

# *DRAWINGS*

Chandraguptha Thenuwara | Jagath Weerasinghe

# ***BREESE* LITTLE**

breeselittle.com 30d Great Sutton Street, EC1V 0DU London

## S A S K I A F E R N A N D O G A L L E R Y

61 Dharmapala Mawatha, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka  
T+94117429010 [www.saskiafernandogallery.com](http://www.saskiafernandogallery.com)

# DRAWINGS

## Chandraguptha Thenuwara | Jagath Weerasinghe

02.10.12 - 30.10.12

Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo

20.09.12 - 10.11.12

Breese Little Gallery, London

*Drawings* takes place as a dual exhibition of drawings by Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe, staged simultaneously in London and Colombo.

Thenuwara and Weerasinghe are among Sri Lanka's foremost artists. Their artistic dialogue spans the last three decades - key years spent bolstering the emergence and grounding of the country's contemporary art scene. Having met at the University of Kelaniya in the late 1970s their interests have since run parallel with sustained exchange and mutual inspiration.

The pairing of these prolific artists considers their current approaches to drawing as a practise. Thenuwara and Weerasinghe cite publishing house Raking Leaves' *One Year Drawing Project* of 2005 as a turning point for their changing attitudes to the medium. Both regard the project's premise of an exchange of drawings between four leading artists as a period of substantial reconsideration of the medium in their own work. The initiative opened a realisation of the potential, relevance and power of drawing beyond their previous regard for preparatory sketches. The discovery of this new creative discipline has served as an effective voice for Thenuwara and Weerasinghe, voicing complex statements to stark but courageous visual effect.

It is with great pleasure that we continue our collaboration with the Saskia Fernando Gallery. *Drawings* is a logical progression from *Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka 2011* at Asia House, investigating a crucial area of artistic practise in substantial depth. Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe have long been instrumental to the making and teaching of art in Sri Lanka, handling core themes and concerns of the art scene at large. The exhibition celebrates the pair's recent work in the context of their tirelessly full careers.

*Drawings* aims to broaden new and existing audiences of these artists and their peers in London, sustaining visibility of Sri Lankan artwork in this country where they continue to be woefully under-represented. Fortunately, London's art scene determines the city as an international cultural capital, celebrating experimental projects of global exchange. Astride London and Colombo, *Drawings'* staging across the two galleries seeks to encourage conversations in both cities and beyond.

Breese Little, August 2012

It is a common misconception that the Sri Lankan contemporary art scene began to flourish after the civil war ceased in 2009. Jagath Weerasinghe and Chandraguptha Thenuwara are two artists whose story and history of involvement in the local art scene are living proof that art has been alive from before war began.

This exhibition not only sustains the connection established through last year's show, *Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka 2011* held at Asia House, London; it highlights the evolution of both artists. Jagath Weerasinghe and Chandraguptha Thenuwara are also two of the islands' most established artists whose histories have many cross sections, yet their work has never before been displayed in a two man show.

As the first collaboration between Breese Little Gallery and Saskia Fernando Gallery, we are pleased to present this show in the galleries' respective countries. This exhibition builds a bridge, enabling both worlds an insight into an old friendship, a country's history and the evolution of two artists that are the strongest voices and mentors in Sri Lanka's contemporary art scene.

Saskia Fernando Gallery, August 2012

## *Interview with Chandraguptha Thenuwara*

*When did you start focusing on drawing as a medium?*

In 2005 with the *One Year Drawing Project* (OYDP) curated by Sharmini Pereira, before which drawing was supporting material for painting to accommodate ideas; sketching as supporting drawings for painting, installation and sculpture. After the OYDP I began focusing more on drawing as a medium. When I started the *Thorn* series, we were in post-war Sri Lanka. I found drawing a perfect medium that was directly representative of how different 'colours' had become irrelevant; colour in this context being representative of different ethnicities.

*How did the One Year Drawing Project influence your approach to work on paper?*

Going back to the *Thorn* series, I moved more away from colour; drawing for me has become black and white. It involves a highly rational thought process, I play with the negative and the positive and as the line moves my eyes follow it. I would not say this process is meditative for me but there is the representation of reincarnation and recreation of self; as your hand aches because you have to get the point across using a continuous line, this harshness becomes the conceptual. The themes of my drawings are that of pain, they are not of beauty. They represent the harshness of reality.

The series titled *This is Not a White Flag* is less about the technique and more about the conceptual. The patches and the negative space accentuate the absence of the white flag and paradoxically it's significance.

While these drawings are visually appealing, when you look closer the process remains harsh. This in itself is heavily related to Sri Lanka and how the country first appears on the surface. It is the same discipline that I applied to my oils and camouflage series, here with more freedom but the handling of the lines gave me a kind of training and developed my own concentration. Most of these drawings, 99% of them, do not possess preliminary sketches. There are no pencil lines as I draw directly onto paper with the pen, manipulating the space, dividing the space through the paper and then focusing more on the negative space that allows me to construct my drawings.

*Are the themes in your drawings different from your work on canvas/sculpture/installation? If so, what is it about the process that influences this for you?*

The style of each drawing is dictated by the theme, not as an art reference. It is purely about white space, the line and my concentrated thinking patterns and of course, the political situation in Sri Lanka. Sometimes when I stop drawing the picture has consumed the entire paper, sometimes not. I stop the drawing somewhere and it might be all over the paper.

In 2012 I will have presented four shows by the end of the year. As an artist, an activist and a teacher making paintings for these show, time-wise, it is becoming more and more difficult for me.

*How does drawing operate in the Sri Lankan context?*

One can observe the shift towards drawing as an artist, in comparison to the former drawing as an illustrator. We are no longer drawing for the sake of drawing, it is for the sake of a concept, and thereby the practice has been transformed. The compilation of these drawings is also dictated by the theme, situation and moment, that in itself is also a completely new concept for the local contemporary art movement.

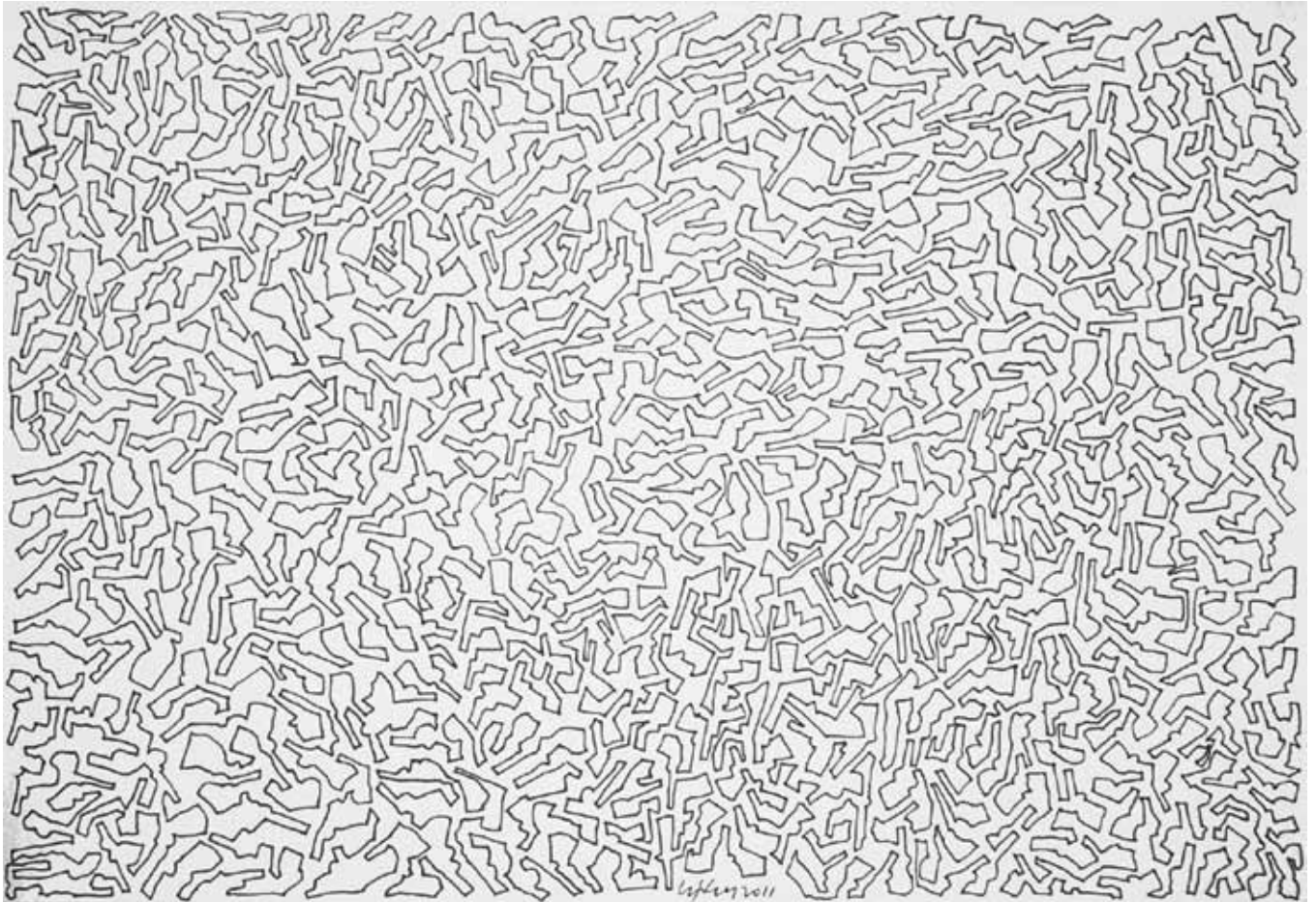
*How long have you known Jagath Weerasinghe?*

Since 1978 we have had a working relationship and friendship. When I entered the university to complete my higher education he was one year senior to me. We became friends. We worked and spoke the same language. We both felt the need to do something for society, and while Weerasinghe did more drawing than me at the time, Weerasinghe is very free on paper; I like his work. I remember after graduation we had evenings of drawing sessions where we each did our work. I focused on Cubism and he focused on his Dambulla series. I think we have influenced each other but you wouldn't be able to identify one specific influence. We are both politically conscious and through this alone there is an influence.

The most obvious comparison would be in my drawing technique that is more linear, while Weerasinghe's is loosely expressed; more emotional. My drawings are less emotional and more rational; this would be the most definitive comparison.

*What are the projects you have worked together on?*

In the early 80s we used to meet every evening in my room and draw together. Chatting and drawing, that was our time together. After that we worked on the OYDP in 2005. Otherwise we have always been independent working in parallel, this would be the first juxtaposition of our work as one.

