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The Visitor Educator (VE) programme at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) is an initiative aimed at enhancing the visitor experience at the museum and building capacity within the cultural industries in Sri Lanka. Launched in December 2019, the VE training position and programme is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. The MMCA Sri Lanka's VEs play a pivotal role as the first points of contact between visitors and the museum, where they enable visitors to learn about and engage with the artworks on view, provide context, and introduce close-looking techniques through conversations, tours, and educational activities for all age groups and levels. The VEs also support the care of the exhibits in the exhibition, observe health and safety protocols, and assist with the setup of its weekly public programmes.

Raesah Samsudeen, Matthew Roger, Hussain Nizam, Prabodhi Navodya, and Virandi Kularatne reflect upon their journeys at the MMCA Sri Lanka as Visitor Educators.

What led you to join the MMCA Sri Lanka as a Visitor Educator?

RAEESAH: I was part of a university tour led by Sharmini during the past exhibition titled 'Encounters', during which she spoke of all the work that goes into putting up an exhibition. I had prior interests in exhibition design, so I asked if there were any internships open. There being none at the moment, they encouraged me to apply for the Visitor Educator role. However, I was later on able to take up an Exhibition Design internship during the design of our current exhibition '88 Acres'!

MATTHEW: I was looking for something different; something which is not in the corporate field, and where I can learn new skills and knowledge, and better my communication skills. When I saw the job call-out for the position it was exactly what I was looking for. The job title sounded unique, and the organisation and its goal and objectives stood out to me.

HUSSAIN: Volunteering has always held a special place in my heart, and my initial opportunity was at a contemporary arts festival in Colombo. It fuelled my

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

interest in joining the MMCA Sri Lanka as a Visitor Educator, with the aim of imparting knowledge about the limitless potential of art to everyone.

PRABODHI: I had been following the MMCA Sri Lanka's social media for quite a while, but never found the time to visit due to exams. Later, I came to see the exhibition 'Encounters' with my boyfriend, and oh my, it was impressive. Soon after, I heard about the Visitor Educator opportunity and eagerly applied for it.

VIRANDI: As an art enthusiast, I sought an art-centric job. The prospects of learning about art and interacting with visitors and other art enthusiasts, inside an art space while maintaining flexibility for my studies, drew me in.

What are some of the highlights of your experience as a Visitor Educator?

RAEESAH: Being a Visitor Educator is a multifaceted role. Some of my highlights involve being able to talk to and meet people from different backgrounds, especially from the art-world itself. Working on MMCA Afterschool with the kids, and learning from them while teaching, is definitely something I will take with me. Finally, getting to work on production and the exhibition design for '88 Acres' has been one of my biggest highlights at the MMCA Sri Lanka.

MATTHEW: Giving tours for all kinds of groups of people, like foreigners, school students, and locals is definitely a highlight for me. They always help me look at the artworks in a different perspective, almost every time. Also being able to be a part of MMCA Afterschool and facilitating many different fun sessions for children is something I always enjoy.

HUSSAIN: I have been extensively engaged in the management of art, spanning from the detailed construction phase to the grand unveiling which is part and parcel of delivering a great exhibition. Through this experience, I have refined my expertise in art curation, installation, and the nuanced coordination required to create compelling exhibitions. Working with curators and getting hands-on experience is another thing I love!

PRABODHI: Although it has not been long since I joined as a VE, it has been a very good experience. This is my first job and it is fair to say that the experience of it has been the most valuable thing to me. I got to learn about the great many things that go into an exhibition, and to communicate much of that knowledge to the visitors. Also, I love it that I get to interact with such a diverse crowd of visitors including children, tourists from different countries, people of different communities in Sri Lanka, and visitors who are engaged in different professions.

VIRANDI: A lot of my fondest memories at the MMCA Sri Lanka are of my conversations with visitors. There is something so incredible about sharing a profound conversation about art and life, especially with those you just met.

Seeing people connect with and relate to artwork in distinct ways is so incredibly moving.

How do you think your career at the MMCA Sri Lanka will contribute to your professional life?

RAEESAH: MMCA Sri Lanka has been the starting point and a great influence over my professional life. I am a graphic designer working towards becoming a multi-disciplinary designer, and the MMCA Sri Lanka has contributed to my professional life through advice and direction, resources, conceptual thinking, and finally opportunities to move forward. Although I've only been at the MMCA Sri Lanka as a Visitor Educator and intern for a year, there has been an overwhelming amount of support and opportunities to grow.

MATTHEW: Being able to work on production for three exhibitions at the MMCA Sri Lanka as both an intern and a Visitor Educator has exposed me to many new opportunities and experiences. Through these I learned how to coordinate and run projects on schedule, understand how to use a space for an exhibition, and many other things. I now also work on art installations and art production, thanks to the training I received at the museum.

HUSSAIN: My experience at the MMCA Sri Lanka spans across different facets of operations such as production and art handling, along with a track record in visitor-facing positions. This diverse exposure, combined with my current responsibilities, has helped me in developing a well-rounded skill set—both interpersonal and technical—integral to a successful professional journey.

PRABODHI: I study journalism and media, and in that field of work communication skills are very important. While speaking with diverse groups of visitors and engaging in effective communication with them, I was able to gain professional experiences first hand. The story-telling method of engaging our visitors with the artwork too has had a positive effect on my skills.

VIRANDI: Knowing how to relate to visitors' experiences, and ensuring that conversations are appropriate and two-way, while respecting and appreciating the differences in the ways we see and relate to art and the world are skills I have refined at the MMCA Sri Lanka. This has definitely given me good training for my future professional life.