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Supporting Sri Lankan Contemporary Art at the MMCA Sri Lanka

Contemporary art in Sri Lanka is steadily gaining more recognition on both national and international levels. As the country's first and only museum dedicated to showcasing Sri Lankan modern and contemporary art, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) is one of the organisations leading the way in creating awareness and educating its audiences on the need to support them.

Supporting contemporary art in a region is not just about fostering creativity; it is also about preserving and celebrating its cultural identity. Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and historical significance have all contributed to an expanding art scene that reflects the complex tapestry of its society. The island can continue to nurture its thriving community of artists and ensure that their voices resonate both locally and globally, by providing resources, education, and exposure on its contemporary art scene. Most importantly, the patrons of Sri Lanka's contemporary art must recognise the vital role it plays in shaping the country's identity and fostering a sense of cultural pride among its citizens.

Connecting patrons of the arts with local artists, and facilitating supportive relationships between both local and international patrons and the Sri Lankan art scene, is an important part of the MMCA Sri Lanka's efforts. As a reflection of this endeavour, their last exhibition titled 'The Foreigners' received the kind support of Anojie Amerasinghe and Hugues Marchand, and Radhika Chopra and Rajan Anandan who are based in the UK and India respectively.

Speaking about her support for Sri Lankan art Anojie Amerasinghe said that, "The exploration of modern and contemporary art by the MMCA Sri Lanka resonates not only with Sri Lankans but also with individuals worldwide. 'The Foreigners' focused on foreignness, and this was particularly compelling to me as I have spent a lifetime navigating diverse cultures. I feel this is probably how my family is seen as my husband is Belgian and my children have grown up travelling and belong to more than one place." She added that, "I felt it was the perfect way

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for us to begin a conversation with the MMCA Sri Lanka about Sri Lankan contemporary art as it was also their first-ever all contemporary exhibition. Equally, it was an opportunity to show our support to the MMCA Sri Lanka as an institution which is an important part of the contemporary art world infrastructure that will benefit those in the art ecosystem and the development of contemporary art more broadly.”

Amerasinghe further emphasised that, “We need art that is not confined to the tastes of a select few but resonates with the broader population, including the youth. Contemporary art is a powerful tool for cultural education, fostering meaningful conversations, and building a deeper sense of community.” She went on to note that “it is an important way to create new opportunities for research and collaboration between institutions, for gallerists to engage with, and for collectors and patrons to participate in the ongoing endeavour to develop Sri Lankan contemporary art.”

Contemporary art is a reflection of society’s ever-changing dynamics, offering a lens through which the surrounding world can be explored and interpreted. In Sri Lanka, contemporary artists are using their creativity to address pressing social, political, and environmental issues, providing thought-provoking commentary on the nation’s evolving identity. This is an artistic endeavour that Radhika Chopra sought to nurture through her support towards ‘The Foreigners’. Speaking in this regard, she noted that, “While I have been supporting the arts for a very long time, our support for ‘The Foreigners’ by the MMCA Sri Lanka was our first institutional support in Sri Lanka. The exhibition’s focus personally resonated as my husband and family are part of the Sri Lankan diaspora and institution building has always been a key area of personal interest. We also felt the efforts in building an arts program in Colombo that engages with the public needed our support.”

She further said that, “The artists’ individual responses to a shared experience were so poignantly woven through the exhibition. Hema Shironi’s work titled ‘A Bundle of Joy’ (2020) is a part of our private collection and was shown at the exhibition, and I feel it spoke in depth about the subject.” Chopra also added that, “It’s important to showcase and engage global audiences with what we do in Sri Lanka and create a wider conversation about our contemporary art globally. This is the start of a greater commitment to supporting cultural institutions in Sri Lanka. Ironically, it took an exhibition titled ‘The Foreigners’ to bring us back home.”

The MMCA Sri Lanka remains committed to championing modern and contemporary art in Sri Lanka. Their new exhibition titled ‘88 Acres: The Watapuluwa Housing Scheme by Minnette De Silva’ is open to the public for free until 7 July 2024, at the museum located on the ground floor of Crescat Boulevard, Colombo 3. The museum is open daily from 10am to 6pm. 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. Information about the museum and its exhibitions and public programmes can be found via its website www.mmca-srilanka.org, or on Facebook at facebook.com/mmcasrilanka and Instagram at instagram.com/mmcasrilanka/.