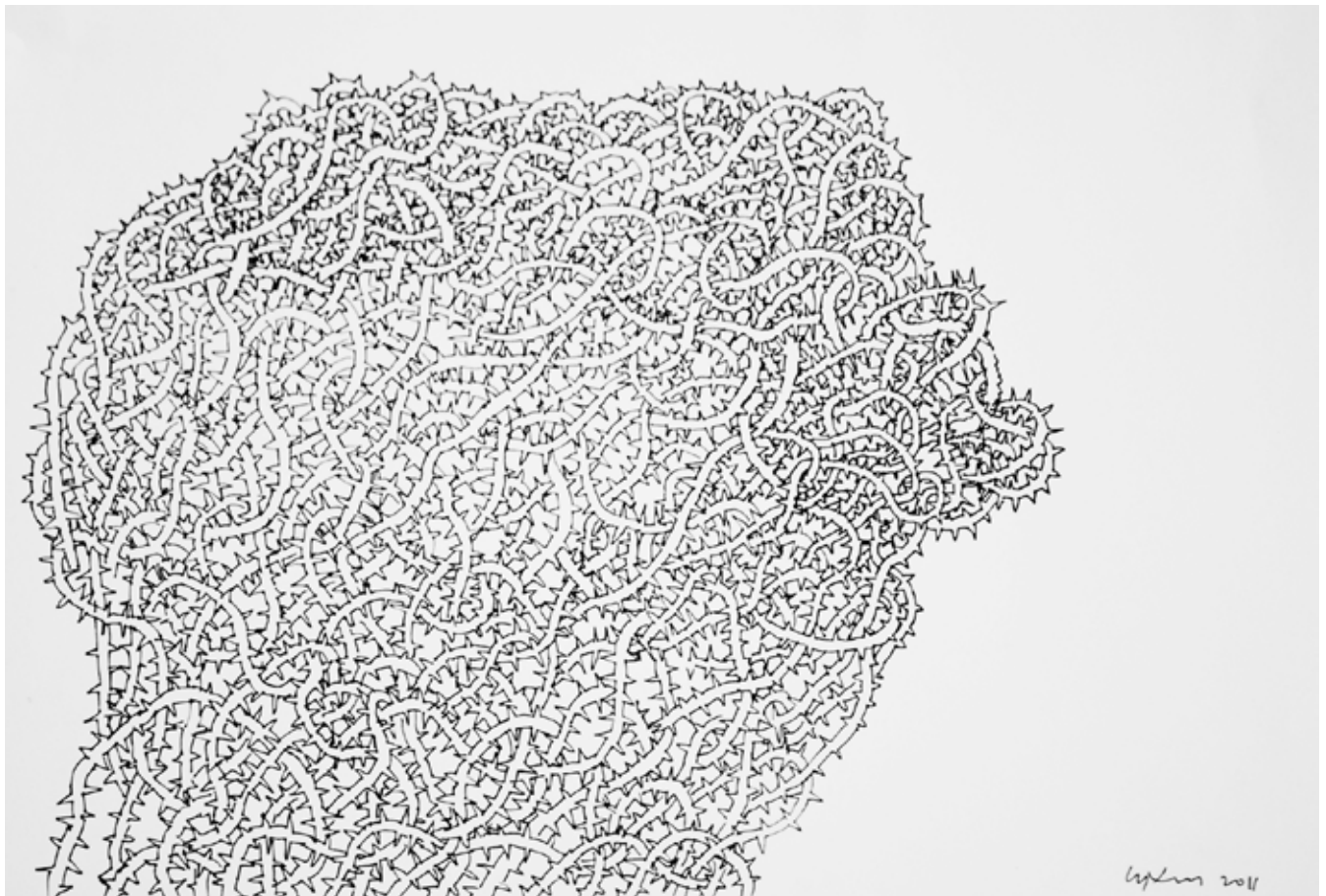


CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Guns*, Ink on paper, 20.5cm x 29cm (Colombo)

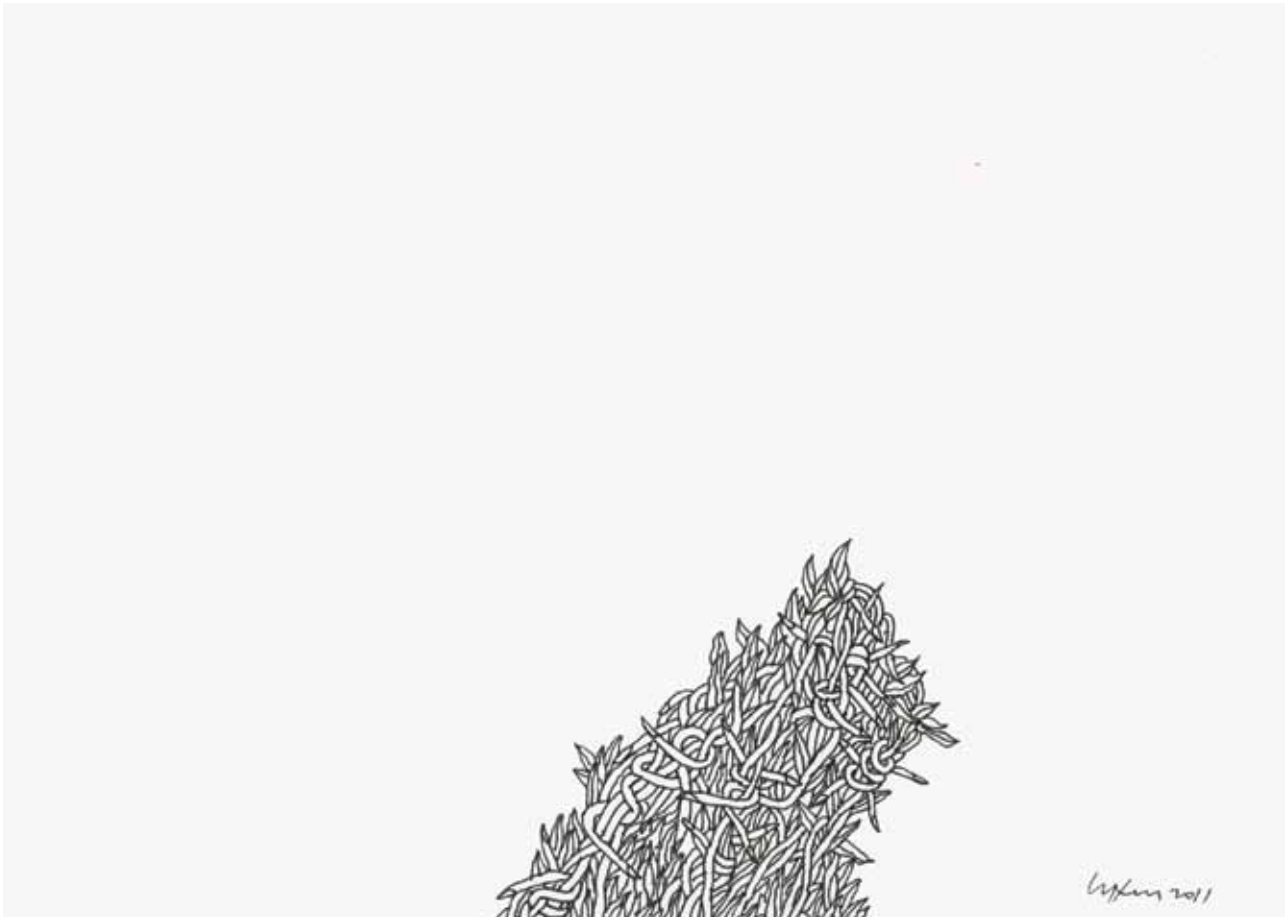




CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Casinopolis*, Ink on paper, 29cm x 20.5cm (Colombo)



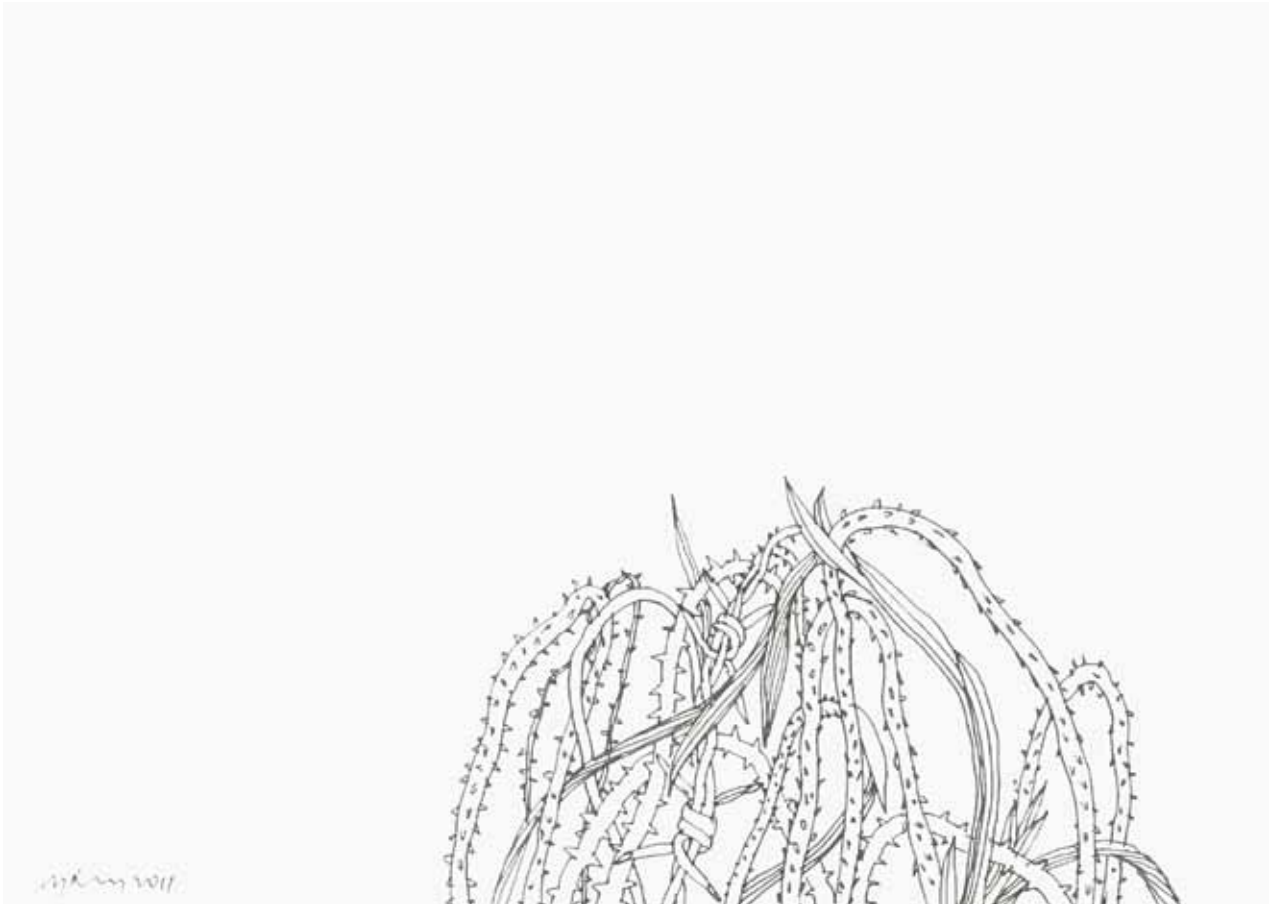
CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Thorns I*, Ink on paper, 20.5cm x 29cm (Colombo)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Thorns II*, Ink on paper, 21cm x 29.5cm (London)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Thorns III*, Ink on paper, 21cm x 29.5cm (London)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Thorns IV*, Ink on paper, 21cm x 29.5cm (London)

