LEGACIES

H. A. KARUNARATNE
RUBERT SOYSA
S. H. SARATH
KINGSLEY GUNATILLAKE
JAGATH WEERASINGHE
CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA
JAGATH RAVINDRA

The works by these artists invite us to reevaluate the evolution of abstract art in a regional context which borrowed profusely from cultural encounters, not just in Europe and America, but also in East Asia, as a language rooted in the emotional, cultural, experiential - with a sensibility that is wanting to be read in the contexts within which they were created.

While H. A. Karunaratne resisted defining his practice; context became particularly essential to the creative process in the socio-cultural environment following the onset of the civil war in the island. Thenuwara's pointed commentary on the increase in militarisation of public spaces, and Weerasinghe's psychological crisis in the wake of the civil war, informed the art world of the unfolding crisis in Sri Lanka and shaped a generation of younger artists who were encouraged to think through the political realities of their time. Among the earliest to respond to the unfolding crisis in Sri Lanka through satire, S. H. Sarath remained on the periphery of the conversation. He moved between social and environmental issues, while also finding inspiration in the erotic and religious alike; while retaining an association with the folk that foregrounded his engagement, visually and conceptually.

In bringing these six artists in conversation with H. A. Karunaratne, the exhibition hopes to hold the spaces within which the pursuit of art continues to persist, even when they do not conform to the conventional categorisations determined by the contemporary art ecosystem. Instead, in asserting the distinct, individual streams of expression across a generation of artists Karunaratne inspired, the presentation acknowledges his vital presence in Sri Lanka’s dynamic visual landscape and its evolving currents - broadening the scope for our engagement with contemporary art.

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Serving as a homage, Legacies: H. A. Karunaratne reflects on the artist's pedagogical contributions and his enduring influence on leading contemporary artists in Sri Lanka. The exhibition brings together the works of S. H. Sarath, Rubert Soysa, Kingsley Gunatillake, Jagath Weerasinghe, Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Ravindra, artists who over the years, either as his students or via mentorship, inherited, variously, his creative philosophy.

In the context of South Asian art history, H. A. Karunaratne's practice emerged during a period when nation-states were emerging, alongside globalisation and exposure to new modes and media of artistic expression. However, Karunaratne's practice resists easy categorisation, and does not situate itself immediately within a conversation of national or international identity. Instead, his approach to abstraction was shaped by the emphasis of Zen Buddhism on producing one's essence, becoming one with the work and liberating the mind. Examining his practice against this backdrop reveals to us an artist whose practice was shaped by a discipline committed to individual creative expression, which in hindsight created the space where artists developed their practice independent of their mentor.

Characterized by a sense of rhythm, energy, and dissonance, Karunaratne experimented with materials ranging from tissue, wire, palmyrah, and fabric to metal over the course of six decades. Widely considered the father of abstract art in Sri Lanka, H. A. Karunaratne, through his engagement as an educator at the Institute of Aesthetic Studies (now the University of Visual and Performing Arts), resulted in a shift in arts pedagogy. He was pivotal in inspiring a generation of artists to move away from the figurative and embrace the visual grammar of abstract art. Sri Lanka's leading abstract art practitioners, Kingsley Gunatillake, Jagath Ravindra, and Rubert Soysa continue to carry his philosophy and methods into their practice.

Jagath Ravindra approaches the canvas as a field where a thought or feeling, matured through prolonged contemplation, materialises itself as a harmonic explosion. Colour is absolute to his practice - mediated through conscious and unconscious processes, it is the language through which the artist arrives at liberation. Kingsley Gunatillake expanded on his Guru, Karunaratne's approach to making the image on the canvas tactile through metal, where its malleable properties reenvision the calligraphic stroke. Having maintained the longest and closest association with the artist, Kingsley Gunatillake embraced Karunaratne's engagement with Japanese visual culture, adopting the expressive linearity of Japanese ink paintings into his practice. Rubert Soysa's practice centres the experience of an image, and the multitude of emotions that can be felt and lived in the moment of encounter. Soysa leaned into the visuality of cubism and combined it with the textural possibilities offered by corrugated boards and fabric. While his approach to abstraction is rooted in distilling a form into its multiple planes, he unifies the image through movement filled with emotional gravitas.

