

museum of modern and contemporary art sri lanka

Quarterly Newsletter #13 – March 2025

‘Three Songs of Ceylon’

The latest exhibition by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA Sri Lanka) titled ‘**Three Songs of Ceylon**’ was open from 23 January to 11 February at The Stables, Park Street Mews, Colombo 2. The show welcomed 2,015 visitors, including 460 students from nine schools and higher educational institutions from the Northern, Eastern, and Western Provinces.

‘Three Songs of Ceylon’ was curated by **Sandev Handy**, assisted by **Thinal Sajeewa** and **Nimaya Harris**. It took as its starting point ‘The Song of Ceylon’ (1934), a film commissioned by the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board under British colonial rule. This exhibition traced how, in the decades that followed, two artists re-visited this film from two distinct vantage points, each producing an alternate ‘song’ as a response. By bringing together each of these three songs of Ceylon into conversation with recent moving image works by contemporary artists, this exhibition explores how stories are told, retold, and unsettled through the medium of moving images.

‘Three Songs of Ceylon’ featured artists based in Sri Lanka, Germany, Pakistan, the United States of America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. They include Bani Abidi (b.1971), Imaad Majeed (b.1991) with Sharika Navamani (b.1990), Laleen Jayamanne (b.1947), Lionel Wendt (1900–1944) with John Grierson (1897–1972), Walter Leigh (1905–1942) and Basil Wright (1907–1987), Mark LaPore (1952–2005), and Rosalind Nashashibi (b.1973).

Countdown 1-Minute Film Night

As part of ‘Three Songs of Ceylon’, we were also thrilled to host the second iteration **Countdown 1-Minute Film Night** in collaboration with **Barefoot Gallery Colombo** on 7 February. This screening of one-minute films, made by artists and creative practitioners who experiment with the format of video art and the moving image, celebrated the potential of short-form filmmaking as a space for play, discipline, and creative risk-taking. The film night featured 30 works, selected from among over 60 submissions. Our best wishes to all creatives who entered the competition!

Visits by World Monuments Fund and Society of Architectural Historians

Extending our collaborations with international colleagues, patrons of **World Monuments Fund**, and members of the **Society of Architectural Historians** visited the

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MMCA Sri Lanka in November and December 2025, respectively. They received the opportunity to speak with the MMCA Sri Lanka archives team about the developments in their recent cataloging and digitising endeavors.

Pop Art and South Asia Conference in Jaffna, Sri Lanka

On 16 December 2025, **Sandev Handy**, Senior Curator and **Nimaya Harris**, Project Curator, presented at the **Pop Art and South Asia Conference** in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Their paper titled **'On the Possibilities of Pop: Testing Frameworks from Sri Lanka'** explored the proposition of 'Pop South Asia' as put forward in the seminal exhibition of the same name, curated by Iftikhar Dadi and Roobina Karode, in relation to recent developments in Sri Lankan contemporary art.

Primer Southeast Asia

Kicking off our team's learning endeavours for this year, **Sharmini Pereira**, Chief Curator, took part in **Primer Southeast Asia** from 25 to 30 January. This by-invitation programme organised by **National Gallery Singapore** is designed to offer critical insight for curators operating outside of Southeast Asia, to the modern and contemporary art contexts of the region. Pereira had the opportunity to visit artist studios, exhibitions, and museums in Singapore and the Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Bandung, holding close discussions with the artists, curators, and other art professionals.

'Boxes, Borders, Biji, Cipta' at the Singapore Biennale 2025

Sharmini Pereira also spoke at the session titled 'Boxes, Borders, Biji, Cipta' at the Singapore Art Gallery on 22 March, in conjunction with **'Singapore Biennale 2025: pure intention'**. Inspired by the artwork 'Metabolic Container' (2025) by CAMP, the speakers explored the broader Malay world, food as material history, and the 'border' as a narrative tool.

Exhibition-Workshop by Kochi Biennale Foundation

From February 9 to 13, **Nimaya Harris** participated in the **Exhibition-Workshop curatorial intensive** hosted by the **Kochi Biennale Foundation** in Fort Kochi, Kerala. This seven-day programme served as a collaborative platform for young curators to engage with critical discourse and methodologies in contemporary curating. Harris joined the South About Conference as well as a series of six intensive curatorial sessions, followed by a visit to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.

Archives digitisation training

Continuing our team training efforts on archiving, **Archivist Nigel Nugawela** conducted a session for the MMCA Sri Lanka archives and collections teams on digitising different

types of records in an archive. Held on 16 February, the training included all aspects of digitisation, from ethics of the practice and core components of a digitisation workflow to the technical and practical components of digitisation.

Curatorial Intensive South Asia

Thinal Sajeewa, Assistant Curator, also successfully concluded his training at the seventh edition of the **Curatorial Intensive South Asia (CISA)** programme, hosted by Khoj International Artists' Association in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi. He opened his first solo curatorial project titled **'as needed'** on 12 March in New Delhi, as part of the 'When We Return' exhibition series by the CISA.

MMCA Sri Lanka Founding Patrons Visit the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

The Founding Patrons Curated Art Tour to Kochi took place from 26 February to 1 March, with guided tours of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The programme also included visits to several exhibition venues and the Students' Biennale.

'Building a Museum Without a Blueprint' by Desi Art Mag

Last but not least, the MMCA Sri Lanka is featured in the latest issue of **Desi Art Mag**, where Namrata Dewanjee speaks to Sharmini Pereira, Chief Curator, on the rewarding yet challenging task of building Sri Lanka's first museum of modern and contemporary art. ['Building a Museum without a Blueprint'](#) is also available in [Tamil](#), [Sinhala](#), and [Hindi](#) on the Desi Art Mag blog.