

03.02.21 - 03.03.21

Gayan Prageeth

# EYES ONLY

Gayan Prageeth is an artist whose work reflects a deep concern for the state of society and politics in Sri Lanka. His exhibitions are acclaimed for paintings and installations that delve into the psyche of the country.

### Eyes Only:

Looks at the developments of post-war regeneration in the context of political corruption, enforced disappearances and ethnic conflict.

These reflections are presented in an intricate surrealism where, for example, notions of growth and destruction are juxtaposed in dismantled landscapes. Such scenes, recurrent in the exhibition, *emphasize* the reality of the Anthropocene:

the current geological epoch shaped by humankind. While such consequences occur on a global scale, they often begin *locally*. Gayan's critiqued subjects include

nationalism,

militarization,

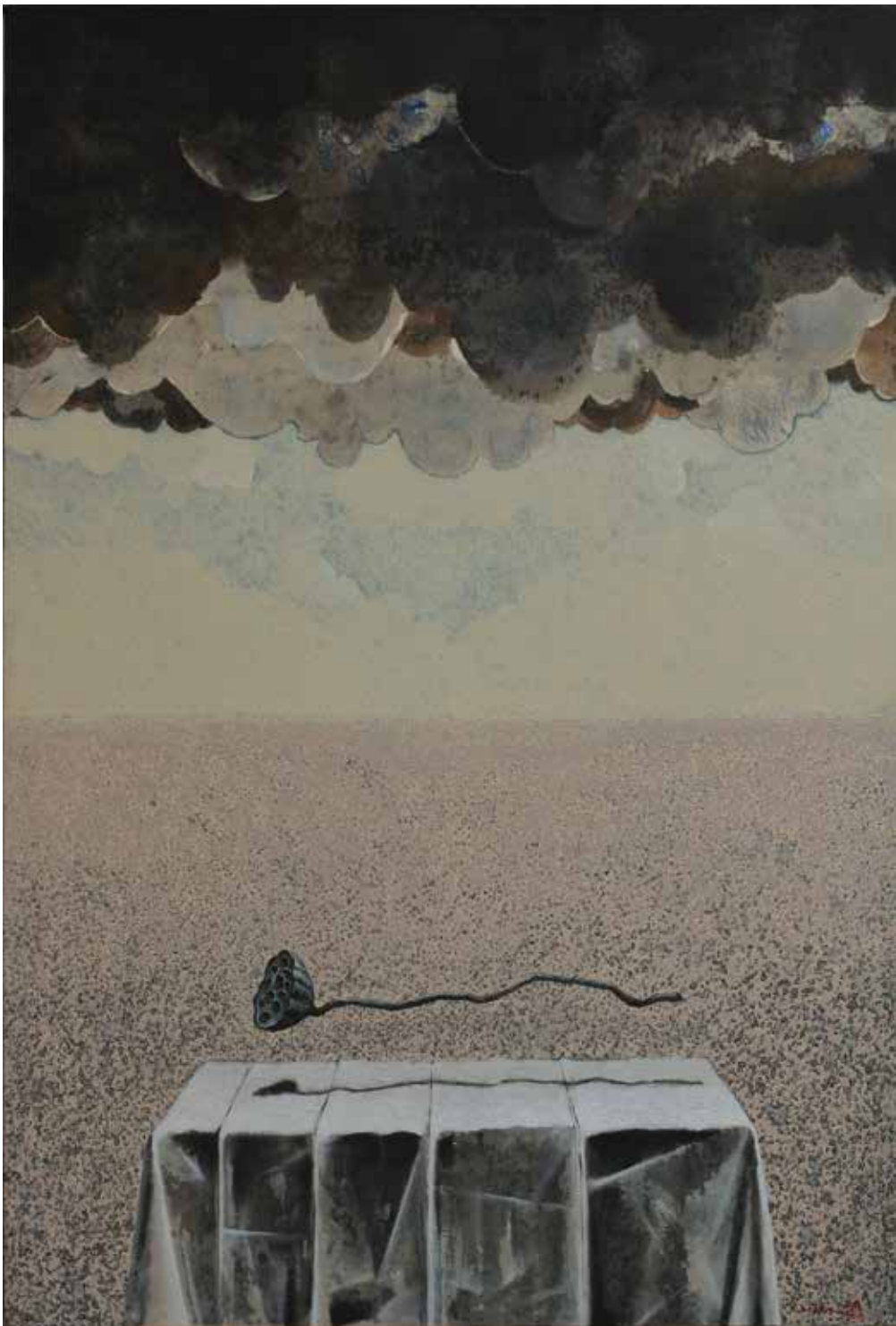
terrorism,

beautification,

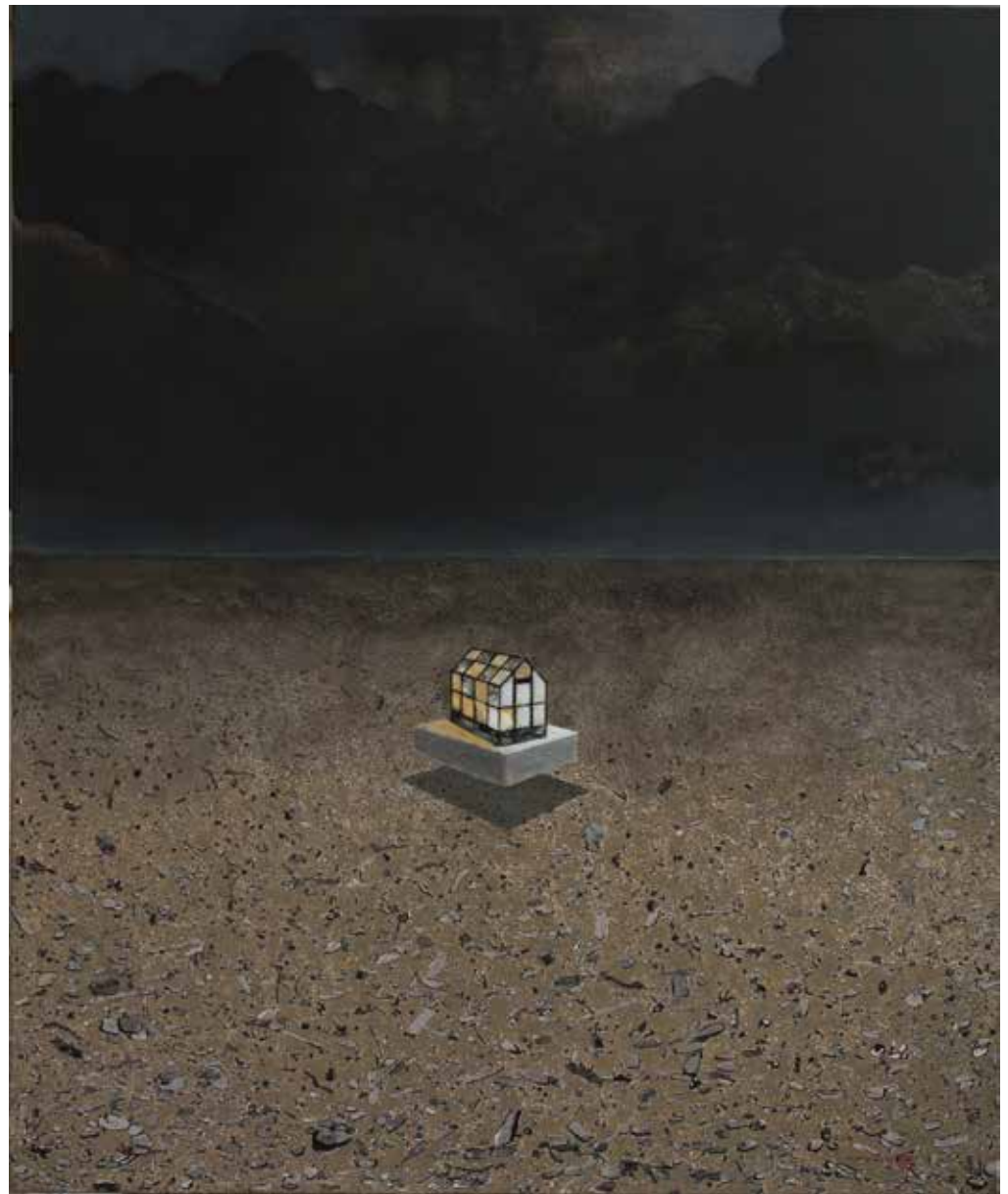
and spirituality in a cohesive discourse.



