

## TASHIYA DE MEL

Tashiya de Mel is an image-based practitioner and communications specialist from Colombo, Sri Lanka. She explores the nature and possibilities of documentary image-making through her practice and deals with themes such as decolonisation, the climate crisis, and landscapes.

I'm driven by curiosity. The need to question, provoke and delve deeper. In a society where images are integral to our historical awareness and how we relate to aspects of our heritage, identity and culture, I am interested in understanding the role of images in shaping our collective memory. I explore the nature and possibilities of documentary image-making through my photographic practice dealing with themes of decolonisation, the climate crisis, and landscapes. My personal context acts as an essential trigger for much of my practice. As a South Asian woman living in Europe, I interpret visual culture through an intersectional lens, which allows me to tell stories that are often overlooked or underrepresented – such as those that interrogate colonial histories and confront imperial legacies. My background in digital media, advocacy, and environmental conservation inform my practice and the types of stories I tell, making me think about my audience, the impact of my work and how to effectively communicate my ideas to the public. A compelling image has the power to evoke emotion and provoke thought. It can challenge public and political perceptions and find new ways of forging connections with diverse disciplines such as art, history, culture and the environment. What moves me to be a visual storyteller is the ability to find ways of bridging these disciplines through different forms of media. I choose to work with the medium of photography as well as moving image, sound and performance in order to create narratives that are layered and nuanced. The actions that are part of my practice range from visual interventions in archival records, discursive writing and performance-based methods of engagement. By working with and through images I tell stories that are inclusive, reaches diverse audiences, and drives meaningful conversations with the potential to lead to durable change.

### WEBSITES

Personal website

[tashiya demel.com/](http://tashiya demel.com/)

### SOCIAL MEDIA

[www.instagram.com/tashiya demel/](http://www.instagram.com/tashiya demel/)

[www.linkedin.com/in/tashiya-de-mel-331351129/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/tashiya-de-mel-331351129/)

### MEMBER OF A PLATFORM, DIGITAL OR OTHERWISE

Diversify Photo

Women Photograph, Native Agency, The Everyday Projects ,

### EDUCATION

2023 - Canon Student Development  
2023 Programme canon

2022 - MA Photography and Society Den  
2024 Haag, Koninklijke Academie van  
Beeldende Kunsten diploma

2010 - BA Psychology University of Melbourne  
2012 - VCA

### EXHIBITIONS

2024 I Wonder Where it Lands Royal Academy of Art  
Den Haag, Netherlands My ongoing research  
project was displayed as a site-specific  
installation, titled 'To taste a bittersweet history'.  
It was on display at the MA 'Photography and  
Society' graduation show at the Royal Academy  
of Arts (KABK) in the Hague, Netherlands from  
27th June to 2nd July 2024. The installation was  
designed with the idea of using the table as a  
place for gathering, inviting audiences to sit  
down for tea and use the space to reflect on  
questions that must be addressed today to  
ensure that we acknowledge and confront our  
history in a way that our future no longer  
resembles our past. The installation included four  
digital collages silkscreen printed on textile and a  
single-channel video (7 minutes).  
[Group](#)

- 2024 Fragments in Transit Beetroot Studio  
Thessaloniki, Greece Curator of MA Photography and Society group exhibition at Beetroot Studio in Thessaloniki, Greece. 'Fragments in transit' was an exhibition that invited audiences to explore what it means to sense and distill feelings of navigating oneself in a new place. Twelve works were curated as part of this exhibition. Some were collaborations, some performances, while some were dialogues that connected like fragmented threads in an intricate web. The themes of this collective exhibition ranged from: feelings of being a tourist, acts of resistance, accessibility of urban structures, re-imagining protest movements, and challenging patriarchal norms.  
[Group](#)
- 2023 Everything that melts is about to Blend De Helena Den Haag, Netherlands What possibilities are offered by gaps in our memory and historical records? The Dutch colonised Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, for 150 years. Yet, this significant period appears to be absent from mainstream narratives on the Dutch colonial empire. Meanwhile in Sri Lanka, a new relationship is emerging with its Dutch-colonial history where the past is stripped of its controversial and violent content. As a Sri Lankan living in the Hague today, I am curious to find ways of tracing and reflecting on the absence of these violent histories and its lasting legacies. The installation 'Blind Spot' hoped to function as a starting point for a dialogue on narrative distortion, erasure, the exotic gaze, and representation.  
[Group](#)
- 2023 Humanity and Earth Kalam Jaffna, Sri Lanka An exhibition of selected photography curated by Liz Fernando showcased the work of the six Sri Lankan photographers Tashiya de Mel, Munira Mutaher, Shehan Obeysekera, Ramanathan Parilojithan, Sandranathan Rubatheesan and Tilaxan Tharmapalan concentrating on the relationship between humans and earth. The photographic documentation of ecological focal points in Sri Lanka and their aesthetic presentation were thematic key elements of the photo project Humanity & Earth that was initiated in 2018.  
[Group](#)
- 2022 Yolun Dışında Darağaç Izmir, Turkey MA Photography and Society group exhibition at Darağaç in Izmir, Turkey.  
[Group](#)

