

October 2022

**Pivotal Conversations about Sri Lankan Contemporary Art Continue:
The #SupportLocalArt Talk Series Completes Its Second Edition**

The second edition of the #SupportLocalArt: The Talk Series, curated and organised by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) took place from 24 July to 14 August 2022. Initiated by the Saskia Fernando Gallery and supported by Nations Trust Private Banking, the first edition of the series took place in 2021.

“The #SupportLocalArt Talk Series was launched during a Covid lockdown with the intention of creating further collaboration and conversation within the Sri Lankan art industry,” recalls Saskia Fernando, Director of the Saskia Fernando Gallery. “We soon realised that the best way to sustain the programme was if we passed on to our entire community, thus widening the reach and scope of these discussions. Edition Two of the series was hence presented by the MMCA Sri Lanka during a turbulent time, and its curation was influenced by various elements of the protests within the island in 2022,” she continued.

The second edition of the #SupportLocalArt Talk Series, curated by the MMCA Sri Lanka, in response to the current economic and political situation in Sri Lanka, consisted of three online talks. Bringing together a host of panellists from different backgrounds and points of view, the talks addressed the role of art in relation to community, cultural diplomacy, and humour.

The first talk, #SupportLocalArt Talk: The Power of Community which took place on 24 July 2022, was a conversation between Sandev Handy, Curator at the MMCA Sri Lanka with Kamala Vasuki (artist), Shamara Wettimuny (academic), and Venuri Perera (artist) about the role of community in relation to their activist practices. The talk responded not only to the current momentum of the ‘aragalaya’ in Sri Lanka, but also to the ways in which the artists in the panel have combined their art with activism and community to spread awareness and build audience engagement.

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In the second talk, #SupportLocalArt Talk: The Power of Diplomacy held on 7 August 2022, Sharmini Pereira, Chief Curator at the MMCA Sri Lanka spoke to Aurelia Collard (Cultural Attaché, French Embassy in Sri Lanka), George Cooke (academic and diplomatic historian), and Kelly McCarthy (First Secretary, Public Affairs Section, US Embassy in Sri Lanka) about the role of diplomacy in arts and culture in Sri Lanka. The talk highlighted the history of cultural diplomacy and the soft power role of cultural work to raise issues that traditional forms of cultural diplomacy cannot do. The panellists compared and contrasted cultural diplomacy in action across time and place in France and the USA. They discussed the numerous challenges as well the opportunities that exist when cultural diplomacy is framed in arm's length to state policy, where cultural diplomacy can become an effective way to mitigate the negative perceptions created by higher level politics.

In the third and final talk of the series held on 14 August 2022, Pramodha Weerasekera, Assistant Curator Education and Public Programmes at the MMCA Sri Lanka chatted with Dino Corera (comedian), Gehan Blok (comedian), Gihan de Chickera (political cartoonist), and Sharmini Pereira (art historian and curator) about the relationship between humour and art. The talk highlighted the ways in which the panellists and their peers have used humour in their digital content, theatre performances, and cartoons, in the current moment of heightened economic and political instability in Sri Lanka. The panel also touched on the history of art and humour in Sri Lanka by acknowledging the practices of modernist artists such as cartoonist Aubrey Collette (1920–1992) who went into exile following criticism of his work during the 1950s and 1960s.

Sanjaya Senarath, Chief Marketing Officer of Nations Trust Bank noted that, “The Bank believes that the partnership with the MMCA Sri Lanka will serve as an opportunity to empower the next generation of artists and art lovers alike. We believe that this talk series serves as a unique platform to reach out to communities and develop their talent and creativity. Nations Trust Bank has been an ardent supporter of local art and artists through its various past initiatives, and together with the MMCA Sri Lanka we look forward to exposing Sri Lankan contemporary art to the new generation, whilst uplifting local artists to a next level.”

Video recordings of all the talks of #SupportLocalArt: The Talk Series Edition Two can be viewed on its YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCylvj8ElwenvXEjCdKQgZ9A> and the MMCA Sri Lanka’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/mmcasrilanka>.

