

Guide

The Ultimate Guide to 111 Markaz & Cafe

At the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, 111 Markaz holds five artists' works, from glass baubles to a garden that is still growing.

Before you go

Where111 Markaz & Cafe

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

In this page

You almost miss it. There is no grand signage and no queue. Walk through 111 Markaz and Cafe.

From the glassblowing workshops of Palestine and Uttar Pradesh, you will reach the submarine cables under Kochi's seabed. You will also see the fishing nets of Mattancherry's markets and the pepper routes that once connected India to the Roman Empire. Are you ready?

Of all the 20-plus venues at this year's Kochi-Muziris Biennale schedule, 111 Markaz catches people off guard. Five artists show five different works. The building pulls you deeper through corridors and out into the open air.

Here is what you will find inside.

Black Gold by Yasmin Jahan Nupur

The first thing you walk into smells like peppercorns.



From the Biennale exhibition with glass baubles from Palestine, a growing garden and submarine cables, in Mattancherry.

Dhaka-based artist Yasmin Jahan Nupur's installation "Black Gold" (2025) tells the story of black pepper. The spice once drew European sailing vessels to the Malabar Coast and reshaped the world. Fabric panels shaped like sails hang from the ceiling, embroidered with maps of the Silk Route and the ancient Golden Road. The fabrics themselves are the story. Cotton, silk, and jamdani all carry long histories of colonial extraction.

Wooden harvesting ladders still used in Kerala pepper farms stand on display, along with vials of spice samples and fragments of vessels. Nupur connects all of this to the present. She points to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor as a modern echo of the same old power dynamics in new language.

It is a room you can read like a book. Every object is a chapter.

Air of Firozabad / Air of Palestine by Dima Srouji and Piero Tomassoni

Upstairs, the air changes.



From the Biennale exhibition with glass baubles from Palestine, a growing garden and submarine cables, in Mattancherry.

Hundreds of transparent glass baubles hang from the ceiling on thin wires. They are barely visible and catch light in small glints. This is “Air of Firozabad / Air of Palestine” (2025), joint work between London-based Palestinian artist Dima Srouji and Italian curator Piero Tomassoni. The e-flux review of this Biennale called it a standout.

Of the 451 glass forms overhead, artisans in Firozabad blew 450 by hand. Firozabad is a city in Uttar Pradesh with generations of glassblowing history. Artisans blew one bauble in Jaba’, Palestine. Both places share this craft. Both communities work under difficult conditions.

The baubles have the shape of teardrops. This nods to Marcel Duchamp’s “50 cc of Paris Air” from 1919. In that work, a pharmacist emptied an ampoule and sealed it with air as a gift.

Here, the air itself becomes the subject. The artists describe the containers not as empty vessels but as preservers of breath. The air they hold is increasingly under threat from pollution, warfare, or surveillance.

Stand under the installation for a minute. The glass shifts with every breeze. It feels like it could fall at any moment. That fragility is intentional.

Deep Sea, Deep Time by Athina Koumparouli

Greek artist and antiquities conservator Athina Koumparouli takes you from air into an actual excavation. In “Deep Sea, Deep Time” (2025), visitors see a mosaic floor revealed inside what looks like a trench. Geometric cross-sections of cables surround it. These cables echo the submarine internet cables running under Kochi’s coast today.

Koumparouli compares Kochi to its past. Kochi was once the ancient port of Muziris, a center for spice trade that connected India to Rome. Today, undersea fibre-optic cables carry data along similar routes. One of the largest submarine cables ceased operations here recently.

The work treats these cables as archaeological artifacts. It asks what a future dig might make of the infrastructure we bury now.

In one corner, a cloud of shattered screens hangs from bamboo scaffolding tied with jute rope. Broken computers and devices from Kochi’s scrap markets make up the screens. A structure built from a craft passed down through generations of construction workers holds them together. Old methods prop up broken new systems in a striking image.

Nearby, Koumparouli has made new vessels from local soil embedded with fragments of plastic, scrap metal, and electronics. Roman amphora shards found at the Pattanam excavation site near Kochi inspired these vessels. Ancient trade and modern extraction fuse into the same clay.

Remember Me by Sandra Mujinga



From the Biennale exhibition with glass baubles from Palestine, a growing garden and submarine cables, in Mattancherry.

Oslo and Berlin-based Congolese artist Sandra Mujinga's "Remember Me" (2025) fills a room with two large sculptural creatures. One faces each entrance, as if guarding the space. Dark fishing nets from Kochi's local markets form their bodies, moulded and sculpted to create patches of transparency and shadow.

The creatures' heads also serve as their tails. They could be sentinels, visitors, or kin. Mujinga uses the basket-weaving traditions of the Chute Wagenia fishing community in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In that community, conical wooden baskets serve as both traps and sieves in the rapids of Boyoma Falls. That weaving technique, which holds and releases together, gives these figures their structure.

Walk around them. They look different from every angle. They are monumental but full of holes, present but hard to pin down. This quality is intentional. Mujinga's work asks what it means to be visible and invisible together.

Soft Offerings to Scorched Lands and the Brokenhearted by Otobong Nkanga

Then you step outside.

Behind the building, a laterite pathway leads through old walls reinforced by the roots of a banyan tree. It enters a garden that did not exist when the Biennale opened. Belgian-Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga's "Soft Offerings to Scorched Lands and the Brokenhearted" (2025) is a living installation. Local gardeners tend it daily. It is still growing.

The garden mixes native and non-native species from Kerala's soil. These include heliconia, thunbergia, zebra leaf, rajamalli, plumeria, hibiscus, bamboo, lemongrass, bush pepper, torch ginger, jungle geranium, areca nut palm, orange jasmine, and white garland-lily. At the centre is a small pond with fish, lotuses, and Ambal water lilies. Seating moulded from mud and laterite surrounds it, covered with woven cane and bamboo mats.



From the Biennale exhibition with glass baubles from Palestine, a growing garden and submarine cables, in Mattancherry.

A soundscape by Nithin Shamsuddin plays as you sit. It includes old stories, rhythms, and songs tied to land, family, water, and the body. The work invites you to slow down and witness the ancient timeline from seed to fruit, from soil to bloom.

Art Asia Pacific called this garden a hidden highlight of the Biennale. It is easy to see why. After the weight of everything inside, this space feels like an exhale.

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.

The place

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