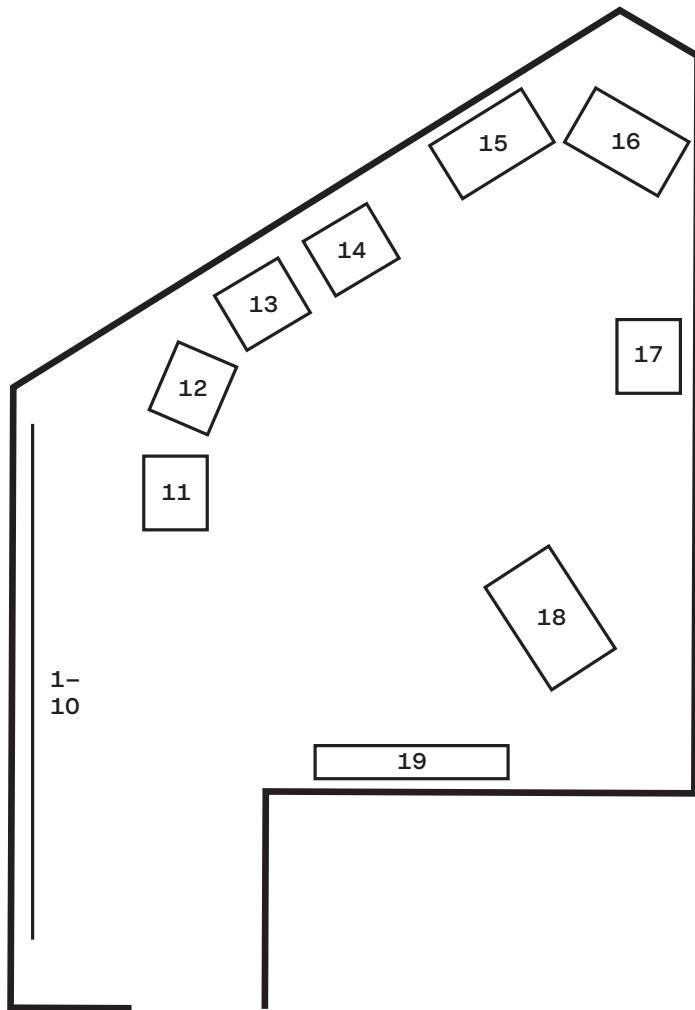


Voices from an Archived Silence – Transoceanic Exchanges

**IVS Gallery
28 January –
12 February**

Voices from an Archived Silence – Transoceanic Exchanges (2023–2025) is a collaborative project by Studio for Memory Politics that aims to explore and address silences in cultural memory in the postcolonial geographies of Colombo and Karachi. The project brings together four artists – Sophia Balagamwala and Veera Rustomji from Karachi and Hema Shironi Joseph and Firi Rahman from Colombo – in a transoceanic dialogue to confront silences, erasures, and gaps in cultural memory within their distinct contexts.