The works by these artists invite us to reevaluate the evolution of abstract art in a regional context which borrowed profusely from cultural encounters, not just in Europe and America, but also in East Asia, as a language rooted in the emotional, cultural, experiential - with a sensibility that is wanting to be read in the contexts within which they were created.

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H. A. KARUNARATNE



1929 - 2026



Untitled, 2023, Twine and Oil on Canvas, 130 x 125 cm



Untitled, 2019, Paper and Staples on Board, 64 x 102 cm



Untitled, 2019, Oil on Board, 102 x 64 cm



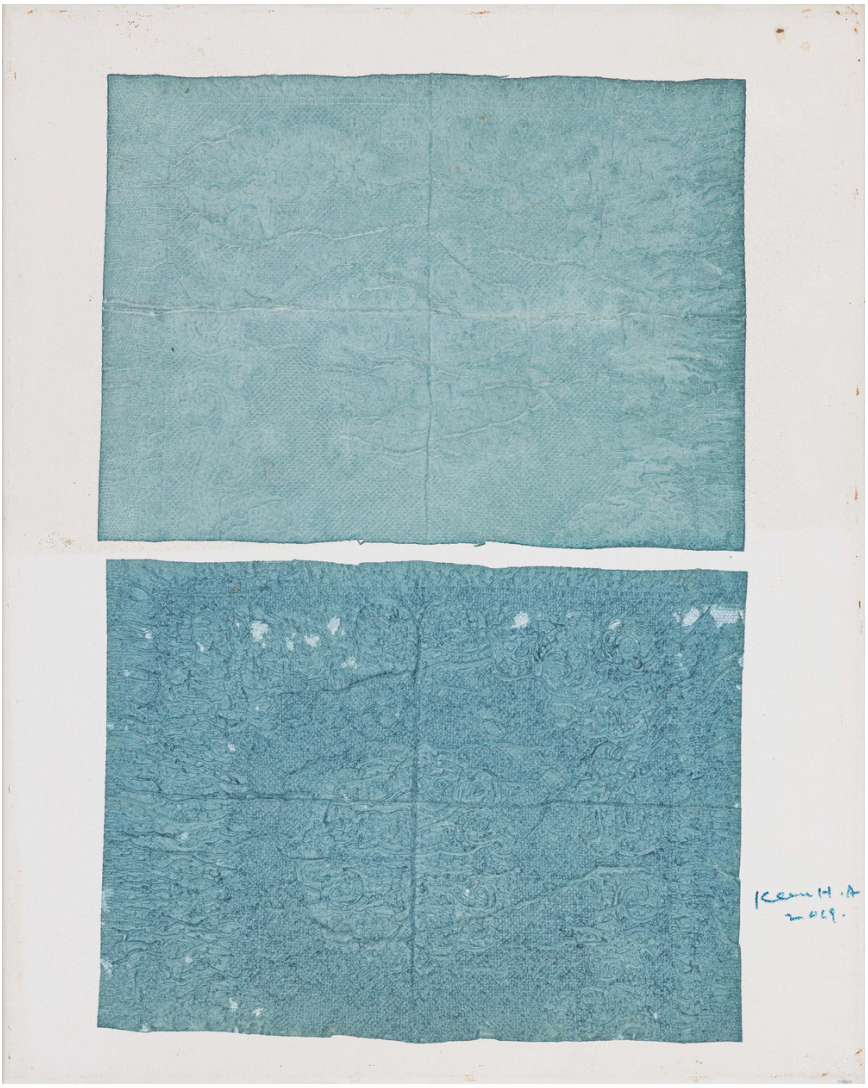
Untitled, 2019, Oil on Board , 88 x 102 cm



