

Guide

The Ultimate Guide to Aspinwall House

A guide to the installations at Aspinwall House, the main venue of the Kochi Biennale 2025/26, with tips for planning a visit.

Before you go

WhereCalvetty Road, Fort Kochi

Pulled from the place record. Nothing in this panel is written on the guide.

In this page

An old refrigerator hums in a dark room. Inside its freezer, frozen fish and fungi slowly decay behind glass. It is a tiny diorama of everything wrong with how we eat, grow, and consume. This is just the first thing you see when you walk into Aspinwall House at Kochi Biennale 2025/26. It gets stranger, more beautiful, and more haunting from here.

Aspinwall House is the main venue of the sixth Kochi-Muziris Biennale, titled “For the Time Being.” This edition runs from Dec. 12, 2025, to March 31, 2026. The heritage building on Fort Kochi’s waterfront was once the headquarters of a British trading company. It now holds work by over a dozen artists from India and around the world.

This guide walks you through the main spaces based on the pictures taken during my visit.

The Coir Godown

The Coir Godown - the old warehouse attached to Aspinwall House - holds some of the biennale’s most powerful installations.

Adrián Villar Rojas - Rinascimento



Think of the most ordinary thing in your kitchen. A refrigerator. Now imagine it as a museum display case for everything the planet is losing.

Argentine artist Adrián Villar Rojas takes dated, obsolete refrigerators and turns their open freezer compartments into glass-fronted displays. Inside are frozen meat, fish, sliced fruit, bottled drinks, roots, and leaves. Fungi grow over all of it.

The compositions look like old Dutch vanitas paintings - those 17th-century still lifes about death and the passing of time. But here, the message applies to our times. Every item in the freezer is a product of industrial farming, global supply chains, and mass production. The fresh skin of a fruit is next to the glossy label of a packaged bottle. Natural and processed, side by side.

Here is what makes it unforgettable. The sculptures depend on electricity to survive. If the power cuts - and in Kochi's humidity, things shift fast - the slow work of decay begins. Fungi spread. Ice melts.

The ruin is part of the design. Villar Rojas has shown this series at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin. But seeing it here, in a former coir warehouse in tropical and beloved Fort Kochi, hits differently.

Panjeri Artists' Union - A 100-Day Living Installation

This is not a single artwork. It is an entire community setting up camp inside the biennale for 100 days.



Inside Aspinwall House during the 2025–26 Kochi-Muziris Biennale — the main venue, on Calvetty Road.

Panjeri Artists' Union is a group of fourteen practitioners - visual artists, filmmakers, musicians, writers, designers - from Banipur in West Bengal, near the India-Bangladesh border. Their name comes from the Persian

word “panjeri,” a navigation device used by boatmen to cross Bengal’s wild rivers.

Their space at Aspinwall changes constantly. Think of it as a workshop that is always open. Discussions happen. Performances unfold. The archives get reworked over time, and the walls fill up.

Swing and Simhasana / Lullaby and Quiet Chants of Power - Video sculptures that dig into what happens to national anthems when the nations that created them no longer exist. The Union interviewed women from eastern Bengal who were born between the 1940s and 1960s. These women lived through East Pakistan, then Bangladesh, then India. They can barely remember the first two national anthems - songs that gave them their identity.

What survives instead? Memories of home. Stories of leaving. The songs of survival, not the songs of states.

At the centre is a replica of the boulder stone from Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury’s famous sculpture “Triumph of Labour” (1959), placed inside a domestic temple altar. A cradle holds a mute TV showing the original sculpture. The cradle rocks gently, as if trying to put a nation to sleep.

Micro-revolts of Stitching Rhythms - Meet Saptak Mistry, the Union’s youngest member at 18 years old. He is a rapper from a refugee settlement alongside railway tracks and an open crematorium. His neighbourhood sees frequent deaths on the tracks. His friends have become migrant workers in garment factories, plastic toy units, and bidi factories. Saptak’s songs are a journal of this life - survival and dreams, side by side.

The sewing machine in the installation is not random. It is the sound of Bengal’s displaced communities. After Partition, sewing machines provided livelihood to refugee women across settlements. The rhythm of the machine weaves into the rhythm of Saptak’s rap. A motorized sewing machine operates alongside a 17-minute film built around his songs.

Knitting and Crochet - This ongoing work invites women from Durgapur, Barddhaman, Ashoknagar, and Kolkata to contribute their crochet and domestic textile pieces. Union member Samapti Mondal learned crochet

around 1990 in Durgapur during a period of industrial shutdowns and protests. Another member, Sudipta Mondal, brings crochet into dialogue with leather design - a craft historically tied to Dalit and Chamar communities. The installation keeps growing as artists add to it through the biennale's run.

Dhiraj Rabha - The Quiet Weight of Shadows

Imagine walking into a garden of carnivorous flowers with sharp white teeth, glowing under blue UV light. News reports about the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) insurgency buzz from speakers - in Assamese, Hindi, and English - but the voices blur into noise. You cannot make out the words. That is what the work intends.



Inside Aspinwall House during the 2025–26 Kochi-Muziris Biennale — the main venue, on Calvetty Road.

Dhiraj Rabha (born 1995) is from a former ULFA settlement in Goalpara, Assam. His work documents life in the aftermath of an insurgency. It

covers displacement and surveillance. It shows the gap between what the state says happened and what people lived through.

Eight watchtowers surround the garden - modelled on the surveillance structures found in every camp. Each tower holds video screens showing conversations with former ULFA members. These members include Anthony Rabha, Jayanta Ray, Juri Rabha, and others. They share memories of loss, violence, and their hopes for their families.

In a nearby room, fragments of newspapers, books, and photographs from 1982 to the 2000s lie scattered like the remains of a burnt house. His film "Whispers Beneath the Ashes" (2025) follows children journeying through a forest, searching for home.

Kirtika Kain - Tar, Gold, and Copper

Kirtika Kain (born 1990, New Delhi, now based in Sydney) works with materials that carry thousands of years of ritual history - tar, copper, gold, cotton. But she uses them to tell a story that official history has erased. That story is the inheritance of the Dalit diaspora.



Inside Aspinwall House during the 2025–26 Kochi-Muziris Biennale — the main venue, on Calvetty Road.

Her tar canvases in “Mimetics” (2025) look like earth charred under extreme heat. Each work begins from a silicon impression of another. The series is connected but never linear. Gaps and additions echo each other. Some canvases come alive with gold leaf and red pigment over the black tar.

In “Chronicles” (2025), suspended sea-green copper plates hang in the viewing space. Cotton lamp wicks dipped in tar lie across the plates. Through heating, acid exposure, and oxidation, Kain reveals copper’s many faces - shiny, solid, brittle, crumbling. The patina layers tell time.

Her abstraction is not decorative. It is a language she has built with historical materials and her own body. It honours the undocumented histories of Dalit women across India and the diaspora.

Pallavi Paul - Alaq

What happens when the dead refuse to leave? How do they stay among us - through faith, memory, shared vulnerability?

Pallavi Paul (born 1987, New Delhi) presents “Alaq,” a three-channel cinematic installation born from her encounters with frontline workers and gravekeepers during the pandemic. She travelled across Kerala, tracing the presence of contagion. She visited sites shaped by the recurring Nipah virus. She also visited the shrine of Beema Beevi, a revered female saint-figure where healing crosses religious boundaries.

The three screens weave together electron microscope views of viral matter, archival fragments, and intimate portraits of care. Science and devotion are side by side. Medical protocols and prayers mirror each other.

Alongside the film are “Anasir” (2025), collagraph prints made with Digvijaysinh Jadeja. The prints have images embossed and etched on paper. “Trousseau” (2025) reworks medical body bags with embroidery. It turns objects of death into objects of tenderness.

The Aspinwall Bungalow: Ground Floor

Walk from the Coir Godown into the main Aspinwall Bungalow. The ground floor has seven artists. Here are the ones with detailed descriptions in the biennale programme.

Lionel Wendt (1900-1944, Colombo, Sri Lanka)

Lionel Wendt was a photographer who died 80 years ago. His images still feel alive. Lionel Wendt was also a pianist. You can see the musician’s sense of rhythm in his photographs. Working with gelatin silver prints, he used double exposures, chemical bleaching, and hand-toning to blur the line between record and performance.

His portraits of fishermen casting nets, farmers ploughing land, and young men with sickles treat physical labour not as suffering but as beauty. The brown body, in Wendt’s camera, becomes a sculpture lit by light and sweat. His landscapes of Sri Lanka - clouds, rocks, silver sea - carry the same

intimacy as his portraits of people. Tenderness runs through everything he shoots.

Ali Akbar PN - Reliquary

Ali Akbar PN (born 1996, Koolimuttam, Kerala) examines what happens when communities build things together. He also examines what happens when those histories get flattened by politics.

“Reliquary” hosts remnants of inter-community relationships from religious and secular sites across Gujarat. These include the Jami Masjid in Bharuch. Other sites are the Roza-Rozi Dargah Sharif near Mahemdabad and the Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum in Vadodara. Paintings reconstruct these sites and their mixed cultural origins.

A ruined life-size pillar anchors the space. Hindu and Muslim sculptors from Sirohi, Rajasthan carved it. They have traditionally worked together at multi-religious sites. A seated lion sculpture is beside the pillar. Some parts echo its Middle-Eastern roots, passed down through Indo-Islamic and Buddhist architecture.

But its aggressive expression speaks to contemporary ethno-nationalist pride. The work shows how different powers reproduce, desecrate, and claim cultural forms through history.

Shiraz Bayjoo - Sa Sime Lamer

Shiraz Bayjoo (born 1979, Port Louis, Mauritius) has created a path from the colonial commercial history of Aspinwall to the sea.

“Sa Sime Lamer” means “The Path to the Sea” in Mauritian Creole. The sea-facing installation revisits a sixteenth-century Portuguese text about medicinal plants of southern India. Suspended textile panels in raw muslin show the plants and spices forced into production and shipped as commodities to European and Mauritian gardens.

Fragile terracotta seed sculptures of local species hang from the panels. Ceramic figurines scattered on the floor reference Dutch soldiers sculpted on the base of a traditional bronze lamp in Sree Krishna Swamy Temple,

Mavelikara. They show how colonial powers embedded themselves into religious architecture.

Wooden plinths host vegetative forms in terracotta. These connect to the ruins of the old Dutch garden in Kochi. Its crevices are now used for religious offerings.

The Aspinwall Bungalow: First Floor

Upstairs, seven more artists show work. Smitha M Babu and Huma Mulji demand your time.

Smitha M Babu - Paakkalam

Smitha M Babu (born 1981, Kollam) has spent over twenty years in theatre. Her project "Paakkalam" - the Malayalam word for the weaving workspace - comes from her life along Ashtamudi Lake in Kollam. Coir making has been a way of life there for generations.

Nearly thirty paintings are exhibited here. Her earth-toned watercolours do not behave like typical watercolours. She layers pigments until they become opaque and dense. Scenes of rural life by the lake mix with fantastical figures - bogeymen, masked dancers, strangers. Theatre lighting runs through everything.

Over three days during the biennale, Smitha and a four-member team stage a fifteen-minute performance. They use coconut husk, coir fibre, and the ratt machine as props and instruments. The soundtrack includes recordings from Ashtamudi Lake. Spinning wheels and lapping water appear in them, along with the sound of workers.

Huma Mulji - Bombay Duck

Huma Mulji (born 1970, Karachi) makes blown glass sculptures. These connect the porosity of port cities with mangrove ecosystems. They also reflect the precarity of migrant life.

The name "Bombay Duck" comes from an imperial mix-up. "Dak" means "post" in Urdu. Dried bombil fish travelled by the Bombay mail train. They got mislabelled as "ducks."

In Mulji's work, swiftly blown glass - shaped under extreme heat, draped around scaffolding - becomes a metaphor for the exiled body. Glass adapts to whatever holds it, just as migrants adapt to wherever they land.

The glass forms rest within mangrove-like structures. Mangroves exist in both Kochi and Karachi (Mulji's hometown) - fragile ecosystems of protection and instability. Fabric knots in the work symbolise the imam zamin, an amulet from Shia homes that represents protection and safekeeping.

Other Artists at Aspinwall Bungalow

The guide above covers the artists with detailed descriptions in the biennale programme. You will also encounter works by these artists.

Ground Floor:

- Mónica de Miranda
- Abul Hisham
- Sheba Chhachhi and Janet Price
- Matthew Krishanu

First Floor:

- Faiza Hasan
- Bhasha Chakrabarti
- Anja Ibsch and Grüntaler9
- Ratna Gupta
- Bani Abidi and Anupama Kundoo

We will be adding detailed walkthroughs for these artists as the biennale unfolds. Check back or see our monthly guide to Fort Kochi for the latest.

Visiting Aspinwall House: What You Need to Know

The address is Aspinwall House, Calvathy Road, Fort Kochi. Plan at least 2-3 hours for Aspinwall House alone. Many visitors come back multiple times.

Visit on weekday mornings for smaller crowds. Some performances have set times. Check the biennale schedule on catsofkochi.com before you go.

The place

Aspinwall House