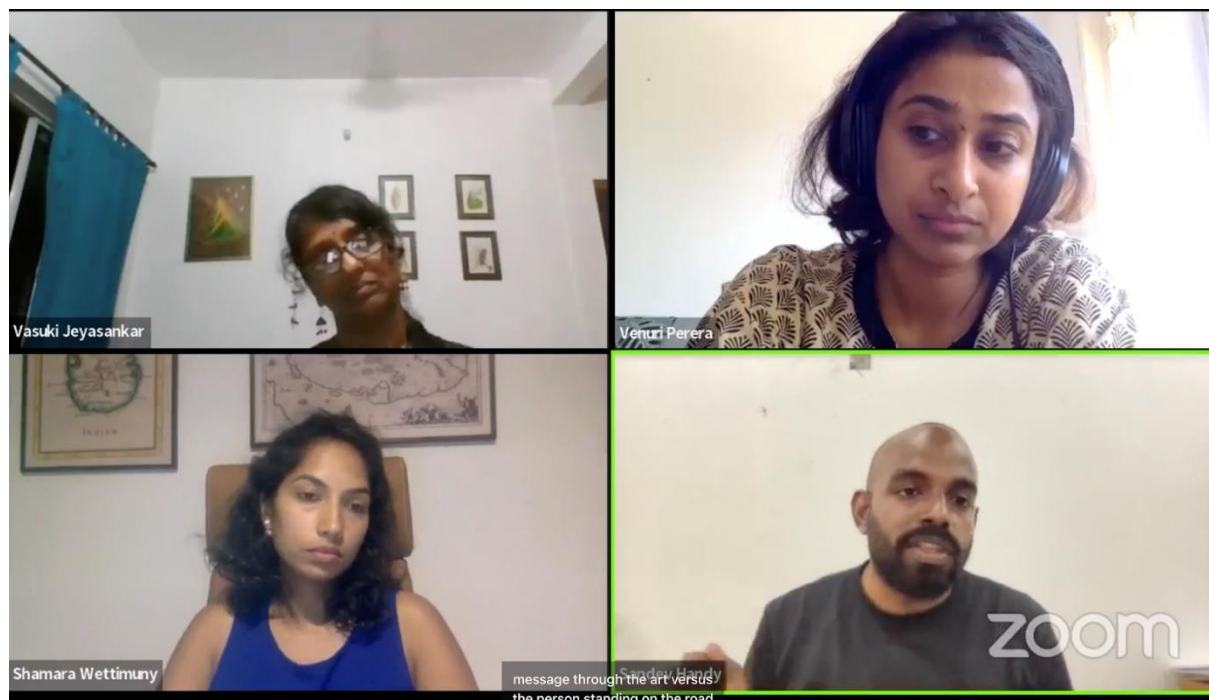


Image: Kamala Vasuki, Venuri Perera, and Shamara Wettimuny in conversation with Sandev Handy, Curator, MMCA Sri Lanka at the #SupportLocalArt Talk: The Power of Community held on 24 July 2022.



Image: Kelly McCarthy, George Cooke, and Aurelia Collard in conversation with Sharmini Pereira, Chief Curator, MMCA Sri Lanka at the #SupportLocalArt Talk: The Power of Diplomacy held on 7 August 2022.

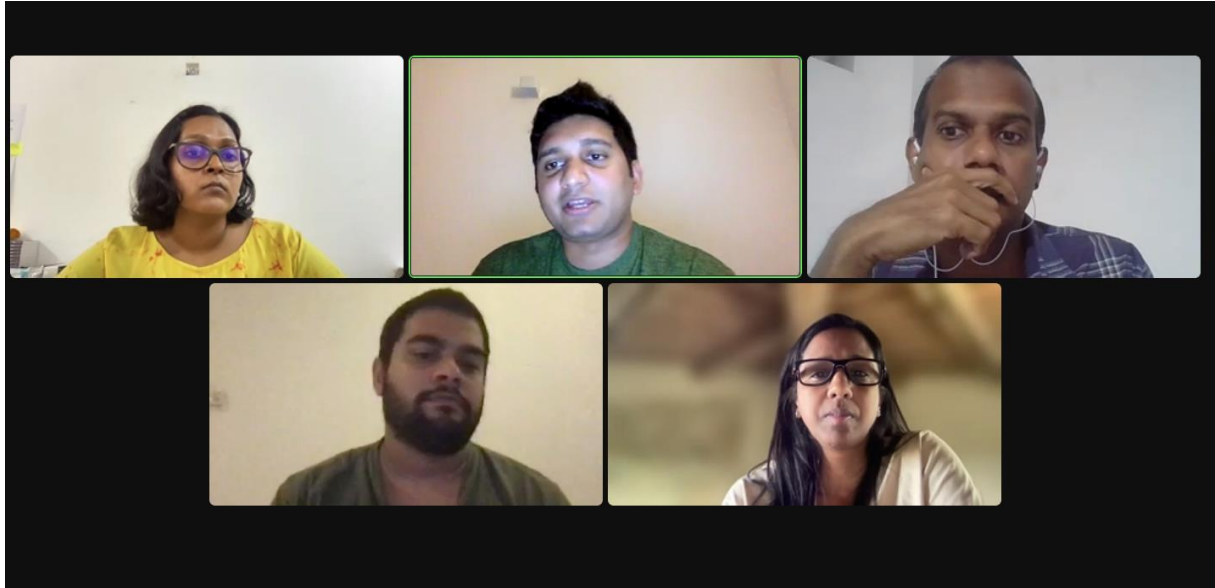


Image: Dino Corera, Gihan de Chickera, Gehan Blok, and Sharmini Pereira in conversation with Pramodha Weerasekera, Assistant Curator Education and Public Programmes, MMCA Sri Lanka at the #SupportLocalArt Talk: The Power of Humour held on 14 August 2022.