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Sandev Handy and Ritchell Marcelline of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka on a Residency at the Singapore Art Museum

Sandev Handy, Curator and Ritchell Marcelline, Assistant Curator at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) took part in the EX-SITU: Art Spaces Residency at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) from 10 January to 6 February 2023.

SAM has introduced this residency as ‘a museum-run programme committed to supporting the development of innovative artistic and curatorial practices that respond to current global discourses’. During their residency Handy and Marcelline focused on understanding current backend museum practices, exhibition making strategies, and the future institutional and pedagogical trajectories of the Singaporean museum landscape, in order to examine what an art museum in the making in Sri Lanka can absorb from it. They further directed their attention to learning new approaches around audience engagement, developing workflows and best practices for museums, along with training in collections management and conducting curatorial research that connect discourses in South East Asia to those in Sri Lanka and the broader South Asia region.

Speaking about the Ex-Situ Residency, Marcelline recalled “The time in Singapore was crucial to understanding what it takes to build and grow sustainable institutions dedicated to public benefit. I learned the mechanics of big ideas such as developing a long-term vision, growing and training a dedicated team, and planning years ahead to structurally prepare an institution to grow into its future projects.” He further noted that “The training on essential smaller components such as back-end processes, timelines, and budgets was

Groundfloor, Crescat Boulevard
89 Galle Road
Colombo 03

Registered Address:
117 Sir Chittampalam A. Gardiner Mawatha
Colombo 02
Sri Lanka

info@mmca-srilanka.org
www.mmca-srilanka.org

also extremely helpful. Most importantly, the Ex-Situ Residency made me reflect on the necessity of not being afraid to experiment.”

Handy and Marcelline’s itinerary included visits to institutions such as the National Art Gallery Singapore, Singapore Art Museum, Heritage Conservation Centre, the National Archives, the National Museum and the STPI: Creative Workshop and Gallery, and independent art spaces such as Hot House, Aliwhal Art Centre, OH! Open House, and Kult Kafe. They further took part on a walk across Punggol with Farhan Idris, met with Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore and Singapore Art Museum and joined Shabbir Hussain Mustafa on a Residency Thursday Talk. They also visited the Singapore Art Week events, exhibitions, galleries, and talks, and the Singapore Biennale exhibitions.

“What underscored my time in Singapore, was learning how crucial it is for Sri Lanka that both state and private bodies recognise the importance of funding the contemporary arts and cultural fields, and recognise the role they play in the country’s future,” said Handy, adding that “My time there showed me the rich culture of exchange and conversation across the arts in South East Asia, and how important it is to not only facilitate a similar conversation in South Asia, but bridge the gulf of discourses that exist between South Asia and South East Asia.”