

museum of modern and contemporary art sri lanka

Quarterly Newsletter #8 – July 2024

'88 Acres: The Watapuluwa Housing Scheme by Minnette De Silva' closed to the public on 7 July. Curated by our Chief Curator Sharmini Pereira with the curatorial assistance of Ritchell Marcelline, Thinal Sanjeewa, and Nimaya Harris, it was the first international solo exhibition to be curated on the pioneering work of Sri Lankan architect Minnette De Silva (1918–1998). The exhibition attracted 13,257 visitors, including 856 students from schools and higher education institutes across the country.

'88 Acres' delved into the 1958 Watapuluwa Housing Scheme in Kandy, designed by De Silva. The Scheme heralded a new form of social housing in Sri Lanka, and was notably created with the participation of its users. '88 Acres' explored how this sprawling hillside development was ahead of its time in providing affordable accommodation for a diverse ethno-religious community of government public servants in Sri Lanka. Alongside a specially commissioned artists' film by Irushi Tennekoon (b. 1989), Sumedha Kelegama (b. 1988), and Sumudu Athukorala (b. 1980), '88 Acres' looked back at the Scheme 65 years later to consider De Silva's influences and the challenges of her design approach.

In recognising the difficulties that come in engaging with contemporary art, we have always endeavoured to explore the reception of exhibitions from a general audience's perspective. To this end, we curated 80 free public programmes alongside '88 acres', attracting 1,388 participants.

Not forgetting our younger audiences, MMCA Afterschool took place in January and June 2024. We welcomed 160 children aged 6–10 who were involved in socio-emotional learning activities that helped them to discover more about the inspirational architect Minnette De Silva.

As we look ahead to our upcoming exhibitions, we are excited to announce three new artist commissions by Jasmine Nilani Joseph (b.1990), Anomaa Rajakaruna (b.1965), and Hanusha Somasundaram (b.1988) under the 'Arts 4 ADR' project. This endeavour aims to examine art's potential to foster dialogue, unite communities, provoke reflection, and offer alternative pathways to reconciliation within contexts of communal conflict. Working alongside communities in Vavuniya, Mannar, Ampara, Trincomalee, Badulla, and Monaragala, the artists are midway in their research that looks at the complex interplay of land issues and conflict in Sri Lanka. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook to keep up with what they are up to.

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In May 2024, following an Open Call, we welcomed four young professionals Bavaneedha Loganathan, Chanthuru Thiveegan, Kalyani Suntharam, and Thamilini Siththiravadivel, to participate in our Dialogue and Civic Engagement Fellowship in partnership with SEDR (Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution). The Fellowships are aimed at cultural practitioners (artists, activists, writers, poets, facilitators, performers, and educators) from the Northern, Eastern, and Uva provinces of Sri Lanka interested in using art to promote civic dialogue and Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR).

A second edition of our professional training programme 'Museum Intensive' was held on 'Paper and Photography Conservation' on 27 June. Developed in partnership with World Monuments Fund, the workshop welcomed 15 museum and gallery professionals from 11 organisations across Sri Lanka.

'Museum Intensive II: Paper and Photography Conservation' provided an introduction to caring for paper-based materials, and agents of deterioration that affect paper. It also included a focused training on handling, storage, and types of treatments. The sessions were led by Dr Lois Rowe, Principal, City & Guilds of London Art School, and Nicola Walker, Tutor on the Book and Paper Conservation course, City & Guilds of London Art School and Senior Conservator, Paper & Photography, National Trust, UK.

On other exciting news, the MMCA Sri Lanka will be launching the Sinhala and Tamil versions of our first research publication 'Second Volume' in August 2024. 'Second Volume' was conceived to accompany '88 Acres' and was launched in February 2024. The new Sinhala and Tamil publications will be available as free, open access, and downloadable e-books on our website. Stay tuned for their release!

A group of our Founding Patrons took part in a curated art tour to Batticaloa on 12–14 July. This visit to the eastern coast of Sri Lanka underlined the important number of artists and new activities based outside Colombo, who are contributing to the vibrancy of the country's contemporary art scene.

Writing for 'Condé Nast Traveller' in May, Adilah Ismail mentioned the MMCA Sri Lanka as a must-visit destination amongst ['The best of Colombo'](#). If you are planning on visiting Sri Lanka in the coming months, don't forget to put us on your must-see list!

Last but not least, we are excited to announce that our next exhibition titled 'Total Landscaping' curated by Sandev Handy and Thinal Sajeewa will open on 12 September, showing works by 29 contemporary Sri Lankan artists based in Sri Lanka, Sweden, UAE, The Netherlands, and the USA. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook to find out more!