigues, "The Blanket" from the "Women From My Country" installation at Manchester Cathedral, England, 2014, leather, wooden frames, spray paint, satin ribbons and cotton lace, 7.00m (height) x 5.00m (width). Photo: RezaKio. Image courtesy the artist.

Your birth country Portugal, has a rich history that includes over 500 years of Islamic rule. Can you please tell us more about author Jose Leite Vasconcelos and how his book *Opusculos* inspired your "Enchanted Mooress" installations?

José Leite de Vasconcelos (1858 – 1941) was a Portuguese ethnographer and archaeologist, founder and the first director of the National Archaeology Museum in Portugal. He was one of the most significant researchers in his field. He was also the first author to write about the legend of the enchanted moorresses – a supernatural being from the fairy tales of Portuguese and Galician folklore.

My first solo show was at the National Archaeology Museum, located at Jeronimos Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage) in 2013. The existing collection of this important museum was consolidated by José Leite Vasconcelos. When designing this show, I titled the exhibition "My Country Through Your Eyes", after one of my photo installations, I wanted to bring a different side of this incredible man and researcher into his home – the National Archaeology Museum. As many other archaeology museums, the collection is displayed according to its historical period and different themes, typologies and materials. I wanted to introduce an unexpected element with my contemporary art installations and sculptures, which cohabited with these very old stones for the four months of the duration of the exhibition – the element of surprise.

My large-scale iron sculptures entitled "Dressed Moorresses", in versions I, II and III, were displayed in dark spots along the normal exhibition route. The gigantic white iron vases dressed with the finest cotton lace, braided satin

ribbons, silk fringes and acrylic clothing lines, were illuminated by theatrical led lights, creating a ghostly appearance similar to the descriptions of the enchanted moorresses by José Leite Vasconcelos.



Cristina Rodrigues, "Dressed Moorress III" from the "My Country Through Your Eyes" installation at Jeronimos Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage), in Lisbon, Portugal, 2013, iron, satin ribbons and cotton lace, 2.00m (height) x 1.50m (diameter). Photograph: André Castanheira. Image courtesy the artist.

I am intrigued to know more about your work "The Fountain of Happiness", which was installed at the Tatton Park Garden. Please tell us more about this work.

Poet Omar Khayyám said, "Drink wine. This is life eternal. This is all that youth will give you. It is the season for wine, roses and drunken friends. Be happy for this moment. This moment is your life."

In the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, you will find many poems dedicated to wine and how this elixir changes human consciousness temporarily – alcohol is a disinhibitor. The starting point to conceptualise and design this art installation was this poem. Then, I thought about lavish Baroque festivities and garden fountains and an important garden or patio space marked by the presence of water, stimulating people to gather around it. In response, I created a contemporary fountain of wine, made of iron and empty glass bottles – "The Fountain of Happiness" – symbolising the perennial joy of the wine.



Cristina Rodrigues, "The Fountain of Happiness", exhibition at Tatton Park Mansion and Gardens, in Cheshire, England, 2015, iron, stainless steel and glass bottles, 3.50 x 2.10 m. Photo: RezaKio. Image courtesy the artist.

You spent several years collecting furniture from immigrant communities in Manchester, United Kingdom. Please tell us more about this process and how it unfolded into your "Bourgeois" installation. As an immigrant yourself, what did you learn about yourself through this experience?

I was primarily interested in understanding what type of furniture and other objects would be selected by a migrant family to decorate their homes in the host country. I perceive an individual's culture as something that is always unfinished. When you emigrate, you carry with you the culture from your home country and then assimilate to the culture of the host country. I was curious to understand how this reality could be translated into everyday objects.

I visited the house of some migrant families from different communities across Great Manchester and enquired them about the criteria to select their furniture. When some of these families remodelled their homes, I bought their old furniture and produced different installations with these – "Bourgeois"; "Dining the Heart"; "Vault"; "Marzipan"; "Gaga" – all exhibited at Tatton Park Mansion exhibition in 2015. The people's objects were displayed in a noble mansion, all of these installations were produced with furniture items previously owned by an Iranian family living in Stockport, in the outskirts of Manchester. The contemporary art installation entitled *Bourgeois* (2014) comprises four chairs. These were conventional chairs used in the family's dining room for over 20 years.



Cristina Rodrigues, "Bourgeois", exhibition on the 10th of June – Day of Portugal – at the Portuguese Consulate General in Manchester, England, 2014, wood chairs and satin ribbons. Photo: RezaKio. Image courtesy the artist.

Your installation "The Shroud" was included in the 2016 edition of the Colombo Art Biennale in Sri Lanka. Please tell us more about the piece, its historic location and how it was received by local residents and CAB audience.

"The Shroud" is a large-scale contemporary art installation produced in collaboration with a group of Portuguese linen weavers and conceived especially for CAB 2016. It was exhibited at the Cathedral of Christ the Living Saviour, in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The art installation is composed of several hand-crafted linen clothes with dimensions 4.4 x 1.1 metres, hand stamped by myself, decorated with silk fringes and braided satin ribbons. The artwork is inspired by "The Shroud of Turin", a well-known religious representation in western society.

The 66 metres of linen used to produce the installation were all hand stamped by myself in different shades of red, using my logo as the main motif – an abstract representation of the stars used recurrently in Islamic architecture. For many religions, death is not perceived as the end of something but rather the passage into another stage – as the life of one's soul is perceived as eternal. The decorated emptiness of "The Shroud" attempts to illustrate that moment when the soul leaves the body – the passage.

[Click here to watch "The Kingdom of Heaven" by Cristina Rodrigues on YouTube](#)

Beyond CAB, do you have any exhibitions where your work will be shown? What are you currently working on in your studio for 2017?

Forthcoming artwork includes two large-scale textile art installations: one for Manchester Cathedral, for which the opening event will take place in the first semester of 2017, and another for CCCCCB – Centro de Cultura Contemporânea de Castelo Branco, Portugal. The art work for Manchester Cathedral is a collection of seven altar frontals, for all existing altars at the Cathedral. It is made of linen, 100 percent silk embroidery linen and gold. Each altar frontal will be exhibited during a limited period of time every year. This exquisite collection, embroidered with the finest silk and gold, will be produced with the assistance of a group of eight Portuguese women, who are experts in a traditional type of embroidery I chose to feature my designs, known as 'the Castelo Branco embroidering technique'.

Lisa Pollman