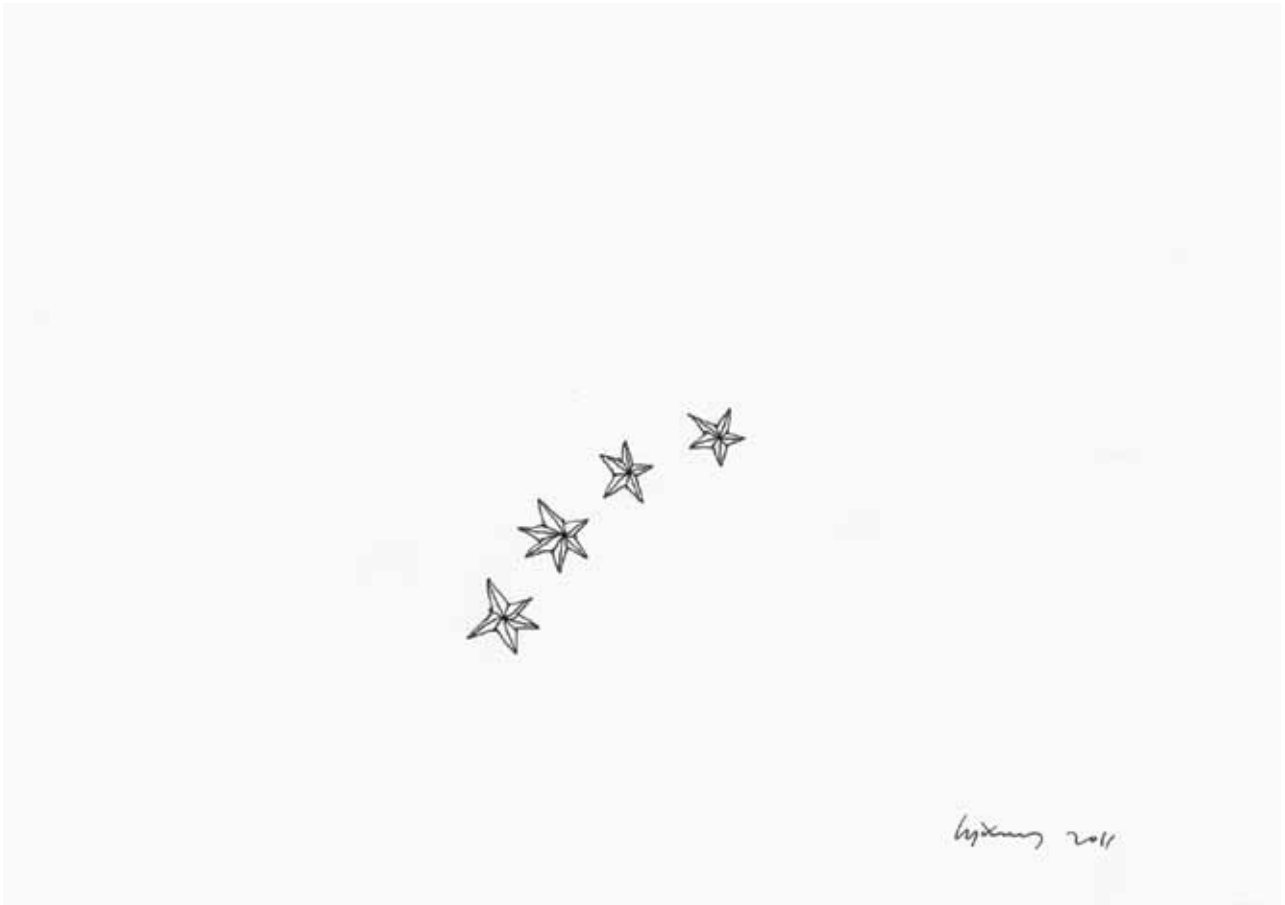




CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Thorns V*, Ink on paper, 29.5cm x 21cm (London)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Dragon Heads*, Ink on paper, 21cm x 29cm (London)

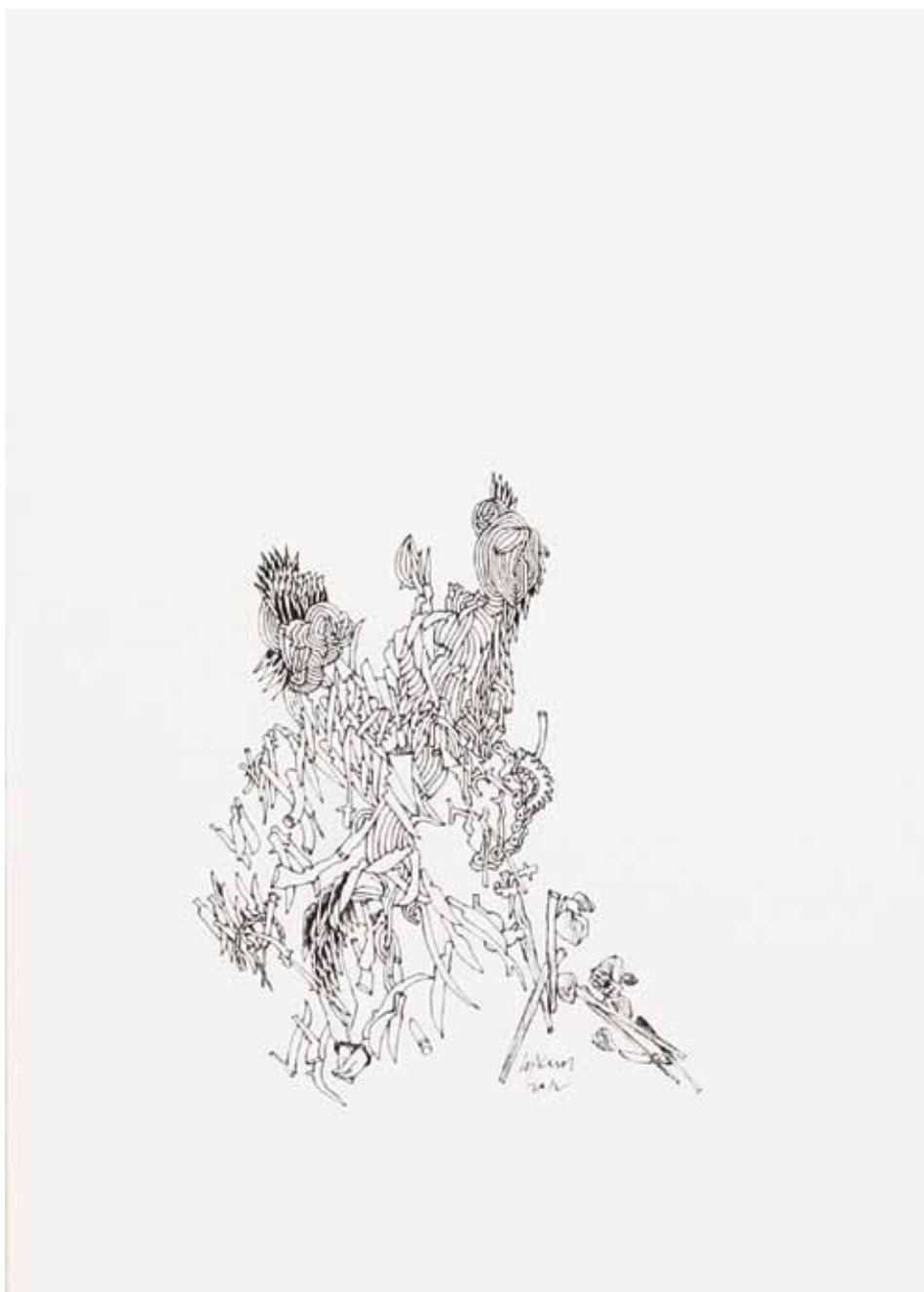


CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2011, *Four Stars*, Ink on paper, 36 x 46.5cm (London)





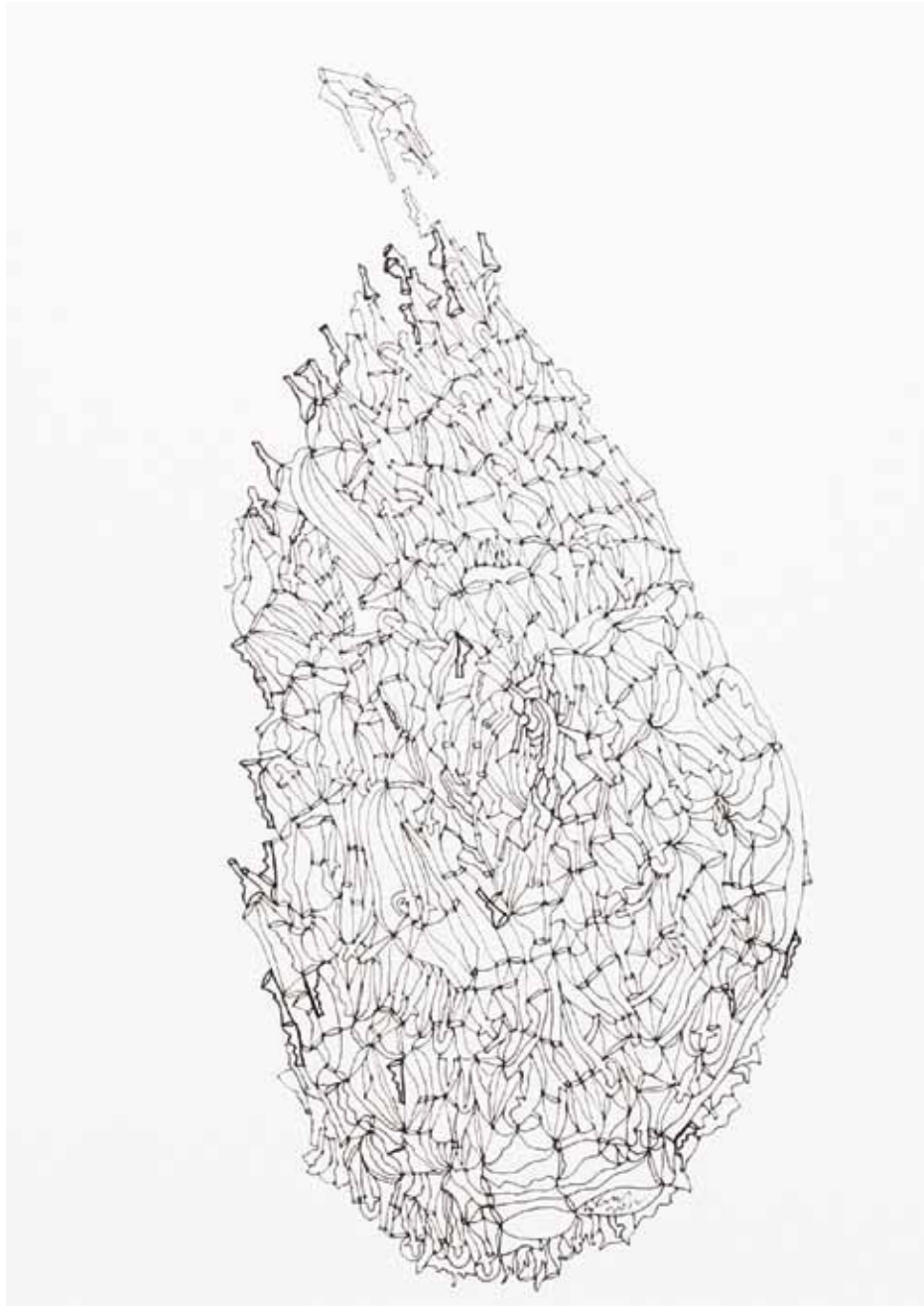
CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *Thorns VI*, Ink on paper, 41cm x 29cm (Colombo)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *Untitled*, Ink on paper, 41cm x 29cm (Colombo)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *Harbour*, Ink on paper, 41cm x 29cm (Colombo)



