

Events

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A steel cage with no door, a song trapped in glass: inside Ishara House, Kochi

A steel cage with no door, stamped “Free Space,” is at the centre of “Amphibian Aesthetics,” an exhibition at Kashi Hallegua House in Mattancherry. The show features 12 artists and collectives and runs alongside the Kochi-Muziris Biennale through March 31, 2026.

This has finished · 12 December 2025 – 31 March 2026

In this page

On view **12 December 2025 – 31 March 2026**
Times 10:30 AM to 7:00 PM
Part of Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2025–26

Where

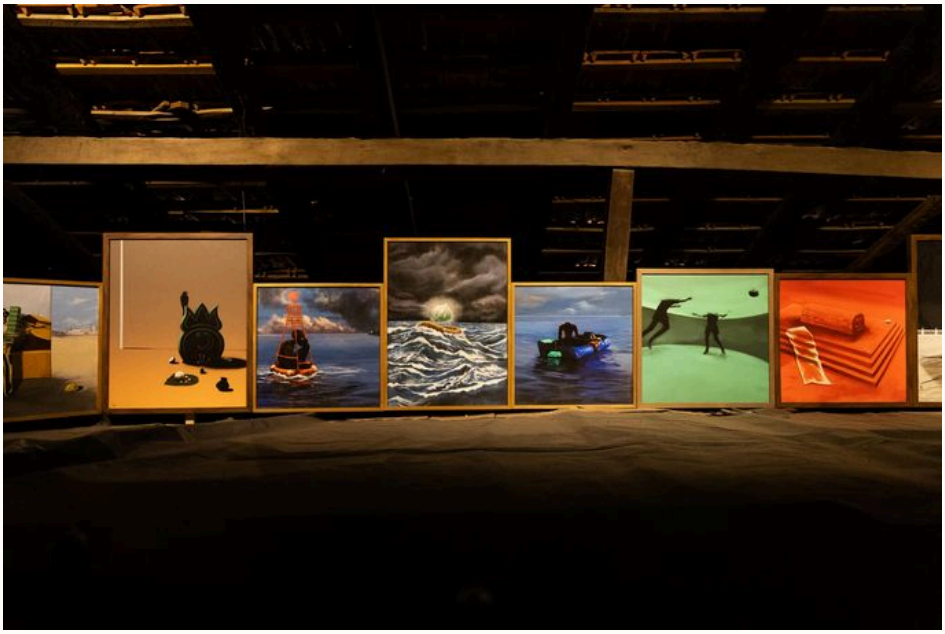
Kashi Hallegua House
Art gallery · Mattancherry

Drawn from OpenStreetMap, by its contributors.

You've just missed it — take it home anyway

The 2025–26 Biennale ended on 31 March 2026. The next is expected around December 2027. We made a book of all 72 exhibits, venue by venue, with the photographs — 76 pages, 9 MB.

> **There's a steel cage in the middle of a room in Mattancherry. Three meters tall, three meters wide. You can walk around it, look through its bars, press your face against it. But you can't get in. There's no door. Stamped along the top edge, two words: "Free Space."**



Inside Ishara House, Mattancherry — a steel cage with no door and a song trapped in glass, at the Kochi Biennale.

"Amphibian Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Precarity" opened on Dec. 13, 2025, inside Kashi Hallegua House in Jew Town, Mattancherry. The building is over 200 years old. It is in one of Kochi's most layered neighbourhoods, a place built by centuries of trade, migration, and coexistence. The exhibition runs alongside the Kochi-Muziris Biennale through March 31, 2026, featuring 12 artists and collectives from India, Italy, Palestine, and the UAE.

Who are the organisers?

The Ishara Art Foundation organises it. The foundation is a Dubai-based nonprofit for South Asian contemporary art. Riyas Komu is the artistic director.

Komu is also a co-founder of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, so this is not a random side show. Aazhi Archives and URU Art Harbour are project partners. Galleria Continua and Alserkal Avenue back the space.

The theme: between land and water

The word “amphibian” does a lot of work in this show. It refers to organisms that live between two worlds - land and water. But for the artists here, it is also a way of thinking about people who live between states - between nations, between memory and forgetting, between visibility and erasure.