1–10		15	
Hema Shironi Joseph	<i>A thought of Lechchami</i>	Veera Rustomji	<i>Old Girls Association–Sanjan Stambh (black)</i>
01 Fabric, collage and thread		Etching and Aquatint on Zinc Plate	<i>Old Girls Association–Sanjan Stambh (navy)</i>
02 Fabric, collage and thread		Etching and Aquatint on Zinc Plate with Watercolor	<i>Etching and Aquatint on Zinc Plate with Watercolor</i>
03 Fabric and thread			
04 Pattu fabric appliquéd and thread on fabric			
05 Fabric, thread			
06 Printed Paper appliquéd on net fabric			
07 Printed paper appliquéd on fabric			
08 Thread on organza fabric			
09 Fabric, collage and thread			
10 Printed paper stitched on fabric			
11		16	
Veera Rustomji		Veera Rustomji	<i>The Cherag! Ajmalgadh Monument (navy, purple and pink)</i>
<i>Navigating–Hormuz to Nargol (blue)</i>		Etching, Aquatint on Zinc Plate with Watercolor	<i>The Cherag! Ajmalgadh Monument (black)</i>
<i>Navigating–Hormuz to Nargol (black)</i>			<i>Etching and Aquatint on Zinc Plate</i>
Etching and Aquatint on Zinc Plates			
12		17	
Veera Rustomji		Sophia Balagamwala	<i>Abujee and the Queen</i>
<i>Rivayat's Description of the dakhma in Old Gujarati 01</i>		Animation, color, sound	
Etching on Zinc Plate with Watercolor, Tea and Saffron		2:50	
<i>Rivayat's Description of the dakhma in Old Gujarati 02</i>			
Etching on Zinc Plate with Toproll			
13		18	
Veera Rustomji		Firi Rahman	<i>MEJA KAYANG</i>
<i>View of Arkayim, Ural Region, Hamazor 01 (green)</i>		Mixed Media	
Etching and Aquatint on Zinc Plate with Watercolor			
<i>View of Arkayim, Ural Region, Hamazor 02</i>			
Etching on Zinc Plate with Toproll			
14		19	
Veera Rustomji		Sophia Balagamwala	<i>Time in the Kitchen</i>
<i>Discourses by Godrej Sidhwa (black)</i>		Monoprinted and Mixed Media Zine	
<i>Discourses by Godrej Sidhwa (green)</i>			
Etching, Aquatint on Zinc Plate with Watercolor and Saffron			
		All works except <i>A thought of Lechchami 1–10:</i>	
		2025, commissioned by Studio for Memory Politics	
		<i>A thought of Lechchami 1–10:</i>	
		2024, commissioned by Studio for Memory Politics	

The project examines how archives-in-the-making – often oral, fragmented, or disappearing – can enable new ways of understanding histories of displacement, migration, and resilience. Over a year-long research phase, the participating artists engaged with local archives – ranging from family photographs, recipes, institutional collections, and community-driven archives – to explore how memory is preserved and transformed across geographies.

Over the past year, the artists have been engaged in a transoceanic discussion with each other. These dialogues were facilitated by the Studio over the course of 2024 through regular meetings, fostering an exchange of ideas that bridge personal and collective narratives.

The outputs include presentations in 2025 in Karachi at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture Gallery and in Colombo at artist-run Studio Kayamai, where artists present their research as artworks and programming that interrogate historical narratives and propose alternative ways of remembering. The multi-city presentations of this project speak to one another, reflecting both the connections between our histories and the gulf and ruptures in North-South exchanges.

This project builds on *Voices from an Archived Silence* (2018–2020) which actively confronted the silences and implicit power structures of Swiss colonial archives and was aiming to explore a polycentric exhibition-making practice with artistic voices from Switzerland as well as from source communities.

Hema Shironi Joseph reimagines the *kambli*, a woollen blanket brought by indentured South Indian labourers, as a living archive. Through mixed-media works, she layers colonial-era imagery of women plantation workers onto reinterpreted *kambli*, interrogating how plantation histories are visualised and remembered.

"My research explores the Tea Plantation Workers' Museum and Archive in Digana housed in a century-old line room made up of rows of 12×12 ft smaller rooms. Each of these rooms functioned as living quarters for entire families of indentured Malaiyaha plantation labourers brought to Sri Lanka from South India under British colonial rule. Among the objects in the museum archive, I was particularly drawn to a display of a single piece of *kambli*. Likely brought by an indentured labourer from Tamil Nadu, the *kambli* was both a practical item, providing warmth and protection against the cold and rain, and a symbol of continuity, often passed down across generations. The *kambli*'s presence in the archive reflected the transnational lineages and collective histories of the Malaiyaha Tamil community, to which I belong. However, the blanket's solitary presentation and the sparse information that accompanied it, served as a stark reminder of the broader silences that surround this community's stories. My project imagines the *kambli* as a living object, exploring what it might carry today if it had continued to be passed down through generations."

