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### **The MMCA Sri Lanka Celebrates Animated Documentary Win**

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) is proud to announce that ‘is this an architectural documentary?’ (2023) has been awarded the prestigious 2025 SAH Award for Film and Video by the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH). This animated documentary was produced by the museum and created by artists Irushi Tennekoon, Sumedha Kelegama, and Sumudu Athukorala in 2023. The award was presented at the 78th Annual International Conference of the SAH in Atlanta, USA, in recognition of the film’s outstanding contribution to understanding the built environment.

‘is this an architectural documentary?’ (2023) is an artists’ film that focuses on Minnette De Silva’s (1918–1998) Watapuluwa Housing Scheme (1958), one of Sri Lanka’s first social housing projects. Using De Silva’s own writings and documentation of the Scheme, as published in her book ‘The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect Vol. 1’ (1998), the film looks at what is left in situ and attempts to understand the Scheme 65 years after it was built. ‘is this an architectural documentary’ (2023) interweaves animation, archival photos, film recordings, and witness testimonies to consider what the Watapuluwa Housing Scheme bears witness to in terms of the social and political transformations of Sri Lanka since the early ’50s.

Sharmini Pereira, Chief Curator at the MMCA Sri Lanka, celebrated the achievement by stating that “This recognition by the SAH is a testament to Sri Lankan art and film in global discourse. ‘is this an architectural documentary?’ not only honours Minnette De Silva’s revolutionary contributions but also redefines how architectural history can be told, experimenting with form in ways that resonate with scholars and general audiences alike.”

Orlando Edwards, Country Director for British Council Sri Lanka said that “I am delighted that the MMCA Sri Lanka has won this prestigious international award. This is a wonderful result, a testament to the hard work and creativity of the MMCA Sri Lanka.” He added that “We have always been proud of our support for innovative arts and culture projects through our grants. This is a great example of

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)

a successful UK-Sri Lanka partnership which has enriched the cultural fabric of Colombo, and internationally beyond, demonstrating excellence in the arts.”

Edwards further reflected on this partnership, mentioning that “The film was created as part of a year-long research collaboration funded by the British Council, between the MMCA Sri Lanka and Forensic Architecture. The latter is a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London, which specialises in visual and spatial investigations, and aesthetic witnessing. I congratulate the three artists involved on winning this award!”

The SAH Award for Film and Video honours distinguished works that deepen public engagement with the history of the built environment. The 2025 selection committee praised ‘is this an architectural documentary?’ (2023) for its innovative storytelling, which blends animation, interviews, and archival material to create a dynamic and non-linear narrative. In their citation, the jury noted that “This recursive, dialogical film eventually echoes De Silva’s innovative participatory methods, offering a fresh and vital perspective on modern architectural history.”

Founded in 1940, SAH is a leading international organisation dedicated to studying and preserving the built environment. Its annual awards celebrate excellence in architectural history scholarship, publications, and media.