Kochi is itself an amphibian city. Its waterways have connected the region to the rest of the world for centuries. Trade brought languages, food, religions, and people from Arabia, China, Portugal, the Netherlands. Mattancherry and Jew Town carry this history in their streets. The exhibition takes place right inside that history.

Work by work: what you will see

Michelangelo Pistoletto

The 91-year-old Italian artist shows two works. He is a pioneer of Arte Povera and a nominee for the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize. Both are courtesy of Galleria Continua.

“Spazio Libero (The Free Space)”, 1976-2025. The piece is a cage with no entrance. Pistoletto first described this work in his 1976 book “One Hundred Exhibitions in the Month of October”. The book is a collection of ideas for one hundred future works.

Inmates built the first physical version in 1999 at San Vittore prison in Milan and installed it in the prison courtyard. A cage inside a cage. The point is that freedom is not a physical state. It is a mental one. Even locked up, your thoughts belong to you.

“Division and Multiplication of the Mirror”, 2025. The work is four framed mirrors, each split and angled apart. Pistoletto started this series in 1978 with a simple observation: a mirror can reflect everything except itself.

When you divide a mirror and move the halves apart, the reflections multiply. The narrower the angle, the more images you see. What starts as breakage becomes abundance. The series links physical optics to a social argument: sharing produces more than accumulation.

Ratheesh T

"The Indian Garden with Unknown Flowers", 2025. It is a massive oil-on-linen triptych (549 × 305 centimetres). Ratheesh paints from the fractures of contemporary India.

His work tracks how Brahminical patriarchy has taken political shape through religious communalism. It also tracks how ideology filters into daily life - deciding what is visible, what is acceptable, what gets erased. His figures are migrants, workers, mythic characters, ordinary people. All of them adapt, bearing the weight of historical memory.

The 2018 Kerala floods and the COVID-19 pandemic appear as backdrops, moments where infrastructure collapsed but human solidarity did not. The work is courtesy of Galerie Mirchandani+Steinruecke.

Appupen (George Mathen)

"The World of Amfy B.N. Jose x Frogman", 2025. The work spans digital interventions across online platforms, print, and outdoor murals in Kochi's streets. Appupen works in dark humour, pop aesthetics, and political satire.

This series follows a fictional character named Amfy B.N. Jose, who takes a government job hunting a vigilante called Frogman. By day, Amfy manufactures fear through staged news and propaganda. By night, he becomes the figure he is supposed to catch. It is a story about what happens when ambition eats conviction.

If you have seen Appupen's murals around Fort Kochi during the Biennale, this is the larger narrative they belong to.

Shilpa Gupta

"When the Stone Sang to the Glass", 2025. Walk into two small rooms. Everything you see - furniture, window panes, tabletops, drinking glasses -

came from the neighbourhood around Kashi Hallegua House. Gupta has turned these ordinary objects into instruments.

During her site visit, as she touched the surfaces, echoes of “Hum Dekhenge” surfaced. Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s protest poem became a rallying cry for resistance movements across South Asia. The installation connects to Gupta’s long engagement with imprisoned poets and suppressed voices.

Previous works like “Untitled (Wives of the Disappeared)” (2006) and “Song of the Ground” (2017) explored similar ground. Here, when authorities silence public dissent, sound finds other paths. It seeps into walls and inhabits household objects. neugerriemschneider gallery supports the work.

Dima Srouji

“Foundations”, 2025. It is a site-specific installation using bricks and plaster. The floor plan comes from an ancient tomb in Gaza, which British archaeologists excavated in the 1930s. Srouji builds a sonic and physical composition of what remains and what has been erased from the ground in Palestine. The erasure spans both space and time.

The installation dwells in time, moving backwards while waiting for Palestinian liberation. Srouji has shown at the Venice Biennale, Sharjah Architecture Triennial, the V&A, and the Palestinian Museum.

Kabir Project

The collective shows two works. The collective has spent 23 years archiving India’s mystic poetry tradition.

“Akath Katha: The Untellable Tale”, 2025. Anisha Baid, Smriti Chanchani, and Shabnam Virmani conceived it. It is a multimedia installation that uses Ajab Shahar, a digital archive of 600 years of mystic poetry.