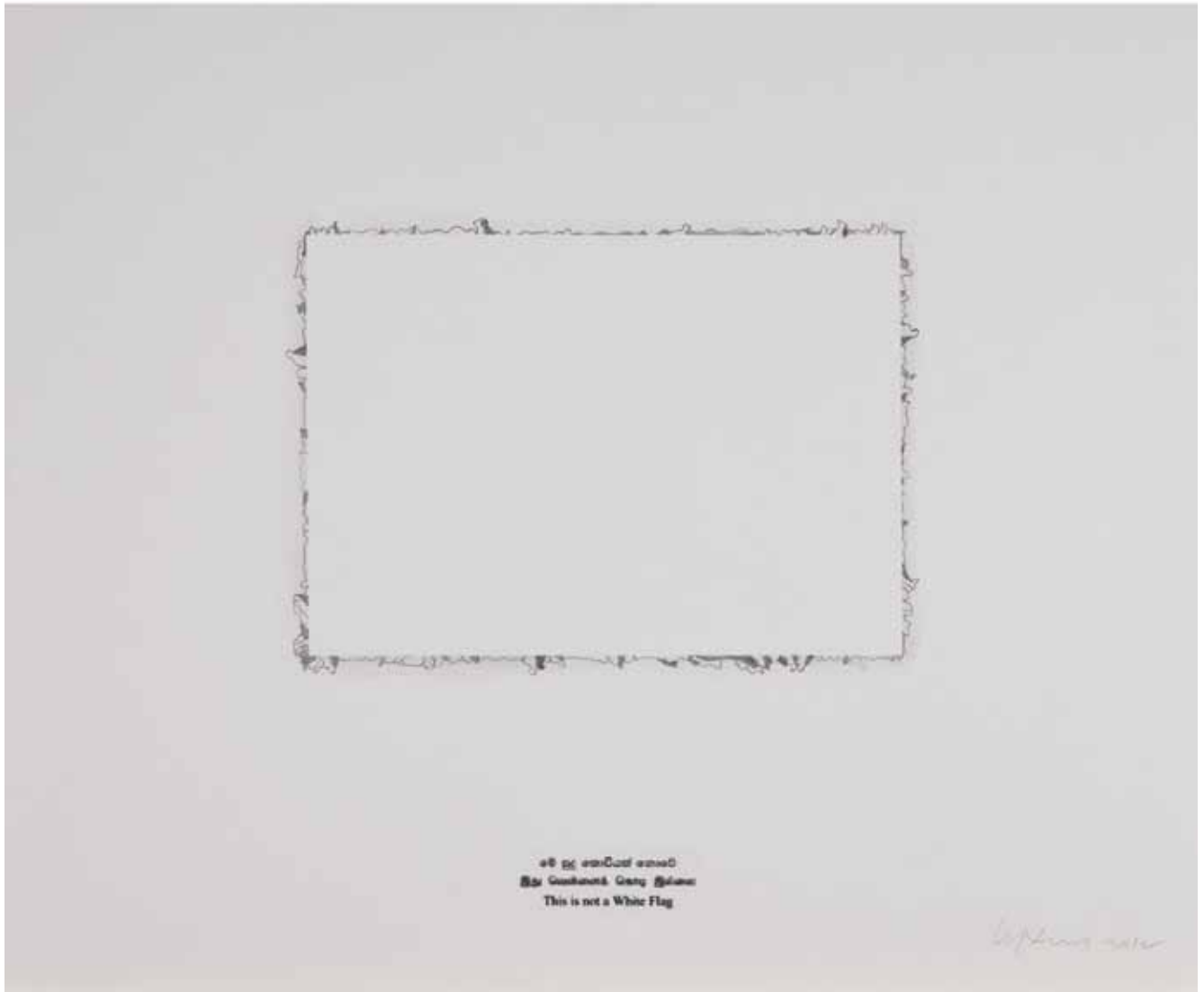
CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *An Island*, Ink on paper, 41cm x 29cm (Colombo)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *This is not a White Flag I*, Ink on paper, 51cm x 61cm (London)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *This is not a White Flag II*, Ink on paper, 51cm x 61cm (London)



CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA, 2012, *This is not a White Flag III*, Ink on paper, 51cm x 61cm (London)

## CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA b.1960

### Education

- 2006 M. Phil, Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1992 MFA with Honours, Moscow State Art Institute named after Surikov, Moscow, Russia
- 1981 BFA, Institute of Aesthetic Studies, University of Kelaniya, Colombo, Sri Lanka

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 *Horn and Other Images*, HIVOS, Den Haag, The Netherlands
- 2012 *The Monument*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo Sri Lanka
- 2011 *The Wall & Other Works*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo Sri Lanka
- 2010 *Vigil & Other works*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2010 *Black Paintings & Other Works*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2009 *Post-Barrelism: Erasing Camouflage*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2008 *Dhammapada & Other Works*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2007 *Neo-Barrelism*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2006 *Wall of Death & Other Works*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2006 *Barrelism: Camouflage*, Maroondah Gallery, Victoria, Australia
- 2004 *Camouflage & Other Works*, VAFA Gallery, Ethul Kotte, Sri Lanka
- 2001 *Recent Paintings*, Paradise Road Galleries, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1999 *Camouflage*, VAFA Gallery, Ethul-Kotte, Sri Lanka
- 1998 *Barrelism & Recent Works*, The Heritage Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1997 *Barrelism & Other Works*, The Heritage Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1995 *In Spacetime*, The National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1995 *In Spacetime*, The British Council, Kandy, Sri Lanka
- 1995 *Drawings*, The Union Gallery, Izhevsk City, Republic of Udmurtia, Russia.
- 1992 *The City Gallery*, Izhevsk City, Republic of Udmurtia, Russia
- 1992 *Moscow Paintings*, The National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1991 *Retrospective of Paintings*, Lionel Wendt Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1983 *Paintings & Drawings*, Soviet Cultural House, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1978 *First Exhibition*, Samudra Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka

### Group Exhibitions (selected)

- 2011 *Contemporary Art From Sri Lanka 2011*, Asia House, London, UK
- 2010 *Visual Responses During the War*, Lionel Wendt Gallery & Harold Peiris Gallery, Sri Lanka
- 2009 *Imagining Peace*, Colombo Art Biennale, Park Street Mews, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2009 *One Year Drawing Project*, Devi Foundation, New Delhi, India
- 2009 *One Year Drawing Project*, SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Centre), UTAC (University of Toronto Art Centre), University of Toronto, Canada
- 2008 *Big in Falkirk*, Scotland National Street Arts Festival, Falkirk
- 2007 Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China
- 2007 The National Museum of Poznan, Poland
- 2006 *Common Goods*, Melbourne Museum, Melbourne, Australia
- 2003 *Un-commemorative Commemoration*, VAFA Gallery, Kotte, Sri Lanka
- 2003 *Artists for Peace*, Charles Hall, Batticaloa, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka
- 2002 John Moores University, The University of Art Collection Gallery, Liverpool, UK
- 2002 *Art Peace*, Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2002 *Moving Collection*, Japan
- 2001 *Theertha International Artists Workshop*, Barefoot Gallery, Sri Lanka
- 2000 *Neelan Thiruchelvam Commemorative Programme*, 706 Gallery, Sri Lanka
- 1999 *1st Asian Art Triennale (The 5th Asian Art Show)*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Ja
- 1999-00 *Cities on the Move*, KIASMA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland
- 1999 *Third International Artists' Camp Exhibition*, National Gallery, Sri Lanka
- 1998-99 *Cities on the Move*, Hayward Gallery, London, UK/PS1 Gallery, New York
- 1998-99 *Cities on the Move*, Louisiana Museum, Denmark
- CapsMusée, Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France/Vienna Secession, Austria
- 1998 *Khoj Artists Workshop Exhibition*, Modinagar, New Delhi, India
- 1998 *In Dependence*, Lionel Wendt Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1997 *The 1st Annual Exhibition of VAFA*, National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1996 *Women in Art*, Mountcastle Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1995 *7th Asia Pacific Biennial*, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- 1994 The Academy of Arts, Moscow, Russia
- 1993 The National Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1992 *International Symposium on Open-air Sculpture*, Izhevsk City, Russia



## *Interview with Jagath Weerasinghe*

*When did you start focusing on drawing as a medium?*

In the 1980s, while I was in Dambulla, I did not have much paint. I was working on the Dambulla series at this time.

*How did the One Year Drawing Project (OYDP) influence your approach to work on paper?*

Drawing became a more committed engagement with the OYDP. Since I am a mural-painting conservator in the field of Archaeology, drawing is a very serious thing and you have to draw things first. In that sense drawing has been a very serious occupation in my work since 1982 when I joined the Archaeology field.

I can draw like an Archaeologist but this is a problem of making a style for yourself and its a problem of being an artist, the art market and the idea of the artist as a single styled person. This is part of our training and I think one reason why drawing did not come out as one of my major expressions. This kind of meticulous drawing linked to my Archaeology practice and it did not come out in my style. After the OYDP the blindfold was lifted; what I mean is I was working on these all along but I kept them hidden.

*Would you say that this is a medium you are focusing more on in recent times?*

No, it's been going together all the time, painting and drawing. But I like drawing. I draw all the time... Even now I'm drawing while talking to you. These shapes I cut and stick on my paintings, they come from the meetings I have to go to as director of the Post Graduate Institute of Archaeology. For me to concentrate I draw in meetings, it is meditative.

*How does drawing operate in the Sri Lankan context?*

Through the change of attitude towards art making, the beginning of valuing craft through its techniques, then Muhanned Cader, as an art teacher at Vibhavi Academy of Fine Arts who taught drawing as a major medium, and finally the OYDP. This new attitude as a theory of art, my own work and especially the OYDP; this all established a position for drawing in the local art scene. Essentially it created a space for drawing.

I think that drawing has taken a strong hold in contemporary art in the past five years, most of the serious younger artists,' work is based on drawings. I think it has a lot to do with the OYDP. In the late 90s we began looking into process of craft-making. Meticulously drawing also became part of the repertoire of art making locally. Drawing in that background developed.

*Are the themes in your drawings different from your work on canvas/sculpture/installation? If so, what is it about the process that influences this for you?*

This is a good question for people who see my art, they are not thematically or emotionally different however, I use a very different approach toward making them.

*How long have you known Thenuwara?*

I have known him for too long. Since 1978.

*What are the projects you have worked together on?*

We worked together on major projects. We started off working together as friends in art school but then we focused together on Vibhavi Academy of Fine Arts and I worked with Thenuwara on some projects to establish alternative art schools.

*Would you say you inspire each other as artists?*

I don't know. Maybe not but we used to talk about our art projects in the '90s because we would meet everyday. We are busy with our respective positions in the university system.

I remember when Thenuwara came to me with his idea of Barrelism. It was 9 pm in the night in Kalubowila and he had this idea. I don't know if we were influenced by each other. I think we were inspired by our discussions because we spent a lot of time together in the '90s.