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Misplaced I, Ink on Paper, 35cm x 30cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, A Dried Lotus Seed Pod Without Fertility, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 100 x 75cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Just For Memory, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 91 x 76cm

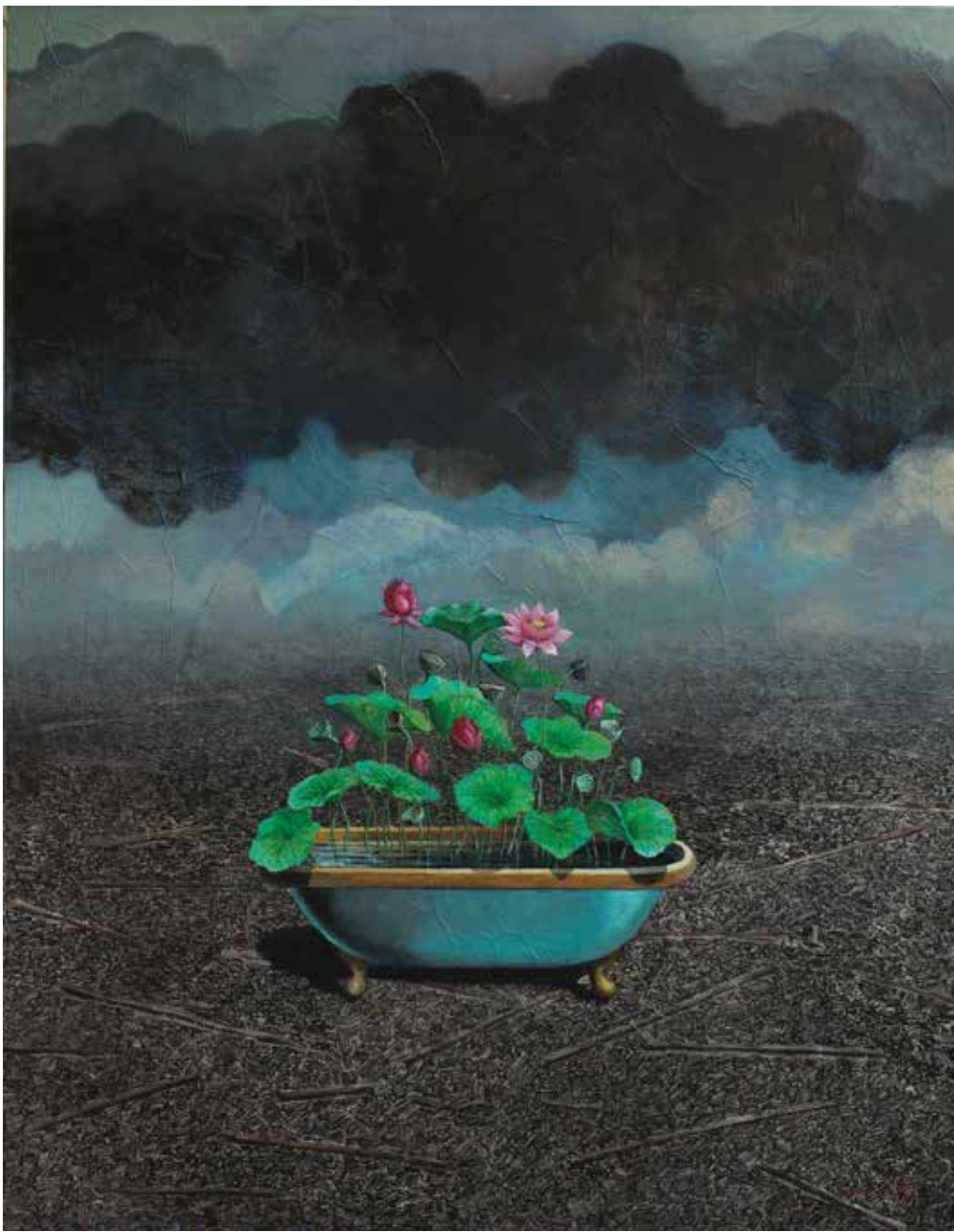


Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Eyes Only, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 178 x 122cm

*The artist explores social turmoil throughout the showcase.*

The painting titled Eyes Only contains a geometric pattern, previously employed in his paintings, positioned like a lattice in front of a church from the horrific Easter Sunday Attacks. Gayan omits the church's guardian statue in order to emphasize that its protective peace has been violated and that such violence is a universal issue. Religious and ethnic intolerance, fundamentalism and nationalism have taken root in an intrinsically connected global society.