The medieval poets of the Bhakti and Sufi traditions challenged religious sectarianism and moral hypocrisy. Their poems crossed language after language - Malwi, Sindhi, Urdu, Bengali - moving through marketplaces, shrines, and village gatherings. The central tension is that these mystics insist on truths that cannot be spoken, yet they keep speaking. They mock

language while using it. Akath (the unsayable) and Katha (the said) wrestle throughout.

“Trail of Mirrors”, 2025. It is an interactive digital archive. Two browsing stations offer curated paths through the Ajab Shahar collection.

The first trail explores “Fakiri” or living freely - shedding ego, material attachment, anxious clinging. It asks you directly: what burdens are you carrying, and could you set them down for a few minutes? The second trail mirrors the Kabir Project’s own 23 years of listening, collecting, and singing with keepers of this tradition.

White Balance

White Balance shows two works responding to the ongoing devastation in Gaza.



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"We Were Playing in the Clouds", 2025. It is a site-specific installation. It begins with a quote from Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani. The quote tells of children being lifted to the sky during wartime and returning to say they were playing in the clouds.

The work centres on Qabars (gravestones) and their place between life and death. The Arabic term "Barzakh" describes this place as a state between this world and the afterlife. The installation uses Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's idea of "infinite time" to ask why gravestones matter in an age of precarity.

"Gopalan Solo", 2025. It is a performance channelling collective grief and rage in response to violence and dehumanisation. Gopalan's theatrical approach draws energy from the present moment, turning performance into an act of witnessing.

Rami Farook

"Three Acts of a Masjid", 2025. The work uses six screens. They show more than 200 short, vertical-format videos gathered from public online sources - stories, reels, TikToks. The work assembles a living archive of the mosque as a place of construction, destruction, preservation, devotion, vulnerability, and control.

The six screens unfold across three acts. Destruction covers forces that erase sacred spaces through war, redevelopment, or neglect. Preservation covers mosques maintained across centuries through care and restoration. Protection covers communities defending what remains through protest, prayer, and documentation.

The sounds overlap and bleed between screens. The call to prayer merges with the crash of debris. The footage spans historic centres of worship to neighbourhood mosques across different geographies.

Zahir Mirza

"Boatcast: Float with Stories", 2025. The work is a series of video interviews conducted aboard Kerala's boats. Mirza, a media veteran and artist, uses Kerala's waterways as both stage and subject. The

conversations move across locations around the state. Travel becomes exchange - a series of conversations in motion.

Midhun Mohan

Fourteen archival prints on paper range from 60 × 60 centimetres to 70 × 60 centimetres. Works include “Man Holding His Dream,” “Sarmad,” “Sea Fairy,” “Dream Ka Tukda,” and others. Mohan worked across visual, digital, haptic, and archival forms, treating mediums as tools to be reconfigured rather than categories to be preserved.

His practice explored maritime travel, colonialism, diaspora, slavery, and myth. He offered sharp, satirical counter-narratives against dominant histories. Mohan is no longer with us, and this presentation bears the weight of a practice cut short.

Shanvin Sixtous

“In, Between”, 2025. It is a site-specific installation using steel and sound. Sixtous uses the hull of a boat as both material and metaphor within Kochi’s waterfront setting. The hull - always partly underwater - carries traces of labour and migration, of journeys both chosen and forced.

Polished interiors against corroded exteriors trace routes of trade and belief. The work connects geographies across the Mediterranean, Gaza, the Aegean, and the Bay of Bengal. It lingers in uncertainty rather than resolving the tensions between commerce and conflict. Vinton Engineering fabricated it.

CAAS Collective

City As A Spaceship (Susmita Mohanty, Rohini Devasher, Sue Fairburn, Barbara Imhof) works at the threshold between Earth and space. Their contribution includes “Amphibious Futures” (2022), a set of A2 posters based on collaborative field notes. These notes cover underwater go-pro images, shore-based movement studies, annotated maps, and fieldwork photographs. The prints capture raw, unprocessed moments from the edge of sea and space, inviting viewers into the same liminal experience. Across four interconnected works, the collective explores states where land, sea, atmosphere, and cosmos merge.

Places in this story 2

MattancherryFort Kochi