Untitled, 2023, Twine and Oil on Canvas, 30 x 125 cm



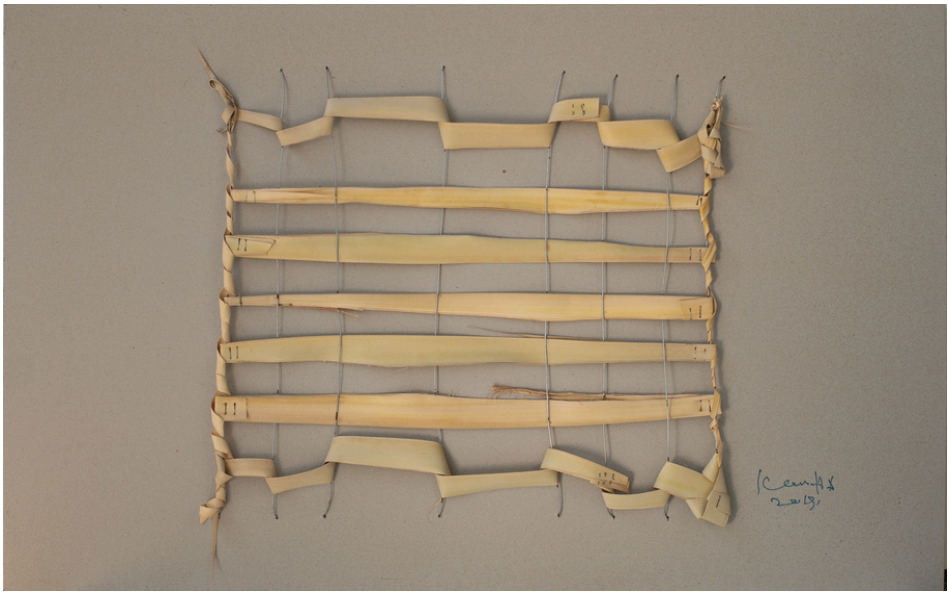
Untitled, 2019, Tissue and Oil on Canvas, 50 x 40 cm



Untitled, 2019, Tissue and Oil on Canvas, 50 x 40 cm



Untitled , 2019, Oil and Tissue on Canvas, 60 x 50 cm



Untitled, 2019, Mixed Media on Board, 61.5 x 100 cm

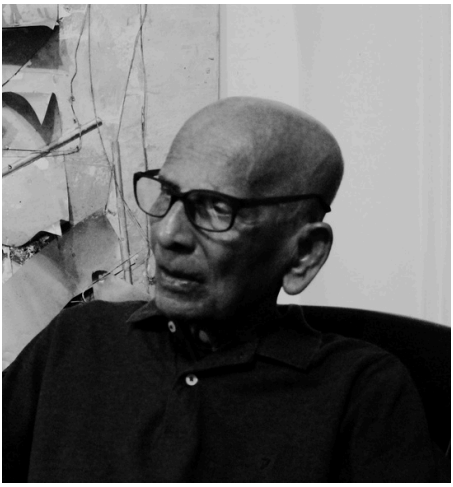


Untitled, 2019, Metal Sheets, Bolts, and Door Knob, 45 x 29 x 39 cm



Untitled, 2018, Metal and Cement, 44 x 28 cm

H. A. KARUNARATNE
(b. 1929 - 2026)



H.A. Karunaratne (b. 1929, Kotalawela. Lives and works in Colombo) is acknowledged as a pioneering figure in the development of abstract art in Sri Lanka. His practice, spanning over six decades, demonstrates a sustained engagement with abstraction, drawing parallels with American Abstract Expressionism while being deeply informed by Buddhist and Zen philosophies. Karunaratne played a pivotal role as both artist and pedagogue, influencing generations of artists and reshaping approaches to abstract expression within Sri Lanka's art institutions.

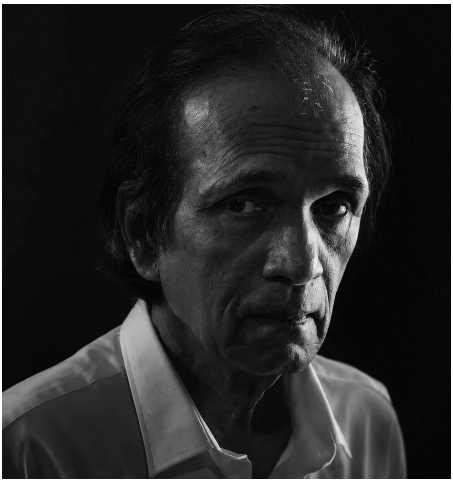
He was conferred the Kala Suri by the Government of Sri Lanka and awarded The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays by the Government of Japan. Karunaratne's works are held in significant public and private collections, including the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi, and major museums in Japan such as the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura and Hayama, and the Fukuoka Collection, Fukuoka.


