



(OTHERS)

**Exhibition Highlighting
the Lives of Migrant Workers**

30th July - 5th August 2015
National Art Gallery
Male', Maldives

(OTHERS)

An exhibition highlighting the lives of migrant workers

Featured artists:

Ali Nishan (Millzero)

Mariyam Omar

Nazaal Shiyam

Shaari

Munshid Mohamed

Nash'ath Mohamed

Ali Samahy Niyaz

Afzal Shaafiu Hasan (Afu)

Nadee Rachey

FOREWORD

The estimated official figure of the migrant population in Maldives, according to the latest census, is 58,683. The unofficial estimates are around 200,000 bringing the size of the migrant population in Maldives up to more than half of the country's total population.

Regardless of this figure, migrant workers have few rights and state redress mechanisms are not accessible to these workers, further victimizing those who are already being exploited in forced labor conditions. The language barrier and the lack of public interest litigators in the country further limit their access to justice.

A high number of migrant workers, especially those working as manual laborers, often sell all their assets to come to the Maldives and are reliant on their new employers for sustenance — for themselves and their families back at home. Often times, they face threats or even violence for speaking up about injustices. Their living quarters are generally provided by their employers, so if they are dismissed they also lose their shelter. The majority of cases that the Transparency Maldives' Legal Advice Center receives from migrant workers include complaints of non-payment of wages, often for months, withholding of travel documents and identification, and inhumane living conditions.

Migrant workers live and work in unimaginable conditions, sometimes being forced to do work that is not permitted in their work permits. They are underpaid or unpaid, their passports and identification documents withheld by agents and employers, effectively crippling workers from rectifying their situation or reaching out to the justice system.

The Legal Advice Center provides free legal advice and assistance to expatriates and Maldivian citizens. Over the past three years, we have assisted over 560 migrant workers with cases of non-payment of wages, unacceptable working conditions, poor housing, withholding of their passport by employment agencies and employers, and being forced to do work that is not defined in their employment mandates.

These are not newly emerging issues and they closely reflect the findings reported in U.S Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (2014). The report notes fraudulent recruitment, confiscation of identity and travel documents, withholding or non-payment of wages, or debt bondages as some of the forced labor situations faced by the migrant workers in Maldives.

While the necessary regulations such as Regulation on Expatriates Working in Maldives and Regulation on Bringing Expatriates to the Maldives for the purpose of Employment are in place, the issues arise from the lack of implementation, monitoring and enforcement of said regulations.

This exhibition is a platform provided by Transparency Maldives for local artists to showcase their thoughts and perceptions on the issues faced by migrant workers in the country. We hope that the exhibition will raise the public's interest and awareness of the plight and conditions of migrant workers.

Ahid Rasheed
Senior Project Coordinator
Transparency Maldives



Curator's Remarks

Artists are keen observers and commentators on the world around them, often capturing in the form of photographs or paintings, details that we miss in our busy and self-absorbed lives.

As Transparency Maldives begins the campaign to raise awareness about the plight of the migrant workers, it is only fitting that artists' voice become part of the dialogue.

Titled the (OTHERS), this exhibition focuses on the uncomfortable relationship our society has with the very people who sustain our way of life and economy. The word 'Others' signify a desire to create a distance and thereby deprive a person of their identity. Yet the irony is that they are faced with the very reality that they desire to evade.

Ten Maldivian artists – amongst them the most prolific and well-known photographers, painters and installation artists – were invited to create works reflecting on the issues facing migrant workers. The works take the viewer from the position of passive observer to disquieting self-reflection.

No other image invokes the despicable working condition of migrant workers in Maldives than that of Thilafushi, the rubbish island. Photographers Samahy, Nash'ath, and Shaari presents a series of atmospheric landscapes from Thilafushi, which on closer observation draws attention to the dangerous and hostile conditions on endured by the workers who sort and burn our rubbish. Nash'ath's narration-less, yet powerful shortfilms add further depth to the reality of the working conditions at Thilafushi.

Munshid Mohamed, Nazaal Shiyaam and Shaari explore the day-to-day lives of migrant workers in a series of photographs that capture an ironic display of their separated harsh reality in a very introspective and intimate manner.

Millzero Nishan and Nadee Rachee have both present intense portraits using very different mediums. Nishan cinemagraphic portraits and Rachee's

carefully painted watercolours force us to stop and question our own prejudices and discriminatory attitudes towards migrant workers as 'We' stand face to face with the 'Other'.

Afzal Shaafiu Hasan and Mariyam Omar both highlight issues of abuse of power, control and living conditions and in very different ways. Omar's interactive installation puts the power in your hands to transform an innocent looking white box to reveal its contents; or rather the reality in metaphors. Shaafiu's painting with its delicate layers and texture reveals the indelicate, gross situation of these migrant workers.