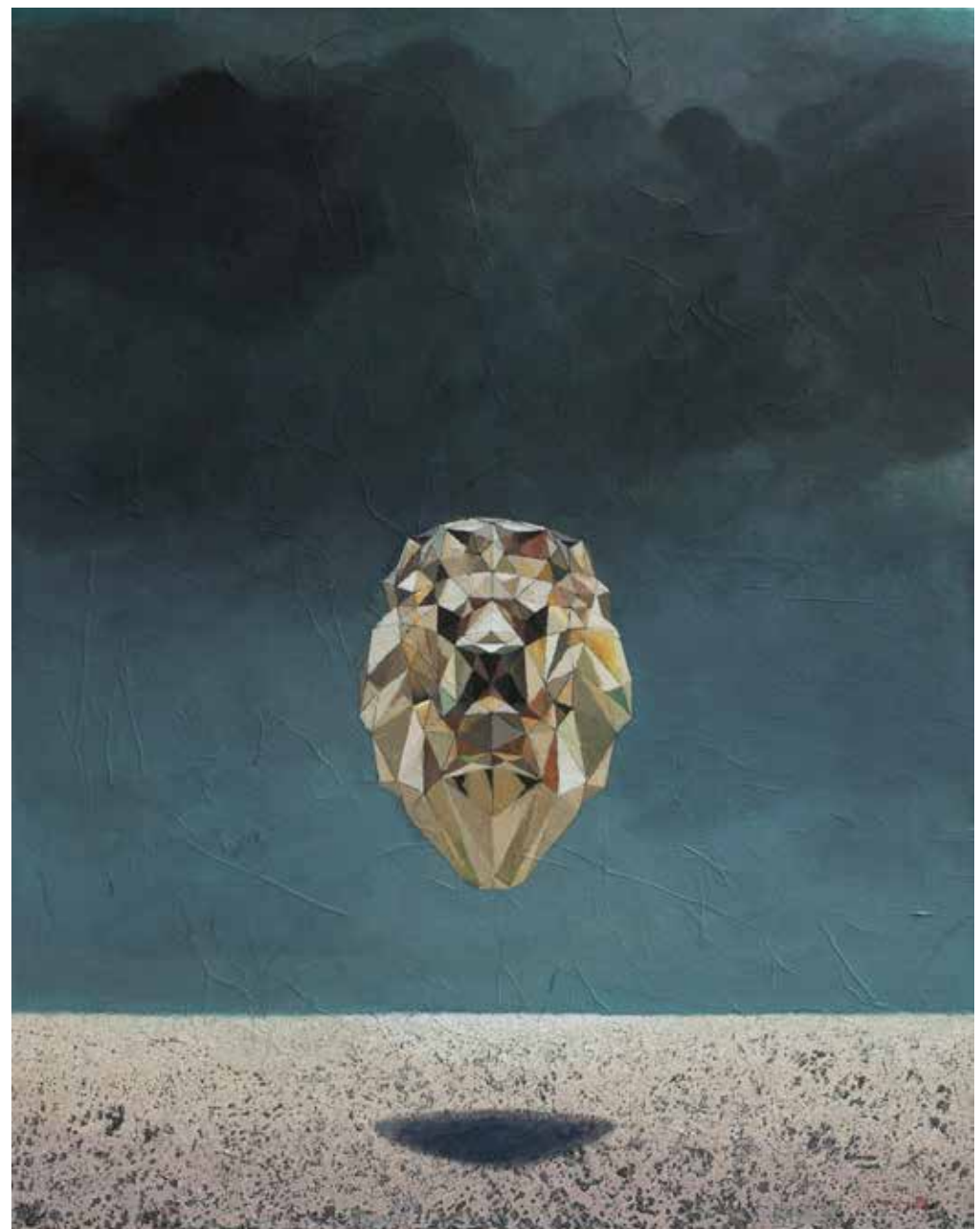


Gayan Prageeth, 2021, The Lotus Cultivation of the Great Other, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 110 x 85cm

A rapid redevelopment policy, known as *beautification*, currently runs rampant.