*What are your opinions on Thenuwara's work?*

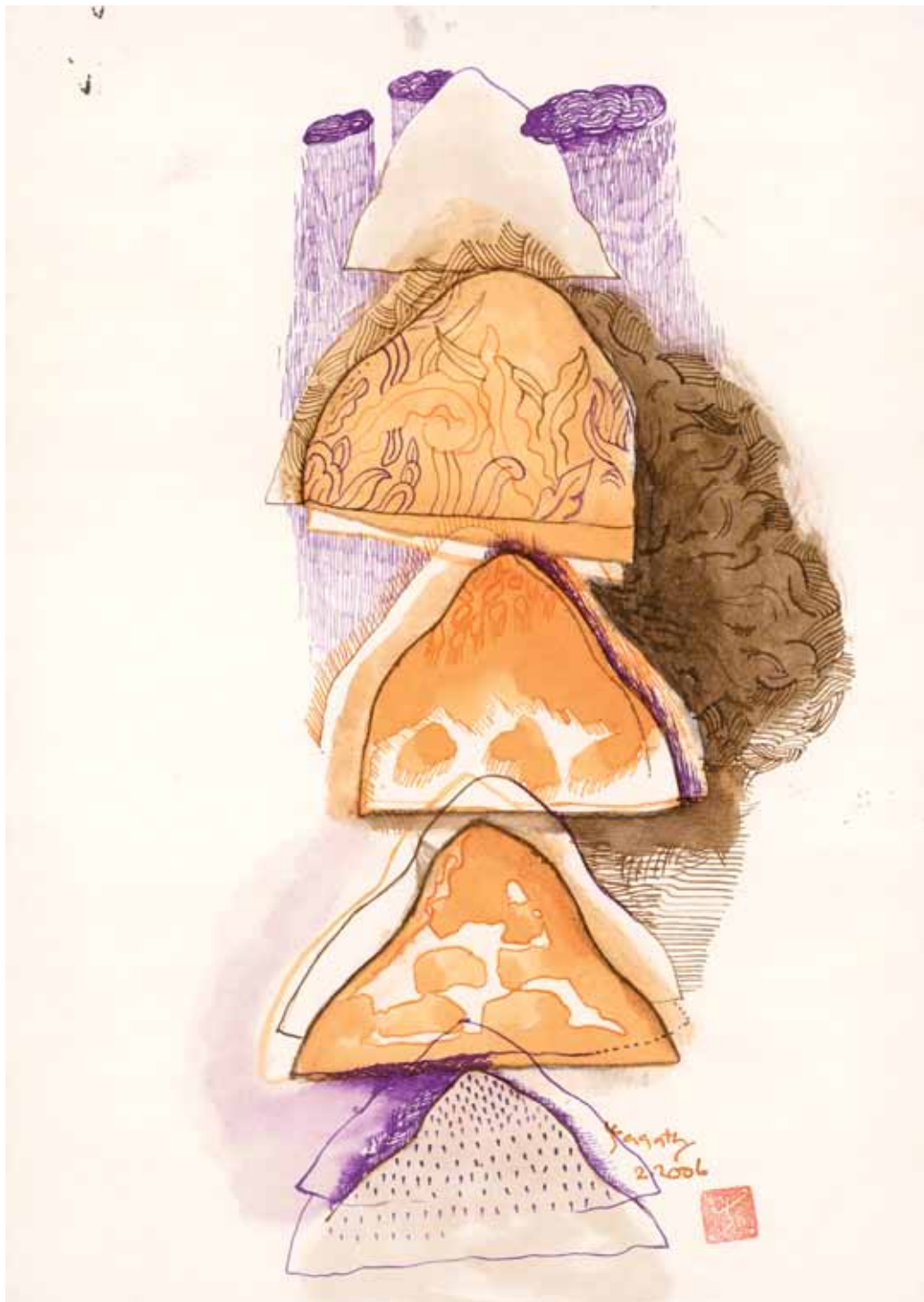
I like his drawings a lot. One thing that Thenuwara brought into his drawings is his very strong 19th century academic training. In order to do this an artist must be disciplined in a certain way and Thenuwara brought this discipline into painting mundane objects such as barrels and barbed wire. This is what I like most about his drawings; with the attention to mundane objects he brings a pictorial presence into the huge surface of paintings and drawings.



JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Flora & Fauna I*, Pencil on paper, 29.5cm x 21cm (London)



26

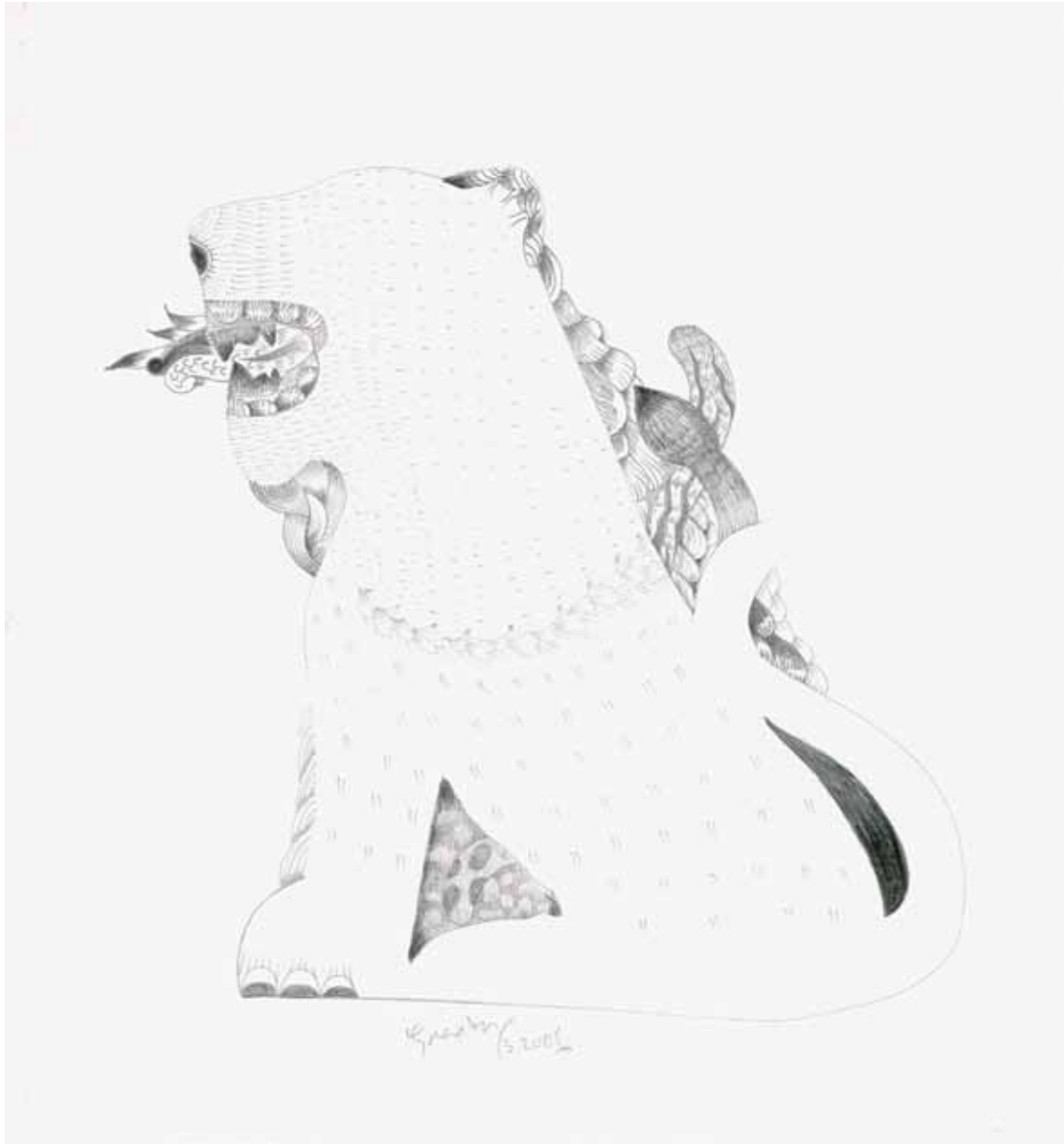


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Mountains, Coffee*, Ink and pencil on paper, 29.5cm x 21cm (London)



JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Burkha*, Coffee, ink and pencil on paper, 29.5cm x 21cm (London)





JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Liger*, Pencil on paper, 29cm x 27cm (London)



JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Will the Sun Rise tomorrow Maggy? I*, Acrylic on paper, 29cm x 29cm (London)





JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Will the Sun Rise tomorrow Maggy? II*, Acrylic on paper, 29cm x 29cm (London)

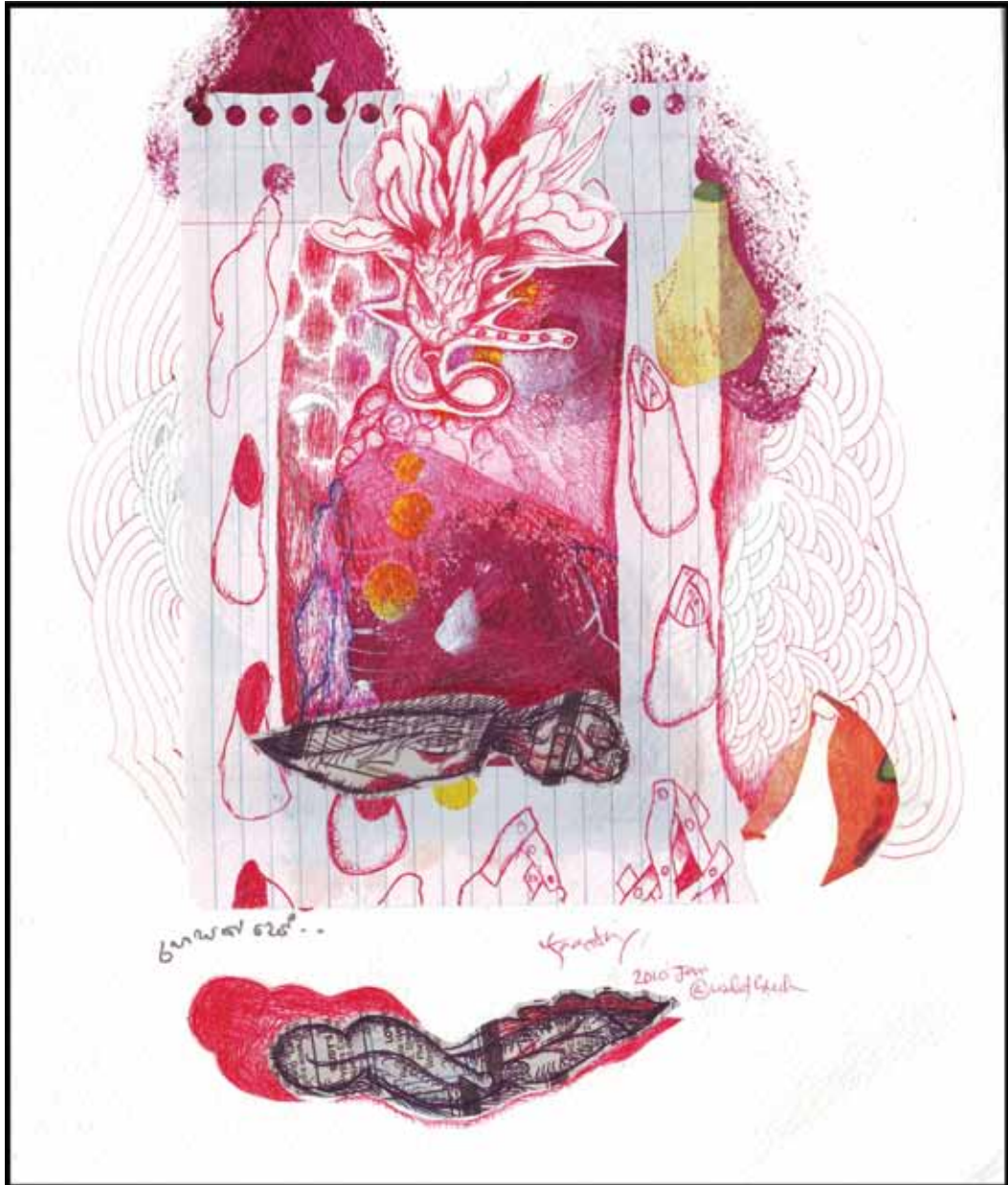


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Will the Sun Rise tomorrow Maggy? III*, Acrylic on paper, 29cm x 29cm (London)

