

For immediate release

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Horniman exhibition highlights Indian transgender culture

A new photographic exhibition at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in south London spotlights Indian transgender culture, through images captured by Zoya Thomas Lobo, India's first transgender photojournalist.

The series of 27 photographs in **Meeting Mohini: Koovagam through the lens of Zoya Thomas Lobo** follows the ancient Hindu festival celebrating the marriage of Hindu goddess Mohini – the feminine avatar of Vishnu – to Aravan.

In the Tamil month of Chithirai, falling between April and May, thousands of transgender women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people gather in the small village of Koovagam to reenact Aravan's story. Having agreed to sacrifice himself for the greater good, Aravan asked the god Krishna (an avatar of Vishnu) to be married, even if only for a night. Krishna, god of compassion, protection and love, became the goddess Mohini to fulfil Aravan's wish.

Images in the exhibition follow transgender women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people – who have long played a central role in the final two days of the festival – capturing the excitement and joy of the wedding day as well as the sadness and pain of funeral ceremony. The exhibition also focuses on life outside the festival, centring Zoya Thomas Lobo's own experiences in Mumbai.

Meeting Mohini shines a light on not only on the rich history and traditions of one of the oldest recognised transgender and LGBTQI+ communities in the world but also on the barriers and challenges that they face and overcome daily. It is Zoya Thomas Lobo's first solo exhibition and first exhibition outside India.

Navjot Mangat, Senior Curator of Social Practice at the Horniman Museum and Gardens, says: 'The Horniman is for everyone, yet this is the first time we have focused an exhibition on – and worked directly with – the trans community in this way. We're incredibly thankful to our collaborators and consultants, and for Zoya's talent and openness in undertaking this commission for us and creating this exhibition.'

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Zoya Thomas Lobo says: 'Koovagam is a very important festival for trans people and I'm very excited to be using my camera to share our stories, traditions, culture and history. I'm very happy to be sharing my story and my work at the Horniman Museum.'

The Horniman will add the photographs from **Meeting Mohini: Koovagam through the lens of Zoya Thomas Lobo** – and 175 others taken by her as part of this commission – to its permanent collection, to increase representation of LGTBQI+ communities, and to complement existing Indian and Hindu collections.

Meeting Mohini: Koovagam through the lens of Zoya Thomas Lobo opens at the Horniman on 6 December 2025 and is free to visit.

Ends

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Image: Gharana from Meeting Mohini: Koovagam through the lens of Zoya Thomas.
Image credit: Zoya Thomas Lobo / Horniman Museum and Gardens

Notes to Editors:

- **Vishnu** is the supreme being; **Krishna** is an avatar of Vishnu and so is **Mohini**. Although Krishna becomes Mohini, Mohini is thus described as an avatar of Vishnu.
- **Zoya Thomas Lobo** - [Zoya Lobo \(@zoya_lobo_01\)](https://twitter.com/zoya_lobo_01)
- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** opened in 1901 as a gift to the people in perpetuity from tea trader and philanthropist Frederick John Horniman, to 'bring the world to Forest Hill'. Today the Horniman has a collection of 350,000 objects, specimens and artefacts from around the world. Its galleries include a World Gallery of anthropology, music, an acclaimed aquarium, The Studio – a flexible arts and exhibition space, and a natural history gallery (closed until early 2027 for redevelopment as part of [Nature + Love](#)). Indoor exhibits link to the award-winning display gardens – from medicinal and dye gardens to an interactive sound garden, Butterfly House and an animal walk – set among 16 acres of beautiful, green space offering spectacular views across London. horniman.ac.uk
- The Natural History Gallery closed for redevelopment from Monday 4 March 2024 as part of our [Nature + Love](#) project. The gallery will reopen in early 2027.
- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** was [Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022](#), the world's largest museum prize.
- The **Horniman Museum and Gardens** relies on income from ticket sales, memberships, the shop and the Café to help care for the Gardens, animals and Aquarium residents, to run events and to look after the collections. The support of our visitors and donors is hugely appreciated. horniman.ac.uk/support-us
- The **Horniman Museum and Gardens** is core-funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and since 1990 has been governed by an independent charitable trust, registered charity no. 802725.
- On 29 July 2019 the **Horniman Museum and Gardens declared an ecological and climate emergency**, pledging to place carbon reduction and environmental issues at the heart of its work. The declaration – and the subsequent **Climate and Ecological Manifesto**, published in January 2020 – is a consolidation of existing work and a commitment to renewed ambitions to reduce the Horniman's environmental and pollution footprint, increase biodiversity, and inspire others to do so. Find out more about the Horniman's manifesto commitments and progress so far at horniman.ac.uk/climate.