RUBERT SOYSA
b.1948



Journey, 2010, Newspaper, Corrugated Board,
Fabric, and Oil on Canvas, 153 x 245 cm

RUBERT SOYSA
(b.1948)



Rubert Soysa (b.1948, Nittambuwa; lives and works in Nittambuwa) is a renowned Sri Lankan artist known for his abstract paintings depicting both figurative and abstract forms. Moving across different stylistic registers, from raw, gestural distortion to a cubist fracturing of form, Soysa's faces splinter into planes of color and jagged line, revealing the messy, contradictory landscape of feelings that lies beneath every human expression.

Soysa studied at the Government College of Fine Arts in 1973. He held his first solo exhibition at the Vansbro Public Library in Sweden and has since exhibited extensively across Sri Lanka and internationally, including in Bangladesh, Syria, Cuba, Bulgaria, India, South Korea, and throughout Europe. He is a recipient of the Prime Minister's Prize and the President's Prize at the Annual Art Exhibition of the Ceylon Society of Arts, as well as the First Prize for Best Painting at the State Awards Ceremony.

S.H. SARATH



b. 1948

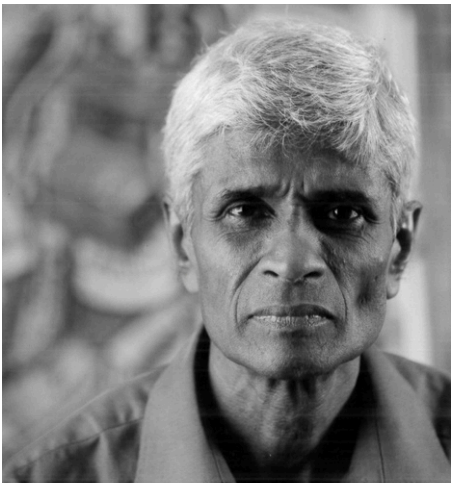


Lovers, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 153 x 104 cm



Meditation, 2019, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 80 cm

S. H. SARATH
(b.1948)



S. H. Sarath (b.1948, Weligama; lives and works in Colombo)is a Sri Lankan visual artist whose practice responds to social and environmental realities through satire, symbolism, and multi-religious philosophy. Rooted in Buddhist thought and shaped by his engagement with Kandyan artistic traditions, his work reflects a sustained inquiry into spirituality, social consciousness, and the human condition. Drawing from his training across Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Australia, Sarath has developed a distinctive visual language that bridges local traditions with contemporary artistic discourse.

Sarath studied Painting and Sculpture at the Government College of Fine Arts, Colombo (1973), graduating with a Diploma in Fine Arts. He later received a UNESCO Fellowship to study at Silpakorn University, Bangkok (1980), and completed further studies in Visual Arts and Printmaking at the University of South Australia, Adelaide (1996).

Sarath has participated in major exhibitions including the Triennale Mondiale, Paris (2006), the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (2003), the São Paulo Biennial (1978, 1982), the Triennale–India, New Delhi (1986, 1991), the Asian Biennial, Bangladesh (1985, 1989). Sarath's works are held in the collections of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan, and the United Nations, Geneva. In recognition of his outstanding contribution to the arts, he was awarded the Kala Suri National Honour by the President of Sri Lanka in 2017.