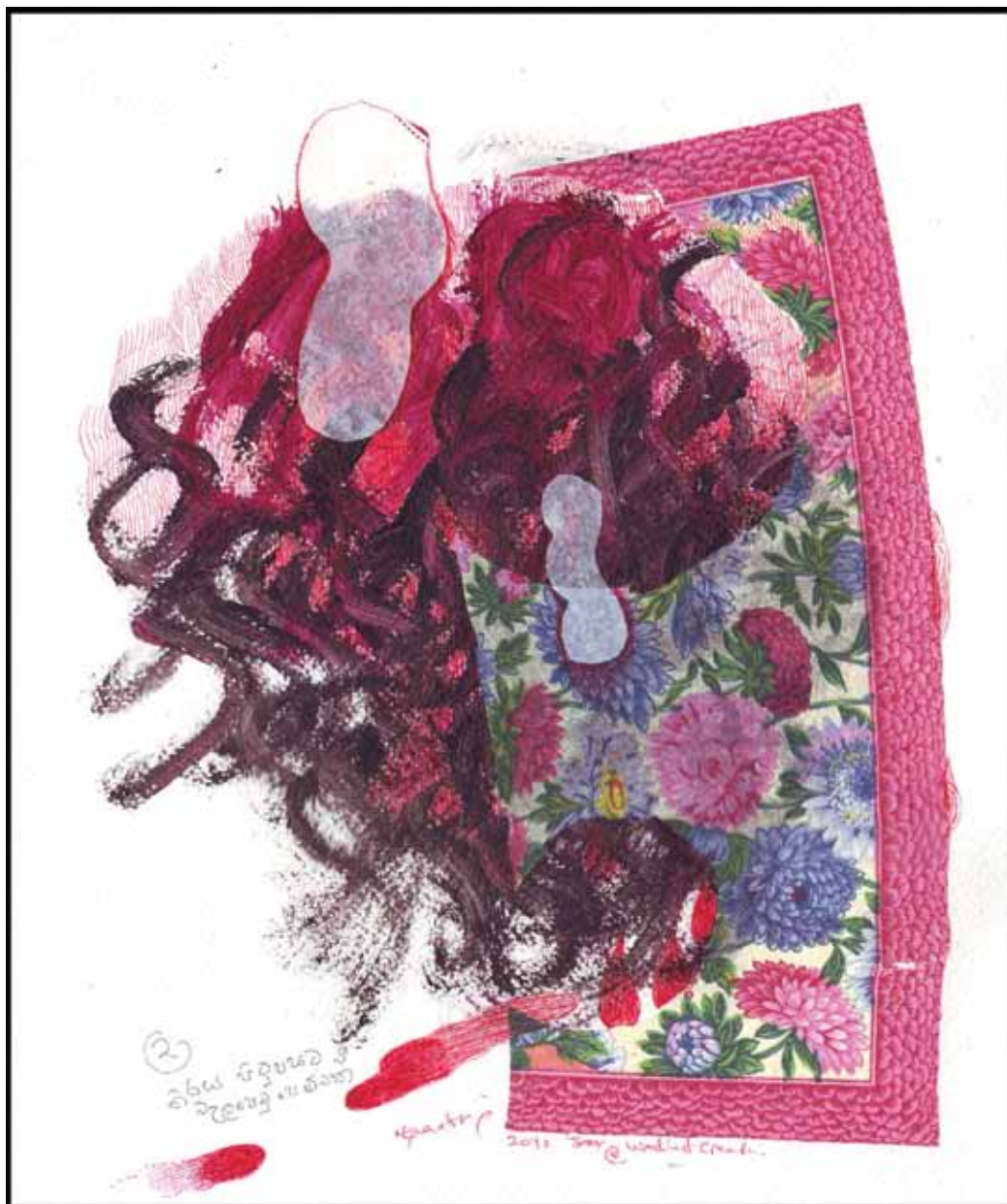


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2006, *Will the Sun Rise tomorrow Maggy? IV*, Acrylic on paper, 29cm x 29cm (London)

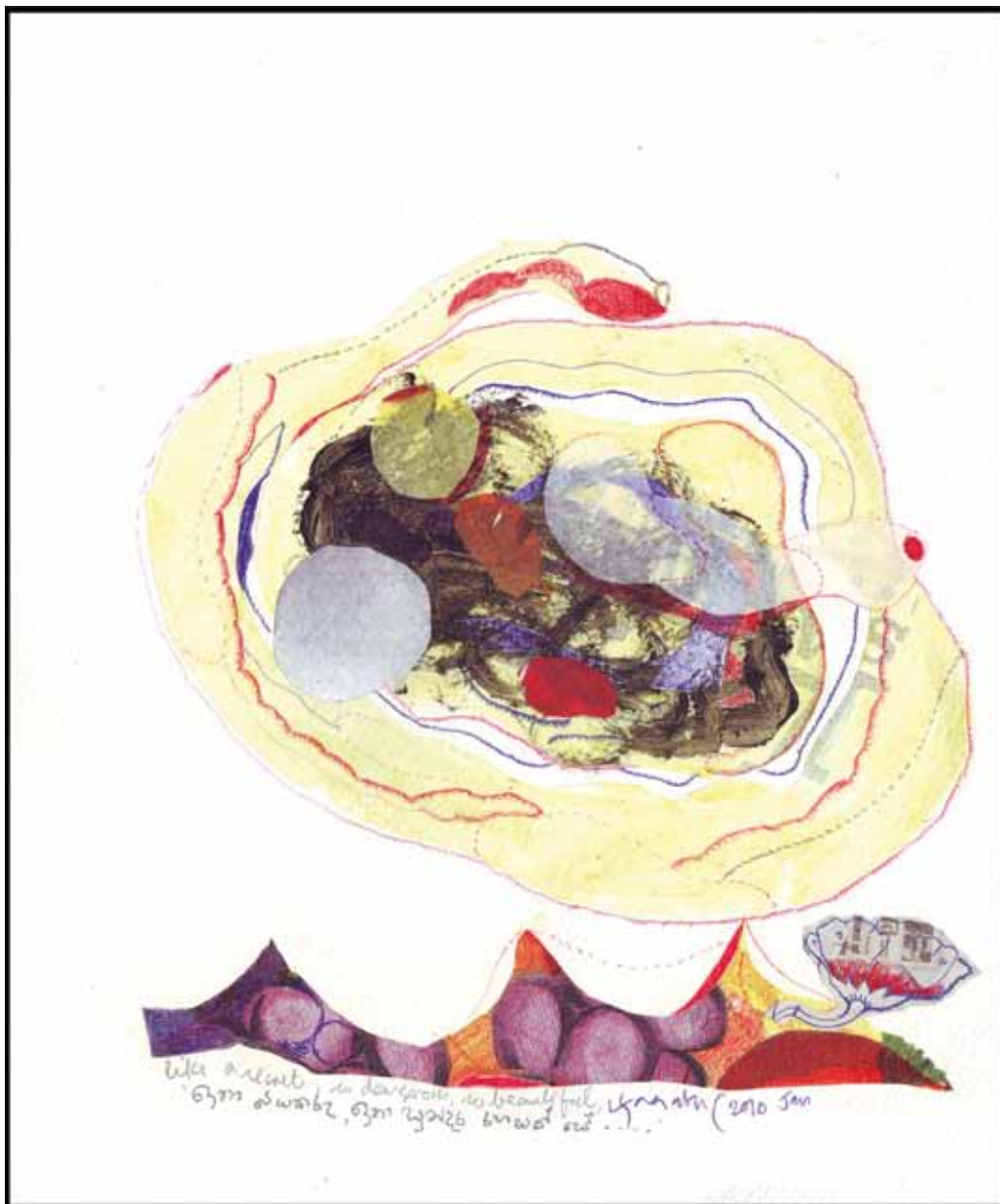




JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled I*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)

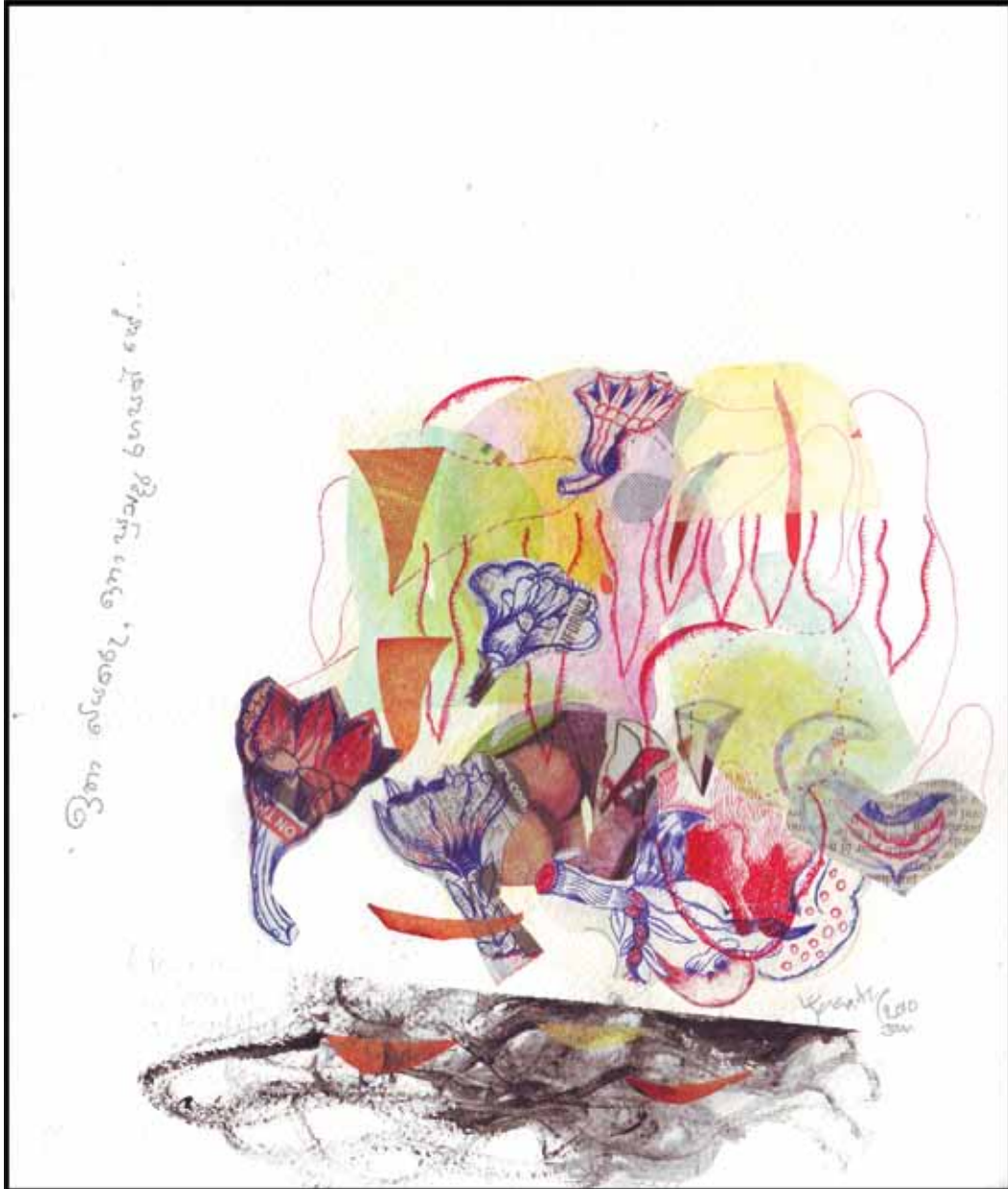


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled II*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)