When looking at or digesting the works collectively, a slow realization draws towards the disturbing and horrifying conditions within which laborers are forced to exist in our society. This deliberate and necessary confrontation compels us to arrive at a conclusion; to consider our individual roles in perpetuating the often-inhumane statuses of these migrant workers in Maldives.

Kareen Adam

Ali Nishan (Millzero)

We are the others, we are watching over you!

Cinemagraphs / three channel video installation

Artist Statement

As soon as we land on the country of our choice, we become a vessel of the employer. But as we look through the community, we are the people who you employ. We do your dishes, clean your rooms, your homes, cook your meals, feed your babies, act as your security guards, accountants, advisors, health experts, care takers of you and your kids. We are part of you, and we will always be a part of your family. We need your kindness and all that you require for yourselves. You can't live without us so be a part of us. We are human too!

Artist Biography

Ali Nishan, also known as Millzero, is a self-taught artist who has extensive knowledge in photojournalism and a member of the International Society of Professional Wedding Photographers (ISPWP).

As an avid photojournalist, Millzero has worked with Thomson Reuters, The Associated Press and UN agencies on various social projects. What sets Millzero apart from other photographers in this field is his attention to detail, commitment to quality, and his unique talent in capturing images that are classically beautiful and timeless.

Millzero has exhibited his work in the US, UK, India, and Denmark. He recently had a solo exhibition titled "Beautiful Maldives" in Nepal, and "Breathing Atolls: Japan-Maldives Contemporary Art Exhibition" in the Maldives as well as Japan.

millzero.com

Mariyam Omar

Living Conditions

Mixed media interactive installation

Artist Statement

Corrugated tin cages is what comes to mind from both a visual and a sensory perception when looking at the living quarters of migrant workers in Maldives. From an outside perspective, for a fleeting moment it weighs in on the conscience as the epitome of deprivation of basic human rights.

There seems to be a mass divide in the collective consciousness of society as a whole when it comes to the strange concept of "us and them" adopted by many. The view or stance of irrelevance and disconnectedness takes shape. A disturbing visual of livestock in unusually small cages escapes most people's minds if they are the fraction that subconsciously agree with the unspoken concept of "us and them".

The ambiguity for these migrant workers is illustrated best in the power their employers have over them. Withholding salary and electricity are among the ill treatment inflicted upon these labourers who come here after selling parts of

their land in the hopes of finding a better life for their families.

The absolute control most employers hold can be depicted literally in a switch that can be turned on and off if the workers refuse to work and live under inhumane conditions. As embarrassing as it is for our society, we must realize that their living conditions are somewhat parallel or worse than that of livestock that are also treated terribly.

Artist Biography

Mariyam Omar's work focuses on human interactions within the society with her primary medium being painting. Her installation works are based on human rights issues; while they are stationary and not computer or sensor based, they attempt to engage the viewer by inviting them to interact on a manual level in order for the concept to be realized. Her installation 'Departure from Logic and Humanity' is featured on the Maldives page in the ArtAsiaPacific Almanac 2014 Volume. She has exhibited her work in group exhibitions including XOPI Exhibition of Public Enquiry in 2012 at Malé City Hall. Other group exhibitions include "The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show" curated by Søren Dahlgaard in Venice in 2013 that later moved to New Zealand, Spain and New York. Omar has also exhibited in other group shows in Berlin, Bangladesh Biennale, and on board "The World" Passenger Liner. She first exhibited her work at the 'Creative Arts and Crafts Training Centre Annual Exhibition' in 2002 in Nasandhura Palace Hotel in Maldives.

Omar was a Panel Member for Visual Arts at the Curriculum Development Unit, EDC from 2009 to 2011. Her Solo Exhibition 'Untitled Works' was curated by Mohamed Khayyam and exhibited at the National Art Gallery in 2011 and some of her works are represented in the Gallery's Permanent Collection.

Currently her works titled the 'Combing Sessions' are exhibited at Loama Art Gallery's group exhibition curated by Umair Badeeu at Loama Resort.

mariyamomar.wix.com/portfolio

Nazaal Shiyam

In-Human

Photography

Artist Statement

Workers have always been a constant part of my life. When my father ran a construction company, he always took me to the construction sites where he would work alongside the workers, toiling in hard labour with them, shoulder to shoulder. We dined, slept and worked together as brothers and comrades.

As I grew up, I began grow conscious that not everyone felt the same way as I did towards these workers. I realized then that they were mostly regarded beneath Maldivians, often treated as sub-human. A few admit that there is a racial discrimination, though it is self evident.

Migrant workers are often the most exploited demographic in an already corrupt land. Yet they manage to eke out a living in these harsh conditions even developing their own pidgin Dhivehi to communicate with us Maldivians and their fellow workers from other nationalities.