The artist interrogates this policy of nationalism and supposed development via a series of surreal and dream-like paintings. It is the aftermath depicted in these paintings that is brought into question: to what end?

**What is the cost of replacing real, diverse beauty with superficiality?**



Gayam Prageeth, 2021, Looking for Lions, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 110 x 85cm



Gayana Prageeth, 2021, Empty Holes Only, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 170 x 122cm



Gayana Prageeth, 2021, Empty Holes Are Filled with Seeds, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 110 x 170cm

The proud, floating head of a lion and a bathtub housing a lotus pond are some of the objects that remain in bleak and devastated landscapes. It is as if the only thing that deserves to remain in a human-engineered climate apocalypse is the indomitable spirit of mankind. However, there is a sliver of hope, although somewhat independent of humanity, in this investigation. In an ethereal painting of a singular lotus stem, there are seeds that are replications of planet Earth.

This idea gives hope to the possibility that newer and better worlds may be borne out of the destruction of another.

*It brings to mind the classical and proverbial Buddhist statement that if there is no mud present, there can be no lotus.*



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen I, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 32cm x 32cm x 8cm

Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen V, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 43cm x 43cm x 7cm



Gayana Prageeth uses the gridded pattern as a comment on the suspected intentionality of the bombings. He investigates its implications on a wider scale in the installation *Misplaced I*, where a number of glass bottles are positioned with portraits of missing people inside them. This refers to the Thovil ritual in which priests trap evil spirits inside bottles and are purged from households by being thrown out. The installation implies a systematic operation where individuals disruptive to a governing system are disposed of in a ritualistic and regular manner. The showcase title refers to Sri Lanka's political corruption and its penchant for making people permanently disappear. It primarily makes reference to the secretive information that decides what happens in the country.

*Access to such information is privileged to those who, despite their civil obligations, remain, like Gayana's lattice-work, decidedly opaque.*



Gayana Prageeth, 2021, *Misplaced 01*, Ink on Paper in Glass Bottles on Board, 43cm x 43cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen V, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 43cm x 43cm x 8cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Fifth Dream, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 120 x 140cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Not You I Will Always I, Acrylic and Japanese Ink on Rice Paper on Canvas, 140 x 110cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Not You I Will Always II, Acrylic and Japanese ink on rice paper on canvas, 140 x 110cm



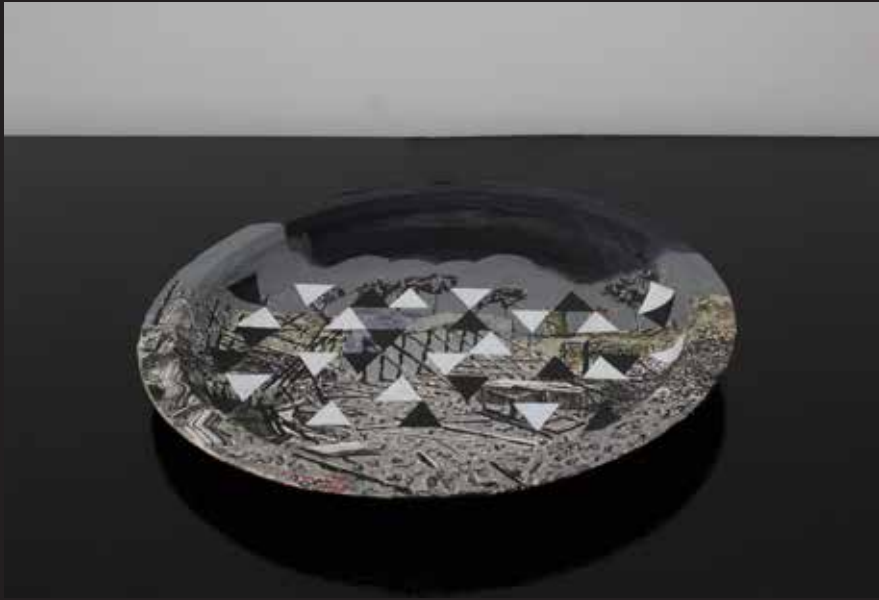


Gayam Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen VII, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 32cm x 32cm x 6cm



Gayam Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen VI, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 44cm x 44cm x 6cm

It is difficult to speak about Sri Lanka without bringing up its natural qualities. Gayan, in turn, explores the violation of the island's sacred nature. While he remarks that everyone has a responsibility towards society, it rings particularly true for ideas placed in the public realm.



