

May 2023

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka Opens 'The Foreigners'

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) opened its new exhibition titled 'The Foreigners' on 4 May 2023, at its premises on the ground floor of Crescat Boulevard, Colombo 3. Curated by Sandev Handy and Sharmini Pereira, 'The Foreigners' brings together the works of 15 contemporary artists who use varying media to address the entangled ways in which foreignness is inscribed onto them, marking them as strangers, outsiders, or transgressors. Together their works resist, reimagine, and re-mix well-worn tropes of how otherness is categorised and foreignness is perceived. These works include photographs, performances, video artworks, installations, drawings, and paintings.

The exhibition has been specially designed by Jonathan Edward and the exhibition identity has been created by Emile Molin. Speaking about the exhibition, lead curator of the exhibition Sandev Handy noted that, "The Foreigners considers how contemporary artists grapple with often contradictory ideas of home, borders, and belonging. We imagine this exhibition as a complicated cacophony of both local and diasporic voices coming together to testify to their experiences of place and displacement, inviting visitors to listen, tune in, and parse through them." He further added that, "My hope is that this exhibition is a starting point; a stake in the ground from which we may begin to recognise the experiences of the foreigner, the outsider, and the stranger, as crucial artistic voices towards helping us critically examine how borders often imposed upon us by dominant cultural narratives may be questioned and even dismantled."

'The Foreigners' features 15 contemporary artists who include Arjuna Gunaratne (b. 1976), Danushka Marasinghe (b. 1985), Dinelka Liyanage (b. 1994), Hema Shironi (b. 1991), Hania Luthufi (b. 1989), Imaad Majeed (b. 1991), Isuru Kumarasinghe (b. 1987), Janani Cooray (b. 1974), K K Srinath Chathuranga (b. 1987), Nina Mangalanayagam (b. 1980), Reginald S. Aloysius (b. 1970), S.H. Sarath (b. 1947), Shyama Golden (b. 1983), Stephen Champion (b. 1959), and

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Sumudi Suraweera (b. 1982). Two of the artworks titled ‘ව්‍යාප්තිය/ එළිපත්ත/ Threshold (Part 1)’ and ‘ව්‍යාප්තිය/ එළිපත්ත/ Threshold (Part 2)’ by Dinelka Liyanage (b. 1994), Hania Luthufi (b. 1989) and Sumudi Suraweera (b. 1982) of Musicmatters, were commissioned by the MMCA Sri Lanka in 2021 with the support of the European Union. Lenders to the exhibition are based in India, Sri Lanka, Sweden, the UK, and the USA.

Speaking about the exhibition, Sharmini Pereira, Chief Curator at the MMCA Sri Lanka said, “‘The Foreigners’ will give the museum’s visitors an insight into the works of contemporary artists living and working in Sri Lanka, the United States, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. One of the most important aspects of our work is to support and showcase the work of living artists; an opportunity not afforded to the generation of modern artists”, adding that “We look forward to welcoming visitors to an exhibition that we believe touches on many contemporary issues about who we are and where we are from.” Pereira further stated that “This is also our first exhibition to receive support from a group of individuals who reside outside of Sri Lanka and who wish to bring international attention to the country’s many contemporary artists. Through their example, we hope that other individuals will do similar and support research and curation around contemporary art.”

The MMCA Sri Lanka will also offer its visitors a host of free public programmes alongside ‘The Foreigners’. These programmes include Gallery Talks with artists and academics, Workshops conducted by art practitioners and professionals, guided Curator’s and Exhibition Tours, a Poetry club, performances, and other special events. All public programmes are made possible with the generous support of the European Union, whilst ‘The Foreigners’ exhibition is kindly supported by Anojie Amerasinghe, Hugues Marchand, Radhika Chopra, and Rajan Anandan, with additional support from the MMCA Sri Lanka’s Founding Patrons, the British Council, and Lite87. Generous support is also provided by the museum’s major benefactors and funders: John Keells Foundation, Nations Trust Bank, and Fairfirst Insurance.

The MMCA Sri Lanka is an education-led initiative that aims to establish a public museum dedicated to the display, research, collection, and conservation of modern and contemporary art for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public, schools, and tourists. The museum is open daily from 10am to 6pm (except on Poya days and public holidays) at the ground floor of Crescat Boulevard, Colombo 3, and entrance to the museum and all its public programmes is free. Information about the museum, and its exhibitions and public programmes can be found via their website www.mmca-srilanka.org, or on Facebook at facebook.com/mmcasrilanka and Instagram at instagram.com/mmcasrilanka/.