Forever ostracized in a xenophobic culture that needed them to function, yet never fully accepted into society for this very reason; they do all the dirty work that we refuse to do. This is a glimpse into their lives.

Artist Biography

Nazaal Shiyam began his journey like many other photographers; by taking photographs whenever possible with borrowed cameras from friends and family. He soon came to realize it was the perfect medium with which to express himself, especially within the oppressive confines of such a close minded society as Maldives.

With a style that primarily focuses on mood, minimalism and textures, he portrays Male as he visualizes it, a decaying urban-scape with unexpected life thriving in a harsh environment. His precisely framed images excuse a strong sense of colour and visual balance, where the subject is often the image in its entirety.

facebook.com/ekkalapage
instagram.com/nazaal

Shaari

Working Class Heroes

Photography

Artist Statement

A selection of photos highlighting work safety in the concrete urban setting of Malé and the serene environment of islands. During my recent trip to Thoddoo, I realized farm labour was exclusively made up of Bangladeshis. They were generally well treated with proper housing and regular salary. Yet their working hours were worryingly around 10 to 12 hours. They were all quite humble and always eager to say hello to the camera.

Thilafushi

Photography

Artist Statement

The 'trash island' always fascinates me in more ways than one. A far cry from the postcard portrayal of Maldives, Thilafushi burns more than 300 tonnes of garbage a day. There is a certain visual appeal to the piles of waste amidst the flames and haze of smoke. This, on the other hand, is where the human predicament lies. Seeing workers toiling all day in the heat while inhaling toxic fumes without a mask is disturbing. They lack proper housing and health screening. I have documented their plight during two trips to Thilafushi and these images continue to haunt me.

Artist Biography

To Shaari, people, ordinary life, and mundane beauty appeal to his senses. He picked up a camera first in 2008 to portray a Maldives different from the postcards. Having majored in Film and TV with a degree in Mass Communication from Australia's Curtin University, he has also been telling human stories as a filmmaker at Hulhevi Media for a decade.

Shaari's photos have been featured at National Geographic, BBC online and other international publications. He won the photo competition held by Alliance Francaise in Maldives in 2012 themed "Jobs of the World". Shaari is currently a photojournalist working for AFP.

Global cinema, good food, travel and sarcasm are integral to his life.

facebook.com/thinvaloa
instagram.com/shaari_
youtube.com/hulhevimedia

Munshid Mohamed

Invisible

Photography

Artist Statement

Street photography, especially of workers, tell a concentrated story that is enough in simple black and white, just the opposite of a mainstream touristic postcard.

Malé City is a construction site in action. Here, the detail of human activity is often ignored or taken for granted while life goes on; the streets are swept early every morning, the rubbish is taken away from shops and houses, goods are carried from dockside to the market area. And throughout their days of hard labour, the workers are only given a recess or two, amongst a pile of cardboard boxes or in alleyways walled by corrugated tin.

The ones who do this work are often dedicated but their faces are tired. These migrant workers show no sign of homesickness. Home is somewhere faraway; away from these streets of automated labour.

A photograph, in this instance, is a moment dedicated to the laborers responsible for these actions.

Artist Biography

Born in Malé in 1978, Munshid Mohamed is a freelance photographer based in Maldives. Growing up in a picture-perfect country of idyllic beaches and turquoise seas, his main focus has been to photograph the less documented everyday streets that don't make it to the postcards. Munshid's work has been used in publications by Human Rights Commission of Maldives, Transparency Maldives, UNDP and BBC online.

*[flickr.com/photos/dyingregime/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/dyingregime/)
[instagram.com/dyingregime/](https://www.instagram.com/dyingregime/)*

Ali Samahy Niyaz

Thilafushi

Photography

Artist Statement

Have you ever thought about the people who are taking care of your every day mess and have you ever imagined the harsh living conditions they are subjected to?

“I can’t remember the last time I had a decent meal or a proper mattress to sleep on”, recalls one worker.

Often what most people see are the ominous amounts of trash that covers Thilafushi and hardly ever the people who work there day and night to organize and dispose of our daily trash.

This is their story. A homage to the people who are cleaning up our day to day mess, the ones that are often treated as second class human beings. More often than not these migrant workers work for little, to less than nothing for days through months.

“I have a family to feed back home therefore I have to work long hours to support them. And yet I hardly ever get my salary. It has been over four months since I got my last pay cheque”, says another worker.