Veera Rustomji examines the paradoxes of a Zoroastrian library in Karachi, situated between life and death yet shielded in isolation. Working with its multilingual collection, she creates prints that trace the archive's materiality, questioning the implications of moving such private objects into public spaces.

"Eagles, termites, stray dogs and fat lizards—these are some of my companions leading up to, and within the library itself. A year-long interaction with a mass of printed materials at the Dastur Dr Dhalla x Young Mazdayasni Zoroastrian Association Library, has made me realise how archives can live at the edges of non-human existence in stillness and isolation. With literature in languages ranging from old and new Gujarati, Farsi and even Pahlavi, the scripts and images among the library's collection tell a story of community hierarchies, economical patronage and contention points of religious discourse. Since the library relocated to its current home in the early 2000s, its close proximity to centres of life and death has underscored a paradox: while it yearns to be heard and read, it also seeks to exist behind a protective shield. I have been documenting not only the content of specific publications, but moments, cracks and deteriorations within the space. This one-way relationship that I have had with the library is captured with prints, bringing copies or suggested insights of the library into a gallery space. Within this display and research in process, I consider the formalities and structure of the library and what it may mean for future custodians of this space to live without the resources that they have today."

Sophia Balagamwala delves into her family's migration as Memons from Kathiawar region of Gujarat to Karachi in 1947, exploring personal archives of photographs, recipes, and anecdotes. Through two bodies of work, she reflects on kitchens as spaces of creativity, conflict, and care, and interrogates the intersections of migration, memory, and identity.

"For this project, I think through the archive of my family, who identify as Memons, a mercantile community, many of whom migrated from Kathiawar region of Gujarat to Karachi in 1947. The research has included looking through family photographs, letters, and diaries – often a multi-purpose archive or recipes, receipts, lists and other memorabilia. From this research, two specific strands emerge.

One project looks at family recipes which were passed on in the kitchen from mothers teaching their daughters how to cook, many of which have not been written down, given that the language spoken by the community, Memoni, exists only in oral form. Many of these recipes include specific dishes like Khaosuey, originally from Myanmar, and now re-adapted to local tastes and popularised in Pakistan. These recipes act as archives of migration of this community and its movement under the British Empire. As I began to collect and transcribe recipes from family members and friends from the community, they were accompanied by stories which apart from food, were about relationships, rituals, traumas, joys and more. This resulted in *Time in the Kitchen*, a series of drawings and recipes that look at the kitchen as an extension of other spaces and spheres of life – home making, archiving, nourishing, parenting, creativity, expression, pride, conflict, expectation and exhaustion.

A second project is an animation *Abujee and the Queen* that merges truths and fictions from multiple oral histories and family archives to tell the story of a Memon migrant, who has a fascination for photography and history and reveres the Queen, speaking to relationships between Empire and postcolony and the way it still impacts communities today."

Firi Rahman collaborates with the last Malay food vendor family in Slave Island, Colombo, using food as a storytelling tool. His project preserves recipes and conversations in Malay, archiving a fragile cultural heritage shaped by displacement. Meja Kayang, a weathered tablecloth, becomes the canvas for an artwork that explores the ephemeral nature of Malay culinary traditions. In a culture where recipes are often passed down orally, the kitchen itself acts as a silent archive. Each worn utensil, each stained pot, whispers of the ingredients, the techniques, the stories that have unfolded within its walls. This piece, through the medium of the familiar tablecloth, seeks to capture these fleeting echoes, to honor the unsee hands and the untold narratives that have shaped Malay cuisine.