KINGSLEY GUNATILLAKE
b.1951



In Between, 2020, Acrylic on Canvas, 160 x 120 cm,
Udayshanth Fernando Collection

KINGSLEY GUNATILLAKE
(b.1951)



Kingsley Gunatillake's (b.1951, Kandy; lives and works between Kandy and Tokyo) oeuvre represents a trajectory in Sri Lankan contemporary art in which abstract ideas are expressed through the physicality of their chosen medium. Inspired by the expressive linearity of Chinese and Japanese ink paintings Gunatillake's sculptures and paintings attempt to communicate the untranslatable weight of human emotions and experience. The artist exploits the malleable properties of metal to create a rhythmic engagement of the senses in his sculptures. His practice also delves into the political landscape that shaped the post-independence history of Sri Lanka through book art, while also contributing to children's illustrations. Gunatillake's practice is rooted in overarching themes of socio-political and environmental concerns.

Gunatillake completed his BFA at the University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya (1979), and a Diploma in Environmental Education from the University of Strathclyde, UK (1994). He is currently a visiting lecturer in the Faculty of Visual Arts at the University of Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo.

Gunatillake has also received two NOMA Awards from Japan (1993 and 2003), as well as the award for illustration at the Biennale Bratislava, Slovakia (1997). In 2001, he was honoured with the Bunka Award for Visual Arts for his exceptional work at the Temple of the Tooth World Heritage site in Sri Lanka.

Gunatillake has been exhibited at Frieze Seoul, Seoul (2024); KALĀ, Lionel Wendt Art Centre, Colombo (2024); Himi Gallery Tokyo (2023); India Art Fair, New Delhi (2020); Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi (2019); and University College Dublin, Dublin (2006). His work belongs to prestigious collections including the Presidential Collection of Contemporary Art in Sri Lanka, Colombo and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi.


JAGATH WEERASINGHE
b.1954



Untitiled, 1993, Acrylic and Charcoal on Paper, 56 x 76 cm



Untitled III, 1992, Acrylic and Charcoal on Paper, 56 x 76 cm

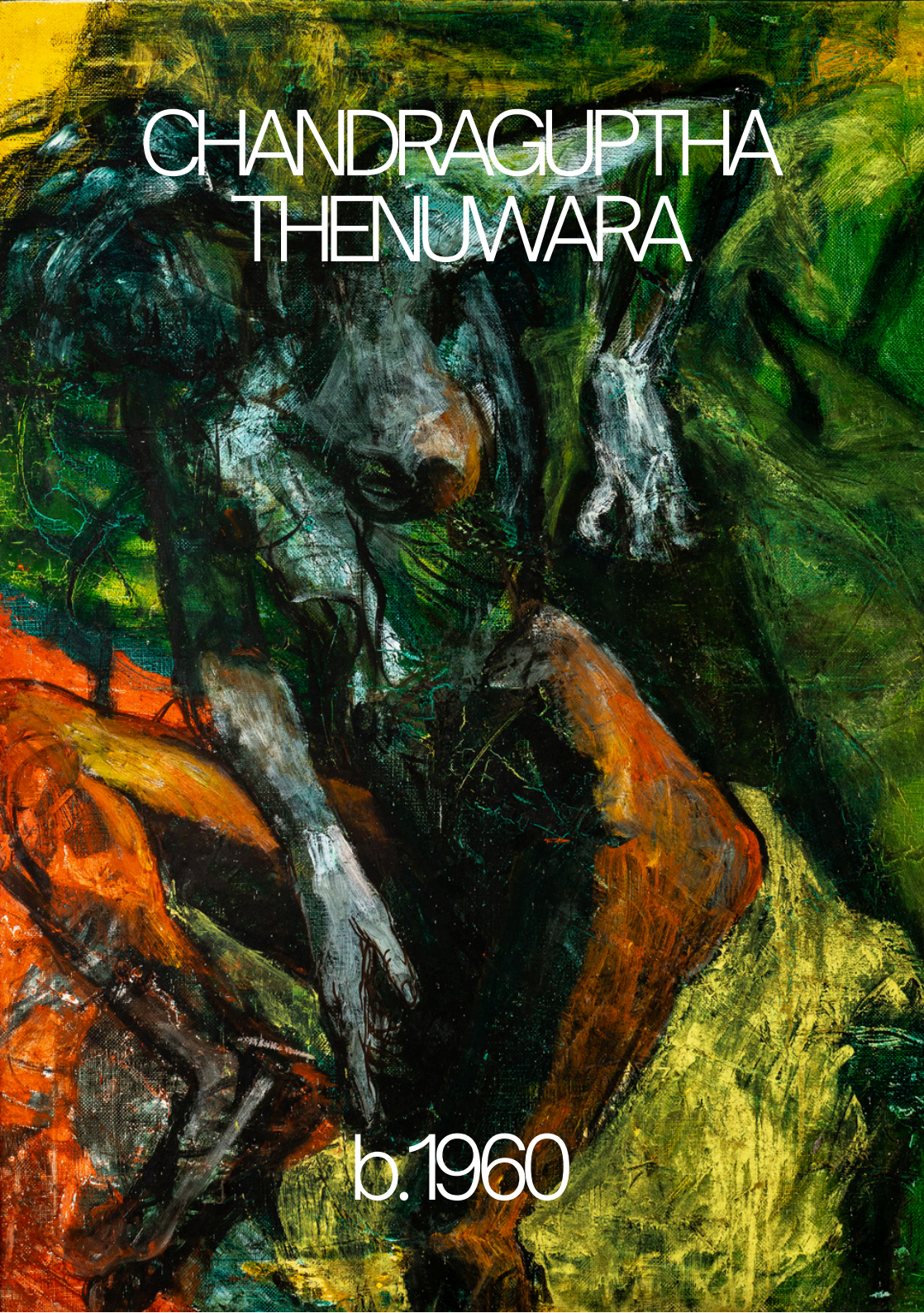
JAGATH WEERASINGHE
(b.1954)