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen III, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 36 x 36cm x 3cm  
(Left) Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen II, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 36cm x 36cm x 3cm



Gayam Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen VIII, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 45cm x 45cm x 13cm



Gayam Prageeth, 2021, Bitter Kitchen IX, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bowl, 45cm x 45cm x 13cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Since 1983, Japanese Ink and Acrylic on Rice Paper on Bucket, 117cm x 66cm x 37cm



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, A Story Behind the Senses I, Bottles Inside Steel Frame, 49cm x 27cm x 28cm



PRISON  
ERS ARE  
**HUMAN  
BEINGS**



Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Prisoners Are Human Beings, Perspex with Coal and Bullet Shells, 65cm x 79cm

While *Eyes Only* makes no explicit reference to the ongoing pandemic, Gayan's critique reveals its impact on society. In the installation *PRISONERS ARE HUMAN BEINGS*, he refers to recent prison riots that resulted in the deaths of numerous prisoners. The sculptural artwork is a presentation with English letters and words filled with charcoal and bullet shells. It is aimed at exploring the fact that prisoners are amongst the most vulnerable people in society. They are often the product of failed systems that fall short of justice and equality, and that tend to criminalize poverty. In the context of the pandemic, this installation opens up the question of who should be among the first to receive the vaccine. The vulnerability, both physical and mental, of prisoners living in cramped conditions needs to be accounted for. The answer, universally, remains to be seen. If it takes critical exhibitions like *Eyes Only* to make such discussions more public, one can only hope to see more of them.

## GAYAN PRAGEETH b.1980

### Education

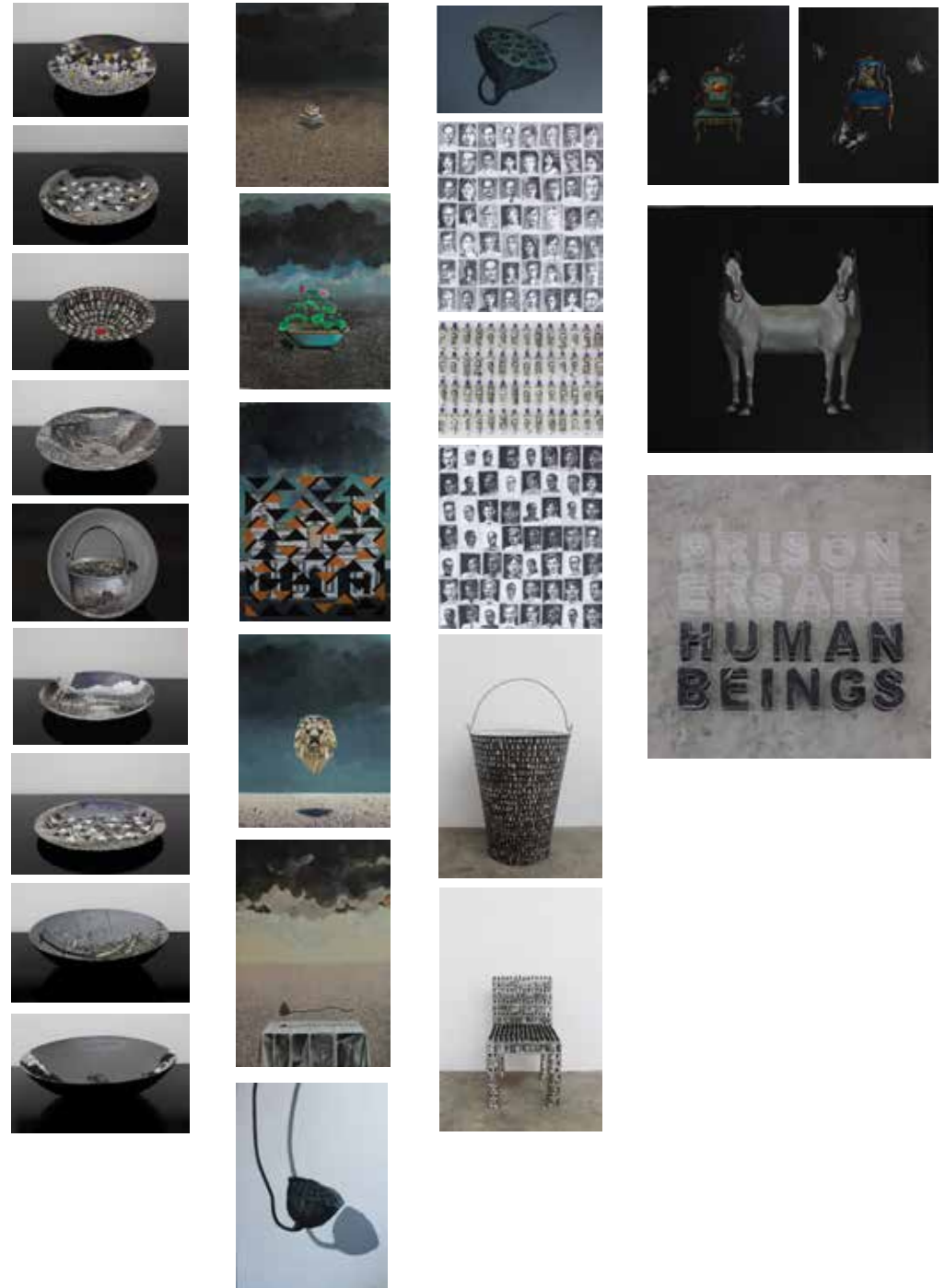
2009 Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting First Class), University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2021 Eyes only | Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2017 Apperceiving 1983 | Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2016 Since 1983 | Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2015 Extravagance | Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2013 Exhibition of New Paintings | Paradise Road Galleries, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2010 Paradox | Paradise Road Galleries, Colombo, Sri Lanka