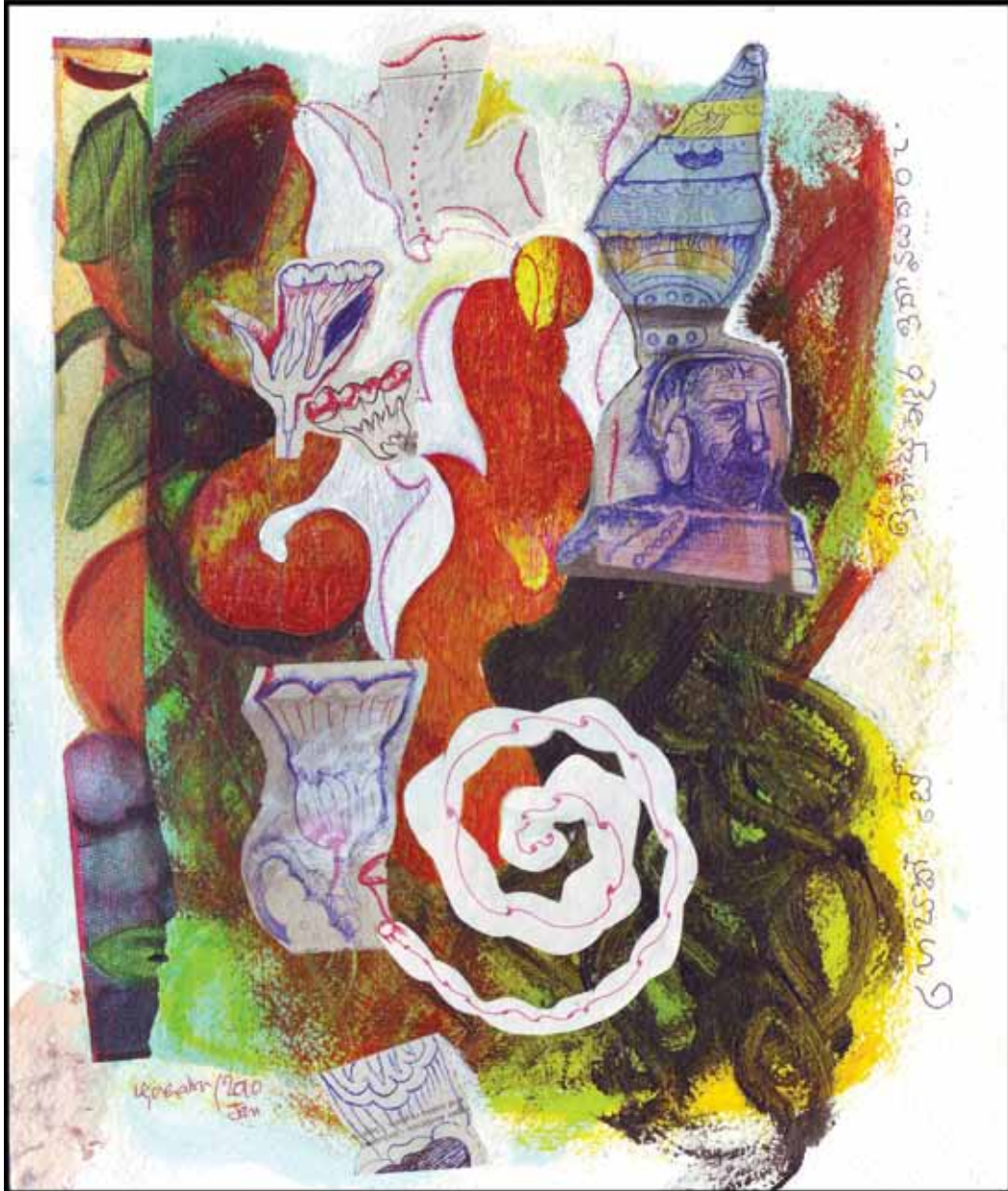


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled III*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)



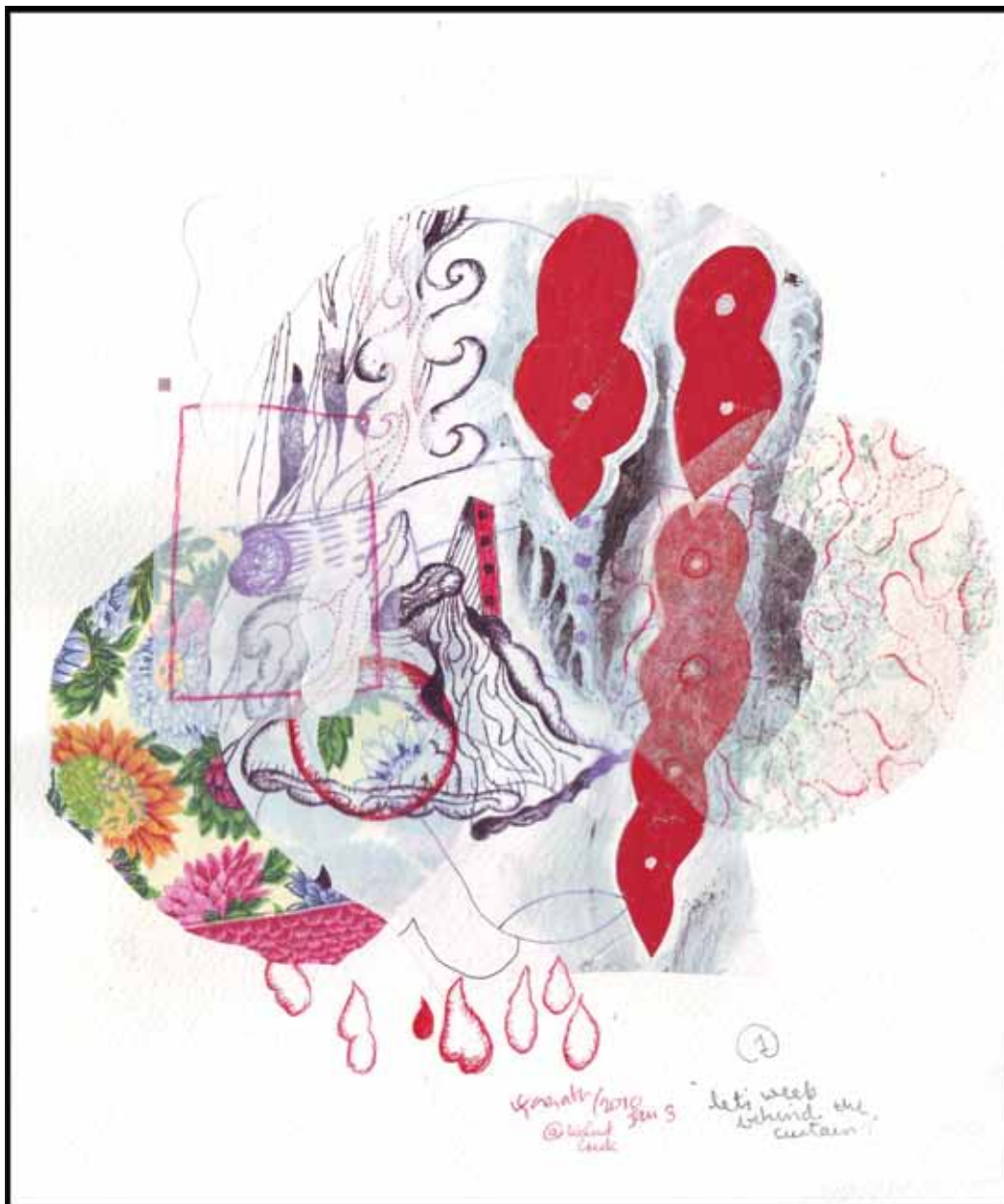


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled IV*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)

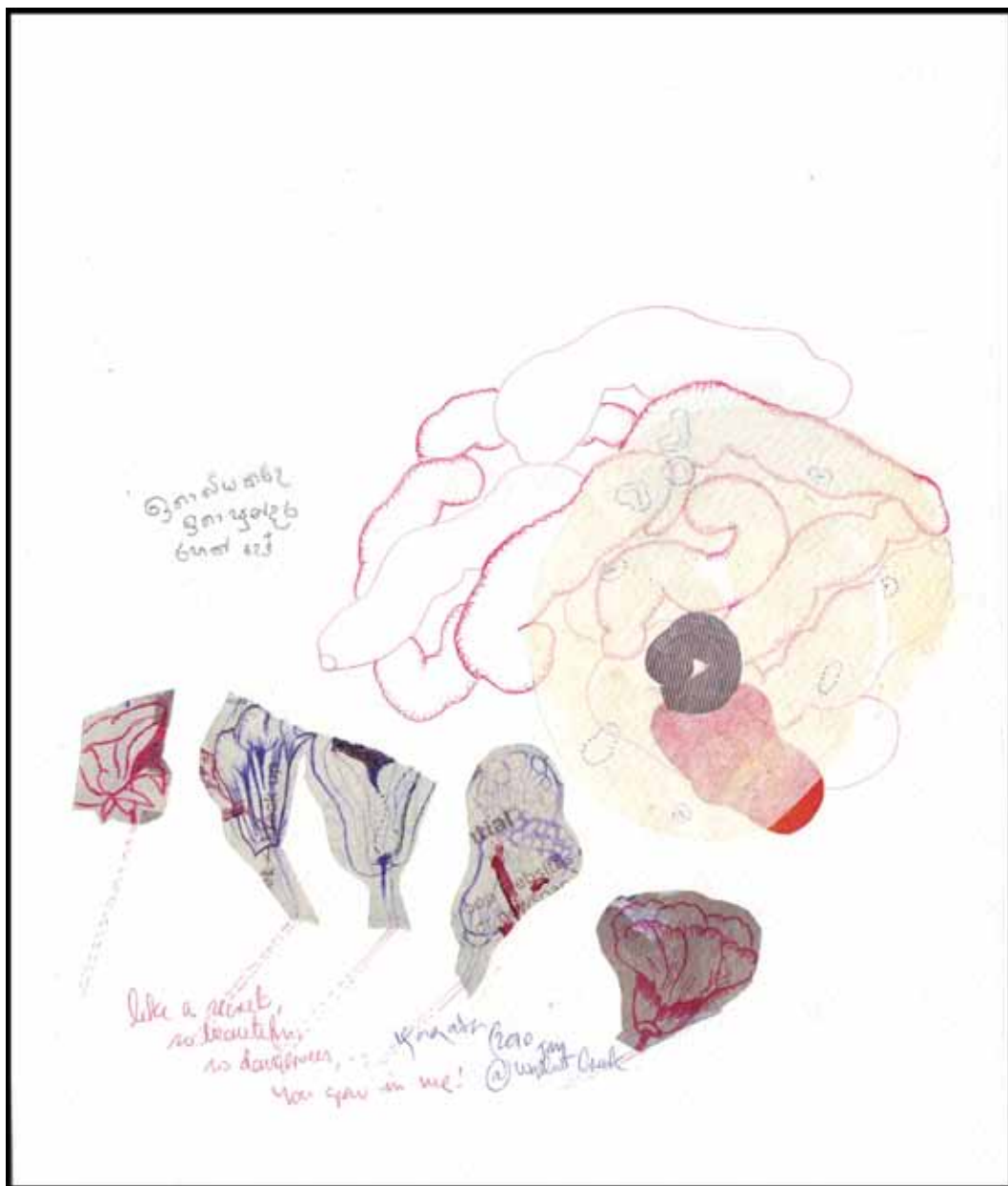


JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled V*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)