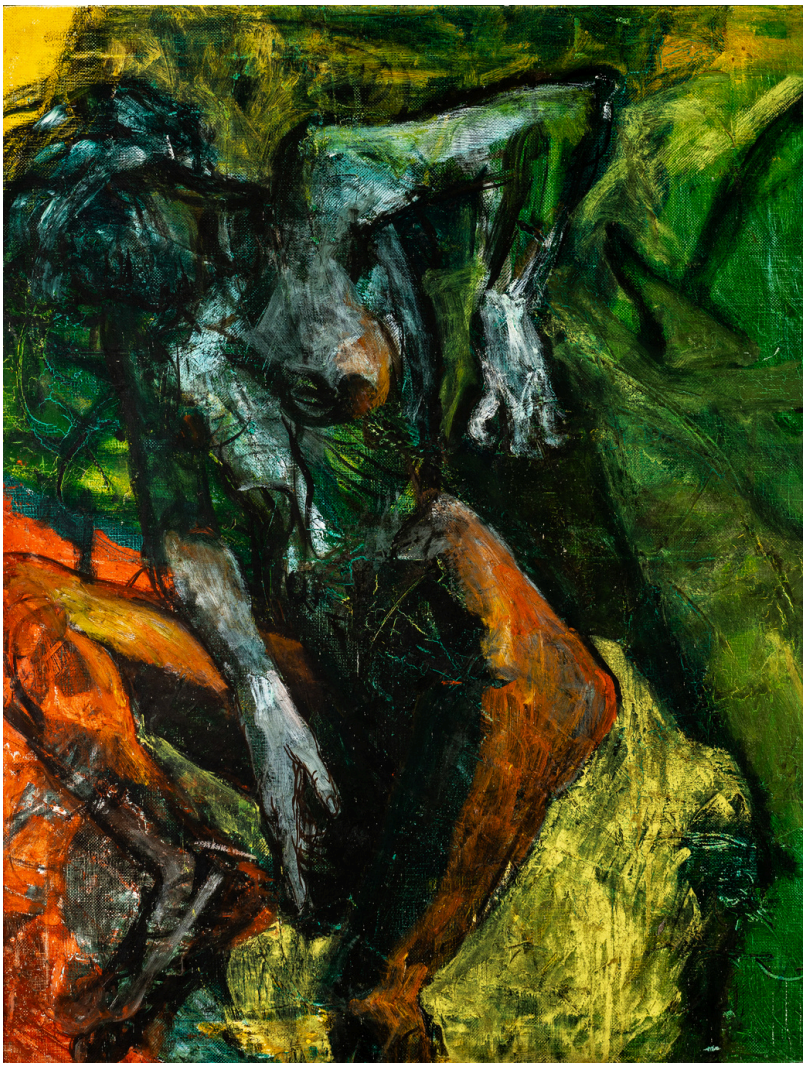


Jagath Weerasinghe (b.1954, Moratuwa; lives and works in Colombo) is a pivotal figure in contemporary Sri Lankan art and has been a significant driving force in its development since the early 1990s. Weerasinghe's work is marked by a frenzied, passionate expressiveness highlighted through intense gestural brushwork. Weerasinghe's compositions display a pervasive sense of tragedy that shows an urgent concern with the contemporary political order both locally and globally. Weerasinghe examines and critiques Sri Lankan anxieties, responding to collective attitudes—as he observes them, taking themes such as nationhood, religion, identity, and confrontation for commentary. Weerasinghe's practice does not merely reflect disillusionment, but extends into an observation of the systemic issues that perpetuate extremism and violence, offering a critical view of the forces shaping contemporary global conflicts.

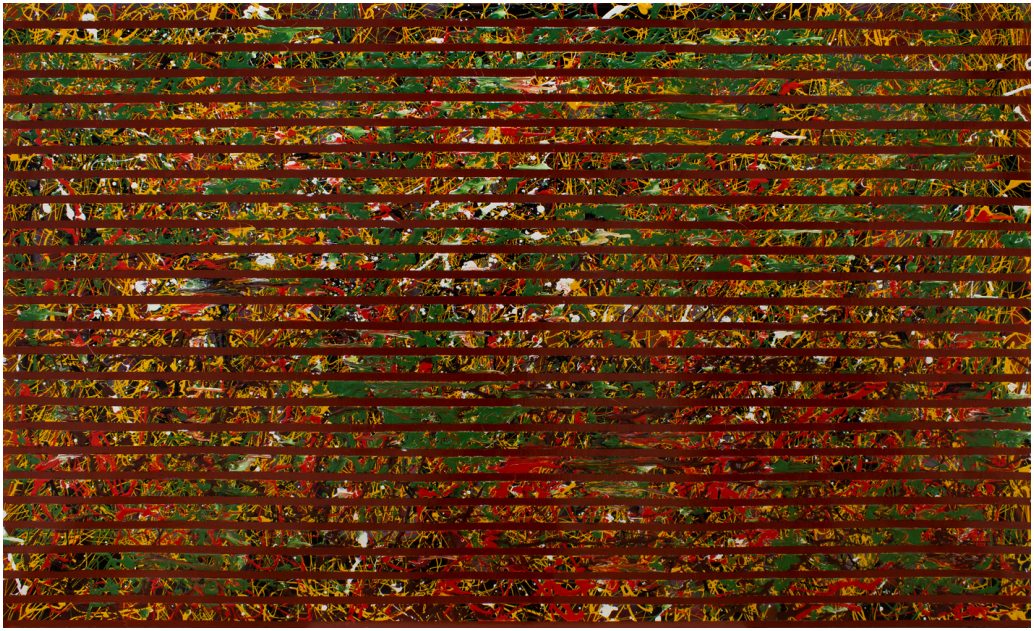
Jagath Weerasinghe completed his MFA at the American University in Washington, DC (1991) and his BFA (Hons) at the Institute of Aesthetic Studies at the University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya (1981). He is the co-founder of Theertha Collective and the moving force behind collaborations such as the Colombo Art Biennale.

Weerasinghe has been featured at Nature Morte, New Delhi (2026); Grosvenor Gallery, London (2025); Bikaner House, New Delhi (2025); the Baik Art Gallery, Los Angeles (2019); Khoj, New Delhi (2018); Art Dubai, Dubai (2018), Aicon Gallery, New York (2017); Serendipity Arts Festival, Panaji (2016); Breese Little, London (2014); Colombo Art Biennale, Colombo (2012), Asia House, London (2011); Museum fur Volkerkunde Wien, Vienna (2009); Singapore Art Biennale, Singapore (2006); Asia Pacific Triennial, Brisbane (1999); Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka (1994). His works belong in institutional collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles; the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan; the Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi; and the U.S. Department of State - Art in Embassies Collection.