### Group Exhibitions

- 2019 Shades of Black and White | J.D.A Perera Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2019 Crossing Place | Baik Art Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2019 Leo Art | Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2018 Art Dubai | Saskia Fernando Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2017 State Art and Sculpture Festival | JDA Gallery, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2016 'Insight of China' Sri Lankan Artist Group Exhibition | The Capital Library of Beijing, Beijing, China
- 2016 Conceiving Virtual Space | Art Space Sri Lanka
- 2016 Colombo Art Biennale: Conceiving Space | Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2016 The Department Show | JDA Perera Gallery, University of Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2015 Transition | Sri Lankan Contemporary Art Exhibition in Mandala Art Gallery Singapore
- 2015 UVA 10th Anniversary Show Visual Art Exhibition | JDA Perera Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2013 SAARC Artist Camp | National Art Gallery, Male, Maldives
- 2012 Asian Art Biennale | Shilpa Kala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 2012 Nawa Kalakaruwo Exhibition | National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka (Presented By George Keyt Foundation)
- 2011 Exhibition of Visual Arts | Stairway Gallery, Thilanka Hotel, Kandy, Sri Lanka
- 2011 SAARC Artist Camp & Exhibition of Painting | JDA Perera Gallery & Jana Kala Kendraya, Sri Lanka
- 2011 National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka (Presented by George Keyt Foundation)
- 2010 Expressions of Independence | JDA Gallery, University of the Visual and Performing Art, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2010 Constellation | Barefoot Gallery Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- 2008 Nawa Kalakaruwo | Organized by George Keyt Foundation, National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2008 Expressions of Independence | National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2008 State Art and Sculpture Festival | National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2008 MOB An Exhibition of Visual Art | Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2008 13th Asian Art Biennale | Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 2007 Nawa Kalakaruwo | Organized by George Keyt Foundation, National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2007 State Art and Sculpture Festival | National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2006 Young Contemporaries | George Keyt Foundation, National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2005 State Art and Sculpture Festival | National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2005 Tsunami Exhibition, Faculty of Visual Art | Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2002 State Art and Sculpture Festival | National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka





Gayan Prageeth, 2021, Misplaced II, Ink on Paper, 35cm x 30cm

SASKIA FERNANDO GALLERY