"Despite my family's mixed ethnicity, Malay remains a dominant language within our household, supported by robust first-language speakers. In multilingual Slave Island, Malay speakers often become trilingual through interactions with Tamil and Sinhalese communities, shaped by the influence of these adstrate languages. Unfortunately, development projects in Slave Island have displaced communities and eroded Malay culture, including its renowned street food traditions. While Malay food in Sri Lanka reflects local influences—mirroring the fusion evident in the language—its authenticity is increasingly threatened by cultural shifts and the declining number of families preserving traditional recipes. My research involves cooking and conversing with the last remaining Malay food vendor family in Slave Island. Using food as a storytelling tool, I record our interactions in Malay, aiming to archive the family's unique recipes and, in the process, reconnect with my own Malay heritage."

Sophia Balagamwala (b.1987) is an artist and curator who explores the interplay between historical events, memories, and fiction. Drawing inspiration from archives, histories, and children's books, she constructs narratives that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination. Balagamwala has previously worked as the curator of the National History Museum in Lahore, and currently runs the Kurachee Reading Room, a collection of local artist publications formerly housed at the COMO Museum, Lahore (2021–2022), now at the AAN Ideas LAB (ArtSpace and Museum), Karachi. She teaches at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture. Notable recent projects include participation in the Abu Dhabi Public Art Biennale (2024), Three Tired Tigers at the Jameel Arts Centre (2024), the Art South Asia Project (ASAP) Research Grant (2022), and Artist Commission Award at the London, Asia, Art Worlds Conference, Paul Mellon Centre (2021).

Hema Shironi Joseph (b. 1991) is an artist who lives in Colombo. Her artistic practice combines embroidery, mythological imagery, bricolage, and installation to inquire into concepts of cultural identity. Her work is deeply rooted in the histories of colonization, civil war, displacement and migration, as they intersect with her personal life. Driven by nostalgia for the numerous places she has called home, her work explores how communities belonging to these places grapple with concerns of language, culture, memory, myth, gender, and equality. She completed her BFA (2014) from the Ramanathan Fine Arts Academy, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka and an MFA (2019) at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. Her work has been featured at the Critical Zones conceived by ZKM, Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe (2022), Colomboscope (2019 and 2022), Matara Art Festival (2023) and the 13th Taipei Biennial. Hema has also completed an Artist Residency at the House of Kal, Sri Lanka (2021).

Firi Rahman (b. 1990) is a multidisciplinary artist, observer, archivist, and activist who critically engages with the rapid urban redevelopment of Sri Lanka. His work addresses the Anthropocene, temporalities of identity and the impact of gentrification on communities and heritage sites. Rahman often adopts an autobiographical approach, drawing from his experiences in Slave Island, his neighbourhood. He mobilizes community narratives, conserving and archiving stories of inheritance and identity. Animism is a recurring theme, with animals serving as symbolic representations of relationships and emotions. Balancing deeply personal expression with community-driven projects, Rahman co-founded "We Are From Here," a collective that documents the ethnographic histories of urban Colombo. He received his art foundation training at Manchester College, UK.

Veera Rustomji (b.1992) is an artist from Karachi. Her practice deals with historiographical power structures and religious iconography portrayed through film, costume, and paintings. She holds a BFA from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (IVS) and an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Arts at the University of the Arts London (UAL), where she was awarded the UAL Postgraduate International Scholarship. Veera is the recipient of the 2021–2022 Mead Fellowship, for which she produced a body of documentation capturing the erasure of island life and coastal heritage within the Indus Delta. Her site-specific investigations coexist alongside literary and community-based archives from public and private collections in Karachi. Veera is currently a faculty member and co-director of the Urban Repository Archive (URA) at the Department of Fine Art, IVS, supported by the Art South Asia Project (ASAP).

Collectively
curated by

studio for memory politics

Studio for Memory Politics is a transdisciplinary collective of cultural practitioners engaging in long-term projects that foster a shared language to address and complicate global power dynamics and memory politics.

Studio for Memory Politics consists of Sandev Handy (Colombo), Vera Ryser (Zurich), Aziz Sohail (Karachi / Melbourne) and Angela Wittwer (Zurich / Jakarta).

www.memorypolitics.studio

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