CHANDRAGUPTHA
THENUWARA
b.1960



Woman, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 93 x 73 cm



BLINDS: This Is Not A Pollock, 2021, Mixed Media on Aluminium,
92 x 153 cm

CHANDRAGUPTHA THENUWARA
(b.1960)



Chandraguptha Thenuwara's (b. 1960, Galle; lives and works in Colombo) interdisciplinary practice deals with the politics of memory and violence, extensively confronting the 'glitch' in Sri Lanka's obsession with beautification, even at the expense of erasing its recent history. His wider body of work includes sculpture, painting, drawings, public monuments, lectures, and curatorial and collaborative projects, all of which are informed directly by his activism. Drawing from a repository of leitmotifs such as barrels, barricades, lotuses, guns, soldiers, and stupas, Thenuwara's artist-activist interventions are intertwined with the sociopolitical developments in Sri Lanka.

Thenuwara founded the Vibhavi Academy of Fine Arts (VAFA), an artist-run school dedicated to fostering the still-fledgling Sri Lankan contemporary art scene after completing a postgraduate programme in Fine Arts from the Moscow State Institute (formerly in the USSR).

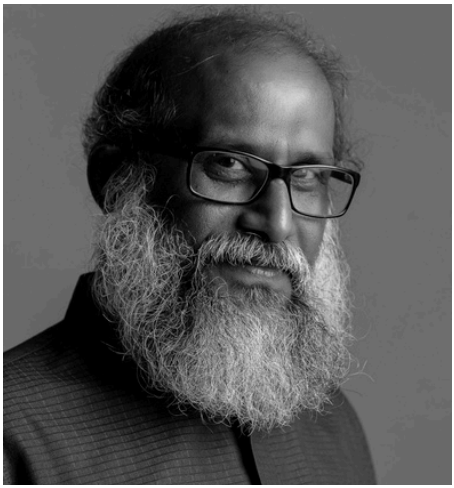
Thenuwara's work has been featured in Grosvenor Gallery, London (2025); KALĀ, Colombo (2025); Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Colombo (2024); Art Dubai Modern, Dubai (2024); Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi (2023); Ishara Art Foundation, Sharjah (2023); Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah (2022); Frieze, London (2022); Personal Structures, European Cultural Centre, Venice (2022); and also at the landmark moving exhibition, Cities on the Move (1997 - 99) curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru. His works belong in institutional collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles; the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Fukuoka, Japan; and the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.


JAGATH RAVINDRA
b.1963



Mataphors of the Soul XVIII, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas,
152 x 244 cm

JAGATH RAVINDRA
b.1963



Jagath Ravindra (b.1963, Madampe; lives and works in Colombo) is a leading abstract artist exploring the evanescent beauty of nature and philosophy through his work. His works are characterised by an exploration of fleeting moments, captured through an interplay of colours and a heightened sensory experience enhanced by scale. Blending the Impressionist pursuit of transience with the evocative visual language of abstraction, Ravindra reimagines ephemeral moments through a uniquely tropical lens. His practice strikes a balance between personal introspection and universal themes of memory and existence.

Jagath Ravindra graduated with a BFA from the Institute of Aesthetics, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka (1990) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Archeology from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka (1991). He also has an MSc in Philosophy from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka (2014). Ravindra served as the former Dean of the Faculty of Visual Arts at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo.

Ravindra has been featured in prominent exhibitions including the Bihar Biennale, Patna (2025); KALĀ, Colombo (2025); the 6th Silk Road International Art Exhibition, Xian (2019); the Colombo Biennale, Colombo (2009); and the Asian Art Biennale, Dhaka (2008, 2006, and 2001). Internationally, his art has been showcased at XVA Gallery, Dubai (2007 and 2005); The Noble Sage Art Gallery, London (2006); and the Serendipity October Gallery, London (2002). His work is part of the permanent collections at the Xi'an Art Museum, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, and the John Keells Foundation Collection.

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