

way of the forest

19 - 28
JANUARY
2024

Colomboscope “Way of the Forest” will be held from 19 - 28 January 2024 across several venues in Colombo. The eighth edition of the festival is shaped with over 40 Sri Lankan and international artists and collectives. Interwoven with interdisciplinary programmes “Mushroomings” ranging from conversations, excursions, performances, workshops, open air cinema and listening experiences realised with a host of cultural partners.

Colomboscope 2024 is curated by Hit Man Gurung, Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Sarker Protick, with artistic director Natasha Ginwala.

Over 40 Sri Lankan & international artists

conversations • mushroomings • excursions
performances • workshops • concerts
open air cinema • listening experiences



COLOMBOSCOPE
interdisciplinary arts festival

Curatorial Introduction

Way of the Forest converges artistic pathways to rekindle knowledge of interdependence, custodianship, and restorative practices across rainforests, wilderness, mountain cultivations, and riverine wetlands. It invites deschooling – moving from the curriculum of plunder, reckless supremacy and extinction, to embrace active listening beyond the human sensorium. The forest as a lexicon holds a plenitude of meaning across languages: Aaranya in Tamil (ஆரண்யா) and Sanskrit relating to a sanctuary, vana (වන) in Sinhala. Bonn, Jongol, and Aranno in Bangla, gum in Nepal Bhasa, tēm in Tamu—each evoking distinct states of being, emotions, disparate imagination, and a palpable climate.

The multi-chapter exhibition at Colomboscope 2024 and accompanying events are an intricate study of our eroding ecological histories, of lost environmental wisdoms, monstrous developmental agendas, and ghosts of extraction. It endeavours to plot legacies of colonisation of resources and minds that operate in disguise. Within mutating landscapes, artists question who owns forest lands, who gets displaced, and who is restricted from sites marked for conservation.

What do the spirits of these lands, rivers, forests whisper in our ears? In many folktales, legends, and mythologies, forests are associated with apparitions, witches, and other mystical beings. These entities are often depicted as powerful and independent, existing beyond the reach of societal constraints. They are also spaces that elicit fear, of things unknown, and forces beyond human control. With the rise of imperialism the exploitation of natural resources and abuse of primary inhabitants was exacerbated as a fulfilment of greed, power, and ego. The subjugation of jungles and wildernesses then portrayed as a victory over the vastness, unruliness, mysticism of forests.

Many Indigenous peoples find themselves navigating nation-states driven by corporate capitalism and geopolitical hegemony. Throughout this struggle, there have been profound transitions marked by loss, change, resistance, and at times, even hopelessness. Revolutionaries, outcasts, borderline beings find solace and refuge within the forest's sheltering embrace. Its dense foliage and shaded paths provide a sense of secrecy and protection, allowing those seeking autonomy and freedom to gather and organise away from prying eyes, to recalibrate uncertainty and fear, to dream of alternative power structures, of new world orders.

Participants

Anoma Wijewardene / Anupam Roy / Anushka Rustomji / U. Arulraj / Barbara Sansoni
Chija Lama / Dumiduni Illangasinghe / Fernando García-Dory / Jayatu Chakma
Karachi LaJamia / Karunasiri Wijesinghe / Kieren Karritpul / Komal Purbe, Madhumala Mandal,
Rebati Mandal and Selo Yadav / Krisushananthan Inkaran / Kulagu Tu Buvongan
Laki Senanayake / Memory, Truth and Justice / Mónica de Miranda / Müge Yılmaz
Nahla al Tabbaa / Otobong Nkanga / Pankaja Withanachchi & Roshan De Selfa
Pathum Dharmarathna / Pushpakanthan Pakkiyarajah / Rakibul Anwar / MTF Rukshana
Ruwangi Amarasinghe / Sangita Maity / Sanod Maharjan / Saodat Ismailova
Sarmila Sooriyakumar with Pirainila Krishnarajah / Shehan Obeysekera / Shiraz Bayjoo
Soma Surovi Jannat / Spore Initiative with U Yits Ka'an, Colectivo Suumil Móokt'aan, Rafiki
Sánchez, and Cecilia Moo / Subas Tamang / Sunita Maharjan and Sanjeev Maharjan
Tamarra Jayasundera / Thava Thajendran / The Initiative for Practices and Visions of Radical
Care with Myriam Mihindou, Tawfiq Sediqi and Elena Sorokina / Thujiba Vijayalayan
Trent Walter / Venuri Perera and Eisa Jocson / Zihan Karim.

Collaborators

A Thousand Channels with Syma Tariq / BLAK C.O.R.E. / Chennai Photo Biennale
Collective of Contemporary Artists (CoCA) / Dharamshala International Film Festival with Ritu
Sarin and Tenzing Sonam / KACHA KACHA with Imaad Majeed / Kālam
Ka(ra)mi / Ghost 2561-2565 with Korakrit Arunanondchai & Christina Li
Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA) / Musicmatters
Non-Applicable (N/A) with Asvajit Boyle and Nigel Perera / Norient with Coco Em
Parrotfish Collective / Small Cat Advocacy and Research (SCAR) with Firi Rahman
The Packet / Visual Art and Experiences Group (VAEG) among others.