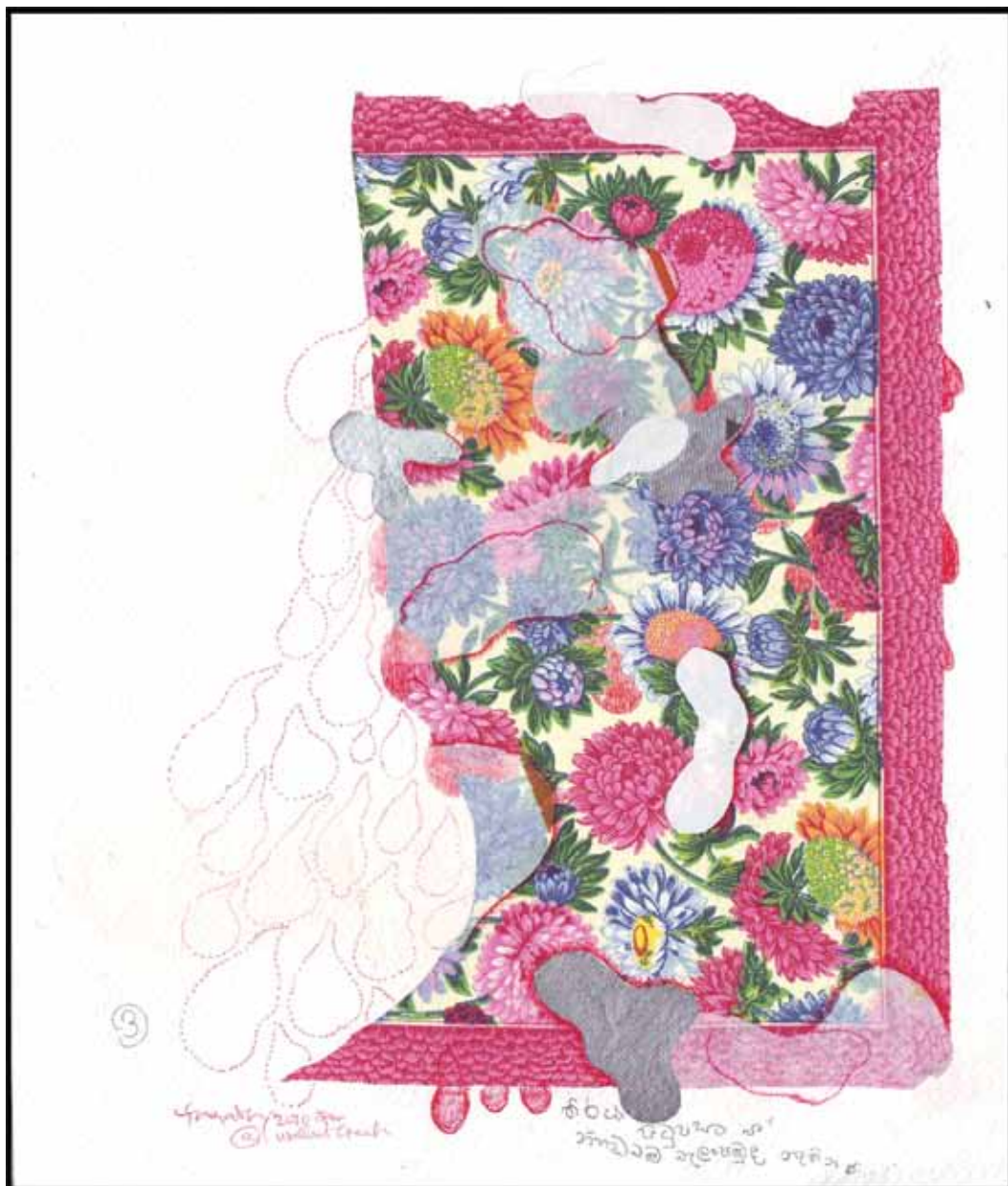




JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled VI*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)



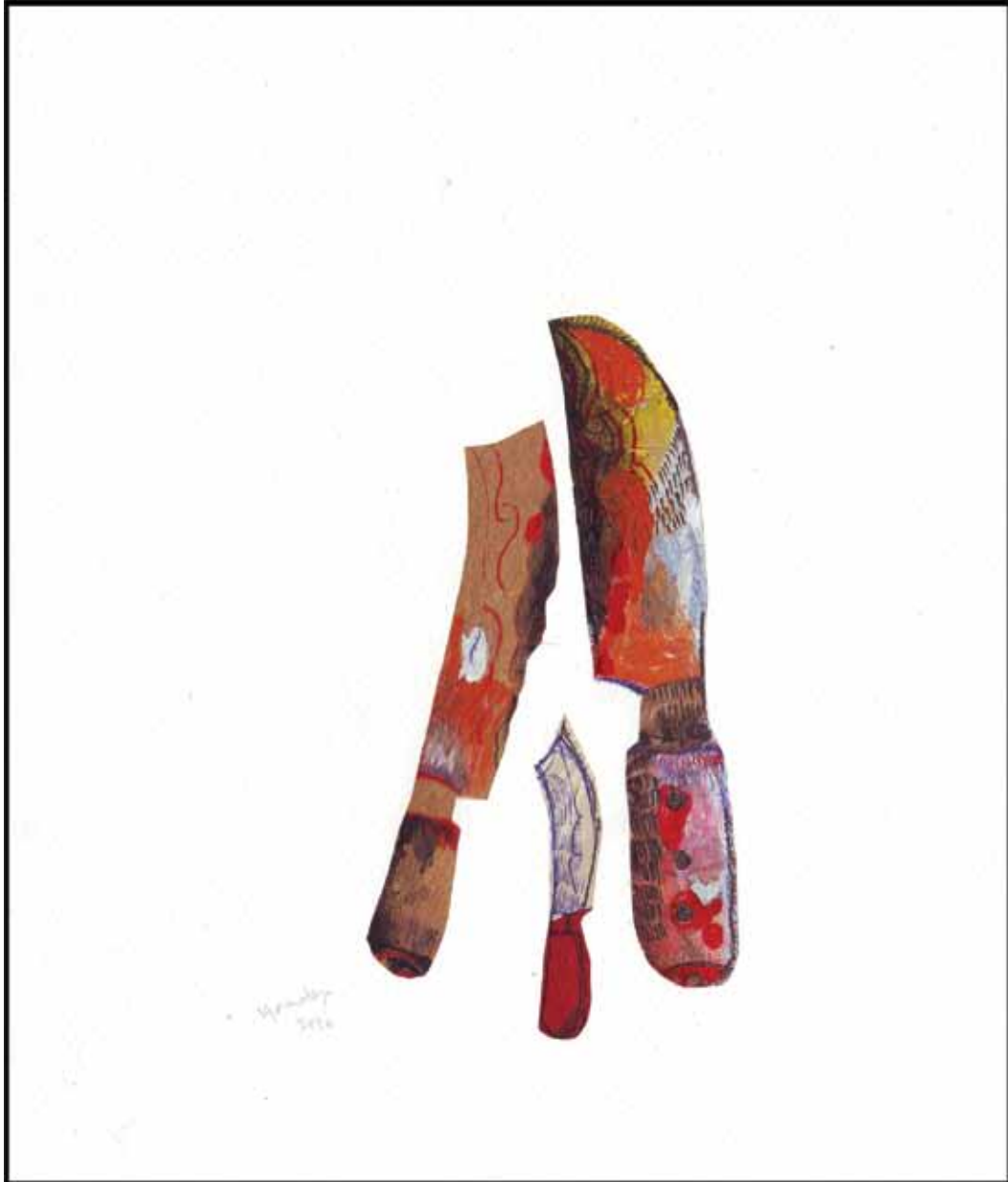
JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled VII*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)



JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled VIII*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)



JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled IX*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)



JAGATH WEERASINGHE, 2010, *Untitled X*, Mixed media on paper, 30cm x 25cm (Colombo)

## JAGATH WEERASINGHE b.1954

### Education

- 1991 MFA Degree in Painting, American University, Washington DC, USA
- 1988 Conservation of Rock Art, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, USA
- 1985 Conservation of Wall Paintings, International Center for the Scientific Study and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)
- 1981 BFA Honours in Painting (Second Class Upper Pass) Minor: Sculpture, Institute of Aesthetic Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

### Solo Exhibitions (selected)

- 2009 *Shiva Nataraja*, Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2006 *The Reading Room: Thousand Shivas and Thousand Mikes*, Singapore Biennale curated by Fumio Nanjo Sharmini Perera, Eugene Tan and Roger McDonald, Singapore
- 2005 *The Celestial Underwear*, Phenomenal Space Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2004 *Urban and the Individual*, Group Show, Phenomenal Space Gallery, Colombo
- 2003 Paradiste Road Galleries, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2000 *(My) Inability of Painting Woman* Gallery 706, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1997 *Recent Paintings*, Paradise Road Galleries, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1997 *Yantragala and the Round Pilgrimage*, Heritage Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1995 Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1992 *Anxiety*, National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka

### Group Exhibitions (selected)

- 2011 *Contemporary Art From Sri Lanka 2011*, Asia House, London, UK
- 2009 *Artful Resistance: Crisis and Creativity in Sri Lanka*, Museum fur Volkerkunde Wien, Vienna, Austria
- 2009 *Designing Peace*, Marian Pasat Rocas, MCDA, Manila
- 2007 Theertha Red Dot Gallery, Sri Jayawardenapura, Sri Lanka
- 2005 *Ten Artists from Sri Lanka*, Milles Garden, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2004 *Aham Puram*, Jaffna Library, Jaffna, Sri Lanka
- 2002 *Art South Asia Show*, Liverpool University Gallery, Liverpool, UK
- 1999 *Asia-Pacific Triennial*, Queensland Gallery, Queensland, Australia
- 1997 *Dialogue*, with Christa Webber, Gallery Mount Castle, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1996 *Die welt zu gast*, Spiel Bank, Dortmund, Germany
- 1994 *4th Asian Art Show*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan
- 1994 *New Approaches in Contemporary Sri Lankan Art*, National Art Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka