

Guide

The Ultimate Guide to David Hall-Art Gallery & Cafe

David Hall at Kochi Biennale has two shows, one by a Kenyan artist drawing on 330-year-old walls and one by a child bride's daughter who would build her mother a shelter.

Before you go

WhereOpp Parade Ground, Fort Kochi

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

In this page

If I could travel back in time, I would build a shelter for my mother and help her run away. That is Tal Sasum, who describes an artwork made of fabric, cardboard and watercolour. In the next room, a Kenyan artist has drawn anonymous human figures directly onto the 330-year-old walls of a Dutch colonial building. One show is about a girl who was never given a choice, and the other is about bodies that never stop moving. Both are at David Hall.

> **Two shows. One Dutch bungalow. Three hundred and thirty years of walls.**

David Hall sits on the north side of the Parade Ground in Fort Kochi. The Dutch East India Company built it in 1695. It was once the residence of Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede tot Drakenstein, the Dutch commander who compiled the "Hortus Malabaricus", a 12-volume study of Kerala's plants. Later, it was home to David Koder, a Jewish businessman who gave the building its name.

Today, it is an art gallery and cafe. During the Biennale, it becomes one of the most intimate exhibition spaces in Fort Kochi. It has three rooms, thick white walls, and a quiet garden. This edition, it has two shows that could not be more different in form but end up in the same emotional territory. What do bodies contain, and what do they remember?



Scree - Peterson Kamwathi and Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute

The main exhibition at David Hall is “Scree”, presented by the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute (NCAI) as part of the Biennale’s “Invitations” programme. The artist is Peterson Kamwathi, born in 1980 in Nairobi. He draws human figures. That is the simple version. The complicated version is that his figures contain entire histories inside them, including migration, protest, prayer, queuing and waiting.

At David Hall, Kamwathi has drawn directly onto the building’s walls using charcoal and pastel. The figures are anonymous, and you cannot tell where they are from, what they believe, or what language they speak. They stand, sit, gather, rest. They look like they could be in a queue at a ration shop, or at an airport, or outside a polling booth. It is deliberate.

On the floor, you will find sculptural assemblages made from materials Kamwathi collected in Kochi itself, including old gunny sacks, synthetic textiles and repurposed billboard vinyls. These are the leftovers of trade, things that once contained, transported or advertised goods, now folded and stacked like monuments to commercial life. They sit between use and obsolescence.

Here is the connection that makes this show work at this specific venue. David Hall is a Dutch colonial building in a port city, and Kamwathi is from Nairobi, on the East African coast. The Swahili coast and Kerala's coast have been trading partners for centuries, sharing the same ocean and monsoon winds. They also share the same movement of goods and people. Kamwathi uses that shared history.

His figures on these walls are not visitors. They belong here as much as the walls themselves do. He works by hand, never digitally, using charcoal, pastel, watercolour, stencils and collage.

Did you know? Only 27% of Dutch sailors who came to Cochin ever made it back home. Between 1740-1795, nearly 400,000 people left Europe for Asia, but only about 112,800 returned. The 8-month voyage was treacherous.

Forest Shelter - Tal Sasum

Also at David Hall, you will find "Forest Shelter" by Tal Sasum, a student artist from Rajiv Gandhi University in Arunachal Pradesh. This one is quieter. And it hits harder.

The artist statement says it plainly. "Nyeme kabnam" is the rhythm of marriage and loss. Longing echoed through the women in her family. Her mother married as a child. Her aunt did too. Tal did not just hear their stories. She lived inside the atmosphere they created.



From the Kochi-Muziris Biennale exhibition at David Hall, the old Dutch house on Fort Kochi's Parade Ground.

The installation grows from what Tal describes as an impossible childhood wish. If she could go back in time, she would build a shelter for her mother and help her run away. It would be a place so safe, so hidden, that her mother could choose her own life. She would do this even if changing her mother's fate meant Tal herself might never exist.

That is the emotional paradox at the centre of this work. To save the person you love most, you would have to erase yourself.

"Forest Shelter" uses fabric, video, cardboards, thread, natural pigment, watercolour paper and acrylic colour to create what Tal calls an "imagined refuge". It is part painting and part interactive passage, and it has emotional architecture. It asks what choice and protection could mean, and what escape could mean, for a girl who was never offered any.

Visiting Details

David Hall Gallery is in Fort Kochi. It is on the north side of the Parade Ground. Scree is part of the Invitations programme of Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2025-26. Pandal Cafe is inside and serves good coffee and a good breakfast.

David Hall is one of the main Kochi-Muziris Biennale venues and is across from the Parade Ground. If you are walking from Aspinwall House, it is about 10 minutes south.



The place

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