

Art Radar Asia

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

Rare double showing of Sri Lankan drawing: exhibitions London, Colombo

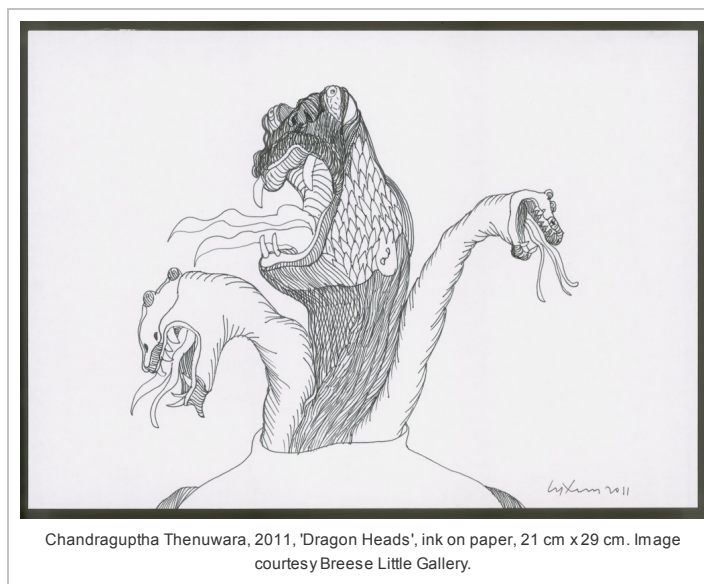
Posted on October 24, 2012

Like < Share 5 2 Tweet 4

3 Votes

Two artists from the emerging South Asian art region bring cities together in one rare showing of drawings.

Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe are established artists in Sri Lanka, yet their work, and Sri Lankan art in general, is rarely seen outside of South Asia. "DRAWINGS", a double exhibition of the two artists' recent work held in Colombo and London, takes a step toward rectifying this.



Two "pivotal" artists

Despite thirty years of friendship and collaboration, artists Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe have never exhibited together in a two-man show. In a recent venture between two galleries, located thousands of kilometres apart, **Breese Little Gallery** in London and **Saskia Fernando Gallery** in Colombo have brought these two artists together in the exhibition "**DRAWINGS**", which will run from 20 September to 10 November 2012 in the UK and 2 to 30 October 2012 in Sri Lanka. For the directors of both galleries, it was important to show work by two artists which they believed had been "pivotal" to Sri Lankan art in the past thirty years. In doing so, the galleries hope to bring Sri Lankan contemporary art to an international audience.

According to Josephine Breese, co-director of Breese Little, "DRAWINGS" provides "a snapshot of the larger careers" of two very

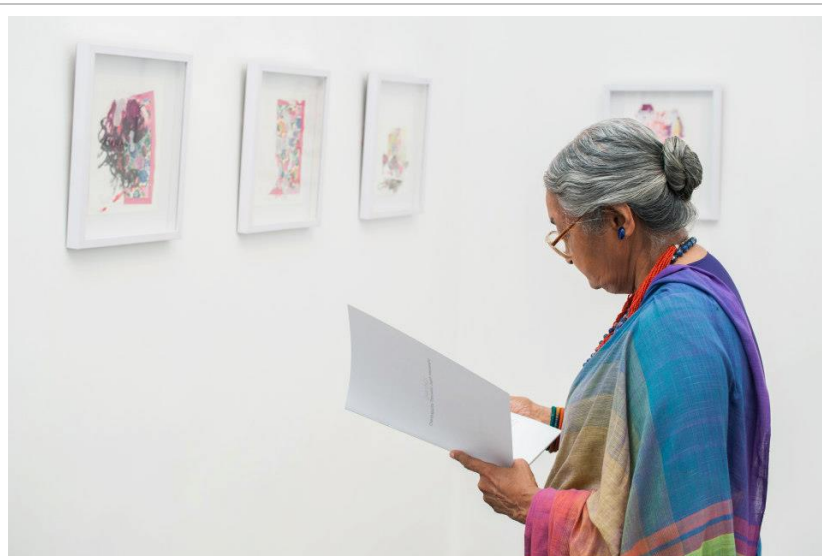
senior, respected Sri Lankan artists. "The motifs that you see in the drawings are parts of much larger bodies of work," she explains. In fact, it is only recently that Weerasinghe and Thenuwara have returned to drawing, as it is increasingly being seen as "a respected medium [of] substantial critical weight". In Sri Lanka, drawing as art practice gained pace a few years ago in "**The One Year Drawing Project**", a two-year-long undertaking that was commemorated with the publication of a book by **Raking Leaves**, a London publishing house, in 2009.