Exhibition Venues:

J.D.A. Perera Gallery / SNAFU Project / Public Library Garden / Barefoot Gallery

Program Venues

SNAFU Project / Goethe-Institut Garden / Public Library Garden / BMICH Kamatha Open Theatre
Ex-Government Servicemen Sports Club / CoCa Symbiosis / Barefoot MMCA / Beddagana Wetland Park

Please refer to our website for full curatorial text and artist notes:

www.colomboscope.lk/way-of-the-forest

Guest Curators' Biographies

Hit Man Gurung is an artist and curator based in Kathmandu by way of Lamjung. Gurung's diverse practice concerns itself with the fabric of human mobilities, frictions of history, and failures of revolutions. While rooted in the recent history of Nepal, his works unravel a complex web of kinships and extraction across geographies that underscore the exploitative nature of capitalism. These narratives revolve around the lived experiences of migrants caught between a dehumanizing transnational labor-based industry and an apathetic nation-state. He furthermore invokes Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies to fundamentally reconfigure contemporary artistic praxis. He has participated in exhibitions at SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2020); Biennale of Sydney (2020); Artspace Sydney (2019); Weltmuseum Wien (2019); Kathmandu Triennale (2017); Yinchuan Biennale (2016); Para Site, Hong Kong (2016); Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2015-16); and Dhaka Art Summit (2014, 2016, 2018, 2020). He was co-curator for the Kathmandu Triennale 2077 (2022), Nepal Pavilion at Venice Biennale (2022), 'Garden of Ten Seasons' at Savvy Contemporary, Berlin (2022) and '12 Baishakh,' Bhaktapur (2015) alongside Sheelasha Rajbhandari. He has also co-founded ArtTree Nepal an artist collective and Kalā Kulo an arts initiative.

Sheelasha Rajbhandari is an artist and curator based out of Kathmandu. Her works draw upon an embodied and speculative lineage of femininities to question the positioning of women across time, landscapes, and cosmologies. Her practice is a provocation to reflect beyond neo-liberal conception of time in order to de-center patriarchal structures that perpetuate cycles of industrial extraction and individual exhaustion. For her, art-making is about making space for collective action. This questioning feeds into her recent artistic and curatorial approach that recompose notions of Indigeneity, gender, worth, and productivity. Her installation in the traveling exhibition "A beast, a god and a line" (2018-2020) was presented at Para Site, Hong Kong; TS1, Yangon; Museum of Modern

Art, Warsaw; Kunsthall, Trondheim; and MIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai. She has also been an artist in residence at the Bellas Artes Projects (2019) and Para Site (2017). She has furthermore exhibited at Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2022), Weltmuseum Wien (2019); Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa (2017); and Kathmandu Triennale (2017). As a part of her collective, she has been a part of Dhaka Art Summit (2020) and Biennale of Sydney (2020). Rajbhandari co-curated the Kathmandu Triennale 2077, Nepal Pavilion at Venice Biennale (2022), 'Garden of Ten Seasons' at Savvy Contemporary, Berlin (2022) and '12 Baishakh,' Bhaktapur (2015) alongside Hit Man Gurung. She is also the co-founder of ArtTree Nepal an artist collective and Kalā Kulo an arts initiative.

Sarker Protick's photographs frequently build the narrative around the trope of change; momentary stillness, fleeting light, elemental origins of a place and a lost home. To make the decaying memory tangible, to define disappearing history of a place without confining it, Protick's often minimal, suspended and atmospheric visuals are coherently open with vast and solemn distance. Working with Photography, Video and Sound, Protick's works are built on long-term surveys rooted in Bangladesh. The form and materiality of his works often morph into the physicality of time; its raptures and our inability to grasp or hold time, the process of image-making as the way to expand time, to make space for more subdued moments, or more hints of an embodied life. Here we don't experience time as moving in a linear direction, rather, we experience it slowing down, recurring, having dips and curves, sometimes changing in a constant flux. Protick studied at the South Asian Media Institute in Dhaka, where he is currently teaching and has been teaching for the last ten years. Protick is a co-curator of Chobi Mela, the longest running International Photography Festival in Asia. His work has received several recognition and fellowships, including Joop Swart Masterclass, Foam Talent, Light Work Residency, Magnum Foundation Fund, World Press Photo Award etc. Protick is represented by Shrine Empire in Delhi.

Artistic Director

Natasha Ginwala is a curator, researcher and writer, co-curator, Sharjah Biennial 16 (2023-25), artistic director of Colomboscope, Sri Lanka since 2019 and associate Curator at Large at Gro-pius Bau, Berlin (2018 - 2024). She was also artistic director of the 13th Gwangju Biennale with Defne Ayas (2021). Ginwala has been part of curatorial teams of 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2014), Contour Biennale 8, documenta 14 (2017), Taipei Biennale 2012 and co-curated several international exhibitions including at e-flux, Sharjah Art Foundation, Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, ifa Gallery, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, L' appartement 22, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, MCA Chicago, 56th Venice Biennale, SAVVY Contemporary and Zeitz MOCAA. Ginwala is a widely published author with a focus on contemporary art, visual culture, and social justice.

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