

Colomboscope: Rhythm asserts its power in many forms

Posted on

Words Arrenga H Nadaraja.

 Still from Basir Mahmood, 'A Body Bleeds More than It Contains', multi-channel video and audio. An overhead view of seated figures around a harmonium suggests collective presence, shared rhythm, and quiet engagement.

Colomboscope has grown with Colombo itself, breathing alongside the city's streets, stories, and shifting identities, and over time becoming inseparable from its ever-expanding artistic community. Since its beginnings in 2013, the festival has continuously opened space for artists across generations, inviting collaboration and conversation to shape one of Colombo's most vital cultural gatherings at the heart of the city. What began as a platform rooted in literature, urban histories, and Colombo's emergence as a post-war cosmopolitan capital has evolved into something far more expansive. When Colomboscope returns for its ninth edition from January 21 to 31, 2026, it does so with Rhythm Alliances, a city-wide, free-to-enter program that brings together more than fifty artists, collectives, musicians, choreographers, filmmakers, and cultural organizers. The festival unfolds across Colombo through a diverse range of venues, including Barefoot Gallery, Colpetty Town House, Kamatha at BMICH, Music Matters, Radicle Gallery, Rio Complex, Soul Studio, and Liberty by Scope Cinemas, transforming the city into a living, resonant map of sound, movement, and memory.

 Natasha Ginwala, Artistic Director, Colomboscope.

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At the core of this edition is rhythm, not simply as tempo or beat, but as a living force that shapes cultural life, social cohesion, and civic histories. Artistic director Natasha Ginwala, who joined the festival in its 2018–2019 edition, describes rhythm as a field through which dissent, healing, and renewal are mapped. In this telling, all life begins and ends with rhythm. Every living being carries its own pulse, its own circadian flow, which merges into a larger universal story. Alongside her, guest curator Hajra Haider Karrar brings a layered curatorial voice that deepens this exploration, tracing how rhythm moves through bodies, histories, and geographies.



Vivian Caccuri's Chahal Flame Box highlights layered materials and tactile surfaces, exploring the interplay of fabrics, texture, and containment.



Sabeen Omar's textile work combining patterned fabric and stitched forms, reflecting on labor, exhaustion, care, and intimacy through layered color and composition.

Throughout the exhibition, rhythm appears in many states of mind, sometimes haunting and turbulent, sometimes recurring or imagined. It is felt in the echoes of war and its lingering sonic imprints, and in sound as cultural expression and resistance. These narratives do not remain abstract. They shape and reshape the world, gathering into artistic expressions that are visceral, political, and deeply resonant.

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A stationary exhibition anchors the program, drawing together communities of practice across disciplines, inspired by rhythms of remembrance, dissent, and renewal. Struggles and migrations travel through vibration and pulse, carrying the memory of protest and the altered lives of bodies moving across borders of time and space, bound by shared dreams and lived realities.

Artists work across various mediums, including painting, textiles, sculpture, film, multi-channel sound installations, and live performance.

Among the highlights are *Parampara* by the Chitrasena Dance Company in collaboration with the Berlin-based reVerb Collective, alongside performances by Nairobi and Berlin-based artist KMRU, Martinican music producer Mawongany, and Lebanese artist-musician Yara Asmar.

Film also plays a central role, with a curated selection of award-winning and lesser-known works exploring music, youth culture, and popular movements, screened at Liberty by Scope Cinemas as part of the wider program.

Running through the festival is a commitment to making the unseen visible and the unheard audible.



Ayumi Paul's *Constellations*, photographed by Luca Giardini, emphasizes the installation's spatial relationships and the artist's exploration of form and connection.

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Charwei Tsai's work presents delicately inscribed seashells on a reflective surface, exploring impermanence, ritual, and the transmission of knowledge.

Colomboscope invites the public into a shared space of encounter, drawing on ritual knowledge and recurring sound practices, from Sri Lankan drumming traditions to Nyabinghi groundations in Rastafari culture. These practices strengthen Asian and Pan-African belief systems that understand the world as something made through vibration, where drumming is not merely sound but a way of shaping reality and meaning for those who participate. Natasha notes that this edition carries an expanded sense of liveness, with more concerts, listening sessions, and multimedia performances than ever before.



Pinaree Sanpitak's two delicately poised forms rest atop slender pedestals.



Mekh Limbu's SAAM LINGMAA shows embroidered textiles inscribed with text and symbolic motifs.



Aboothahir al Wajahath's work of Spindle Stories II, combines painted and textile elements to reflect on craft, labor, and material memory.

One of its most striking presences is Arka Kinari, a solar-powered seventy-ton sailing ship that has journeyed across oceans to promote live performance cultures, foster exchange, and address the impacts of climate change while rekindling relationships with the ocean. Supported by the Goethe-Institut, the vessel arrives at the Sail Lanka pier in Port City, Colombo, extending the festival's rhythms into maritime space. In Sri Lanka, drums have long been bound to healing rites,

exorcisms, and ceremonial life, believed to ward off malevolent forces while channeling the divine. They have also been feared and forbidden, powerful tools of communication once banned on plantations, as writers like Amiri Baraka remind us when recounting histories of Black music. In southern Sinhalese traditions, healers, drummers, and dancers come together to treat physical and psychological ailments, animating folk legend through sound and movement.



Arka Kinari at Sydney Festival, Australia. The illuminated vessel becomes a floating performance space, bringing together music, storytelling, and visual projection against the night-time harbor backdrop.



Gayan Hemarathne's sculptural assemblage of stacked geometric forms.



Naiza Khan's presentation brings together sculptural and drawn forms, reflecting the artist's ongoing exploration of the body, architecture, and the politics of space.



Gayan Hemarathne's sculptural assemblage of stacked geometric forms.

At Colomboscope, these formations of sonicity, shaped through voice, body, and hand-made motion, become the building blocks of resistance and remembrance, held together by memory and synchrony. Organizing a multi-venue interdisciplinary festival in Sri Lanka has never been without challenge. Natasha speaks candidly about the absence of large-scale infrastructural support for contemporary cultural events and the scarcity of individual philanthropy. Yet year after year,

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Visit: colomboscope.lk/rhythm-alliances