Artist Biography

Ali Samahy Niyaz is a Maldivian photographer whose hobby turned profession in late 2007. He describes photography as ‘what you see everyday’. Day to day things that don’t catch the average eye. Capturing these raw candid images has been one of the few things that set him apart from most local photographers

Starting off with studio photography, Samahy ventured into documentary photography and recently, after collaborating on a documentary with Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) and its National Human Rights Defenders (NHRD) 2012 with a another local artist, he found a passion for cinematography. Since then he’s worked on various cinematic projects including media campaigns for Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) and Transparency Maldives (TM).

[instagram.com/alisamahy/](https://www.instagram.com/alisamahy/)

Nash'ath Mohamed

Thilafushi

Photography

Artist Statement

"Thus were we brought so low that for first and coconuts we were fain to do the most vile handiwork and the most painful labour...All this was without fore or compulsion: we went ourselves and begged them to employ us; otherwise we should have died of hunger, for they would give us nothing unless we for it, and then so little, that we were ill-sustained by what we got"
- Francis Pyard

This is how Pyard described his time surviving in the Maldives after his ship ran aground during the 17th century.

But this could very well have been the words of a migrant worker living in the Maldives today. Too often do we hear about the plight of migrant workers, who've had their money and documents stripped away, leaving them to beg for work, usually involving hard labour, and paid so little in return that even two small meals a day is a luxury.

This is not a new story. Not then, not now. And the Thilafushi Island holds many such stories.

The only question is; what are we going to do to change this?

Artist Biography

Professionally, Nash'ath has mainly been involved with the civil society sector, working on social issues. However he always had a keen interest in visual arts and believes that stringing the two together can be a strong tool for social change.

While he is slightly anthropobic, Nash'ath is also largely intrigued by human behaviour. He thus likes to observe and photograph people, mostly from a distance. He claims that this is not as creepy as it sounds.

Nadee Rachey

Can you really tell? Black from white, brown from yellow, blue from grey?

Watercolour on paper

Artist Statement

Often most migrant workers find refuge working in a foreign country in the hopes of better lives and better pay — away from political drama or some kind of personal abuse in their own land.

“It is not men who migrate, but machine minders, sweepers, diggers, cement mixers, cleaners, drillers etc. To re-become a man (husband, father, citizen, patriot), a migrant has to return home. The home he left because it held no future for him.” - John Burger, *A Seventh Man*.

Most migrant workers in Maldives are subject to bullying, racism, and abuse. Why is it that we feel such intense hatred towards people who are so similar to us? Racist slurs and abuse toward people with the same features, same colour, and sometimes even the same belief and aspirations as us?

Take a minute to study these faces. How quickly do you judge? What's your first impression? Is he black or white? Does he have brown or yellow hair? Are his eyes blue or grey?

Ask yourself why make such a hasty decision just based on the colour of their skin or the hierarchy of their jobs or even their nationality. Shouldn't we as human beings overcome these societal biases and prejudices?

Can you really tell?

Artist Biography

Nadee Rachey is a mixed media artist based in Malé, Maldives. She received a Diploma in Visual Arts and BA in Fine Art Photography at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia.

In Malé she works with acrylics and watercolor, and is renowned for her wall murals of Maldivian marine life. Nadee's murals are on display at several luxury resorts including Cheval Blanc Randheli, Summer Island Resort and Herathera Island Resort. For two years in a row, she has been one of the lead artists for the Annual Whale Shark Festival, organized by the MWSRP (Maldives Whale Shark Research Program).

Afzal Shaafiu Hasan (Afu)

Master & Slave

Acrylic on canvas

Artist Statement

This artist declines a statement, leaving the viewer to further reflect on the title

Artist Biography

Over the last decade Afzal Shaafiu Hasan (Afu), has participated in many exhibitions in the Maldives as well as in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Mauritius, Zanzibar, Japan and on board the famed cruise liner, 'The World'. His paintings have been housed in foreign embassies, private collections, major hotels as well as in the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery of the Maldives. He has contributed to the Maldivian heritage with a record number of beautiful postage stamps during his thirteen-year career as a postage stamp designer in the Maldives Post Limited and was awarded with a scholarship to study graphic design majoring in illustration. The most recent addition to his portfolio is the sand art animation works which has proved to be of exceptional quality. He has judged various art and art related competitions in the country. In 2014 he received the National Award for Visual Arts.

facebook.com/pages/Afu-Afzal-Shaafiu-Visual-Artist



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(OTHERS)

Exhibition Highlighting
the Lives of Migrant Workers

अदसु
वैदेशिक कामदारहरूको
जीवन झल्काउने प्रदर्शनी

അടസ്
വैदेशിക कामदार
ജീവൻ മൂലകാണെ പ്രദർശനീ

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Others
exhibition na nag inhahandog
ang buhay ng mga OFW

অন্যান্য- চিত্র ও শিল্পকর্ম প্রদর্শনী
মালদ্বীপে অভিবাসী শ্রমিকদের জীবনযাপন