- 2024 To Taste a Bittersweet History Colombo/ Den Haag, Sri Lanka [tashiyademel.com/to-taste-a-bittersweet-history](https://tashiyademel.com/to-taste-a-bittersweet-history) As someone who grew up in Sri Lanka and lives in the Netherlands today, I am intrigued by how differently the Dutch-Sri Lankan colonial history is remembered; the history is absent from mainstream narratives on the Dutch colonial empire, while in Sri Lanka this period is associated with bittersweet nostalgia. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) colonised Sri Lanka between 1658 and 1796. In their efforts to secure a monopoly on the cinnamon trade they transformed the landscape and culture of Sri Lanka, leaving traces visible today. I use the historical importance of cinnamon as a point of departure, to generate a critical dialogue that unpacks some of the forgotten stories and violent histories from this period. 'To taste a bittersweet history' is an ongoing project that brings together collective and personal memory to offer new ways of engaging with a complex and nuanced history and explores how visual media can be used to address colonial legacies.
- 2022 How Big Money Spoiled a Global Anti-Poverty Experiment Bloomberg Colombo, Sri Lanka Magazine feature [www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-05-03/big-take-how-banks-use-small-loans-to-prey-on-the-poor](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-05-03/big-take-how-banks-use-small-loans-to-prey-on-the-poor) finished
- 2022 Meet the fact-checkers decoding Sri Lanka's meltdown Rest of World Colombo, Sri Lanka [restofworld.org/2022/meet-the-fact-checkers-decoding-sri-lankas-meltdown/](https://restofworld.org/2022/meet-the-fact-checkers-decoding-sri-lankas-meltdown/) finished
- 2021 Tons of potentially toxic microplastics are covering Sri Lanka's western coastline greenpeace Colombo, Sri Lanka [www.greenpeace.org/international/story/48292/potentially-toxic-plastic-sri-lankas-oil-spill-xpresspearl/](https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/48292/potentially-toxic-plastic-sri-lankas-oil-spill-xpresspearl/) finished
- 2022 Aragalayata Jaya Colombo, Sri Lanka [tashiyademel.com/aragalayata-jaya](https://tashiyademel.com/aragalayata-jaya) A selection of images from the peaceful people's protests (Aragalaya) in Sri Lanka against the economic and political crisis. Non-partisan protests of this nature were organised daily across the country until government crackdowns and arrests on activists and demonstrators began to take place. Images taken between April – June 2022 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- 2020 Great Sandy River Colombo, Sri Lanka [tashiyademel.com/great-sandy-river](https://tashiyademel.com/great-sandy-river) The Mahaweli, meaning 'Great Sandy River', is the longest and most revered river in Sri Lanka. Over decades, the Mahaweli river has been exploited, choked, and dammed for irrigation and energy. Large dams have flooded valleys and made lakes out of wild rivers while rural communities were forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands. Resettlement of communities, deforestation, and habitat loss are just some of the knock-on effects. Globally, the era of large dams is over, yet in Sri Lanka, hydropower remains the largest renewable energy source, with more projects in the pipeline. This ongoing series aims to explore the paradox of

hydropower and shed light on the hidden cost of renewables by highlighting their ecological and social impacts. The project seeks to focus on lesser-known and under-reported aspects to unpack the downstream consequences and cleaner energy solutions in ways that have not been attempted before. With Sri Lanka facing an unprecedented economic crisis, fuel shortages, droughts, and power outages, the question of where we source our energy from has never been more important. As the climate crisis intensifies, investing in clean sources of energy is critical. If we are to safeguard the free flowing rivers we have left and work towards a healthier future for our planet, we must ask important questions and ensure we learn from our past and find sustainable alternatives for our future. This project was conceptualised and first developed from a grant given by the Goethe Institute in Sri Lanka and parts of this work has been exhibited at the 'Humanity and Earth' group exhibition in Colombo (2020) and Jaffna (2023.). The project was also selected as one of the five recipients for the Visura grant for visual journalists in 2023.

## PUBLICATIONS

- 2024 Remembering to forget / forgetting to remember E-book FOMU Tashiya de Mel Den Haag, Netherlands  
[fomu.be/trigger/articles/remembering-to-forget-forgetting-to-remember](https://fomu.be/trigger/articles/remembering-to-forget-forgetting-to-remember)
- 2023 The Everyday in Citizens' Protests: In Conversation with Tashiya de Mel E-book ASAP Connect PRAMODHA WEERASEKERA Colombo, Sri Lanka  
[asapconnect.in/post/572/singlestories/the-everyday-in-citizens-protests](https://asapconnect.in/post/572/singlestories/the-everyday-in-citizens-protests)

## REVIEWS

- 2023 Meet the next generation of international photojournalists Magazine MADELEINE ROTHERY London, United Kingdom  
[www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/61048/1/meet-the-next-generation-of-photojournalists](https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/61048/1/meet-the-next-generation-of-photojournalists)
- 2021 The power of photography as we enter 'code red for humanity' Blog/Vlog Tan Lee Kuen Sri Lanka  
[www.greenpeace.org/international/story/49155/photography-humanity-climate-crisis/](https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/49155/photography-humanity-climate-crisis/)

## AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2024 Stroom Young Talent Award (KABK) (sinds 2004) Stroom, Den Haag Den Haag, Netherlands
- 2023 Visura Grants for Freelance Visual Journalists Visura United States



Cinnamologus, 2024  
7 minutes



From the project 'To Taste a Bittersweet History', 2024  
Digital archival intervention



From the project 'To Taste a Bittersweet History', 2024  
Digital Photography



Digital Collage 'Cinnamon Gardens', 2024  
Digital Collage



From the project 'Aragalayata Jaya', 2022  
Digital Photography



From the project 'Monsoon milk tea', 2021  
Digital Photograph



From the project 'Life in Limbo', 2021



Portrait of Wilma, beetroot farmer from Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka,  
2021  
Digital Photography



From the documentation of the X-Press Pearl marine disaster in  
Sri Lanka, 2021  
Digital Photography



From the project 'Great Sandy River', 2020  
Digital Photography