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### **Community Building at the MMCA Sri Lanka**

With a steadfast goal of introducing new careers in the museum sector to young professionals in Sri Lanka, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) is committed to train and build up expertise and knowledge among local communities.

Sharmini Pereira, Chief Curator at the MMCA Sri Lanka emphasised this commitment at the ‘Singapore Art Week Forum 2025: Art Publics’ on 15 January 2025, organised by the Singapore National Gallery, Singapore Art Museum, and the National Arts Council in Singapore. Pereira spoke in a panel titled ‘Creating Communities’, where she recognised how exhibition making has given the MMCA Sri Lanka the opportunity to create community by building human capital in the form of curators, exhibition designers, installers, editors, translators, and conservators among others.

Pereira looked at how the MMCA Sri Lanka builds itself around community, as the country’s first museum of modern and contemporary art and as a museum-in-the-making. She addressed this in terms of physical proximity and shared spaces, language, museum events and public programmes, education and outreach, fund raising projects, and most importantly in training its staff of museum professionals.

“It might be fairer to say at this stage, our focus is not on how we conserve and care for a collection but on how we care for the people that come from different communities—all of whom contribute to the establishment of the MMCA Sri Lanka,” Pereira noted. She added that “It is in some sense a fundamental shift away from thinking of museology as strictly linked to a building and assets. Whilst there is much more work to be done, the MMCA Sri Lanka is firmly committed to ensuring the museum is established on the basis of recognising what community has meant in the past, and how it continues to be in flux as a concept.”

Exhibition making is an important part of the MMCA Sri Lanka’s work and provides a means to open up more opportunities for young professionals to train

Groundfloor, Crescat Boulevard  
89 Galle Road  
Colombo 03

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

[info@mmca-srilanka.org](mailto:info@mmca-srilanka.org)  
[www.mmca-srilanka.org](http://www.mmca-srilanka.org)

in museum careers. Pereira and Sandev Handy, Senior Curator at the MMCA Sri Lanka addressed this at the 'International Symposium on Rethinking Heritage: Conflict, Reconciliation and Agency' held in Jaffna, Sri Lanka on 25 January 2025. Nodding towards the importance of education and communication in rethinking heritage in Sri Lanka, they noted that at the MMCA Sri Lanka "Exhibition making has hence helped to train and build up an infrastructure of expertise and knowledge which is embedded in a tri-lingual practice."

However, exhibition making is not the only focus area for professional development at the MMCA Sri Lanka. This was highlighted by Kaumadi Jayaweera, Editorial Assistant at the museum, who spoke at the Sri Lanka Design Festival on 7 November 2024 on the topic of what it is like to work at a museum, especially in a career that bridges linguistics and museology. She introduced the audience to different kinds of activities and projects that take place at the MMCA Sri Lanka, including exhibitions, education and public programmes, digital engagement, marketing, collections, archiving, and fund raising, which all involve different varieties of growing expertise among the museum team. "As the first and only museum of modern and contemporary art in the country, it is essential that we think long term about our work in the arts and culture scene in Sri Lanka" she noted.

Jayaweera also added that, "Some of our former colleagues have gone on to work in the creative industries in areas such as design, editorial, art writing, and curation. Some have gone on to pursue their higher education in design, architecture, and art history. The kind of work you do at the MMCA Sri Lanka comes with you, as you pursue your creative career beyond the museum."

The MMCA Sri Lanka recognises the importance of the roles that artists, museum professionals, funders, visitors, and other stakeholders play in building a free and trilingual museum of modern and contemporary art for Sri Lanka's communities. Towards this end, it is committed to facilitating conversations, and learning and training opportunities to all collaborators involved. More information about the museum, and its exhibitions and public programmes can be found via their website [www.mmca-srilanka.org](http://www.mmca-srilanka.org), or on Facebook at [facebook.com/mmcasrilanka](https://facebook.com/mmcasrilanka) and Instagram at [instagram.com/mmcasrilanka/](https://instagram.com/mmcasrilanka/).