Opening night of "DRAWINGS" at Breese Little Gallery, London, 18 September 2012. (From left to right) Saskia Fernando of Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo; Henry Little and Josephine Breese of Breese Little Gallery, London. Image by Art Radar.

Sri Lankan art in London

In "The One Year Drawing Project", four Sri Lankan artists, Muhanned Cader, Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan, Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe, collaborated from May 2005 to October 2007 to produce 208 drawings. The artists faced an unusual challenge in that they were unable to communicate face-to-face, separated by distance and the civil war in Sri Lanka, which began in the 1980s and only ended in 2009. Drawings were exchanged only by post over the 29-month-long project, and as Breese describes it, the project took on an "exquisite corpse" element.



Opening night of "DRAWINGS", 20 September 2012, at Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Image courtesy Saskia Fernando Gallery.

Since the end of the civil war in 2009, the first major exhibition to give an overview of Sri Lankan art outside of the tiny nation was "**Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka**" held from 1 March to 12 March 2011 at **Asia House, London**. Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe were among fourteen artists exhibiting work there, a show that was considered by Breese to be an achievement "in bringing Sri Lankan art to an audience that's never seen it before and rarely has the opportunity to do so".

Reaching a wider audience

With the success of the 2011 exhibition, Breese and Fernando felt it was important to continue the story of Sri Lankan art in 2012, this time in both Colombo and London, so that the artists themselves and the wider Sri Lankan art scene could participate. As Breese comments,

It's important that there's a community around it rather than just picking up the artwork from Sri Lanka, bringing it over and isolating it here. That was quite important in terms of making sure there's meaningful dialogue [between the two groups].



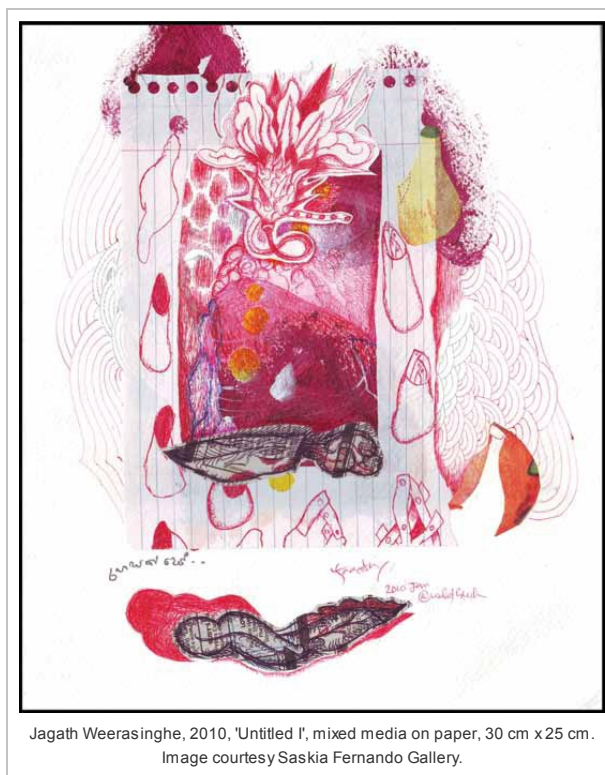
Copies of "The One Year Drawing Project", published in 2009 by Raking Leaves, London, UK. Image courtesy Saskia Fernando Gallery.



Installation view of "Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka", March 2011, Asia House, London. Image courtesy Breese Little Gallery.

Thenuwara and Weerasinghe were selected to continue that dialogue in the "DRAWINGS" exhibition because, as Breese says,

As practitioners, I think that they are exceptionally sensitive in transmitting a message and I think that they do that with a lot of courage, which is what makes their style so specific. And I think that's why they stand out here.



About the artists

Chandraguptha Thenuwara

Referring to the current post-war period in Sri Lanka, **Chandraguptha Thenuwara** describes drawing as "a perfect medium that was directly representative of how different 'colours' had become irrelevant...; [it] involves a highly rational thought process [and] the representation of reincarnation and recreation of [the] self; as your hand aches, 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."



Chandraguptha Thenuwara, installation view of "Dhammapada and Other Works", 2008, at Lionel Wendt Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Thenuwara earned his BFA in 1981 and MPhil in 2006 at the Institute of Aesthetic Studies, **University of Kelaniya, Colombo, Sri Lanka**. He received his MFA at the **Moscow State Art Institute** in 1992. Currently, he is Director and Lecturer of Visual art at the **Vibhavi Academy of Fine Arts** in Colombo, which he founded in 1993.

Thenuwara exhibits work extensively in Sri Lanka and worldwide, most recently at **HIVOS**, Den Haag, in The Netherlands, entitled "Horn and Other Images" (2012).

Jagath Weerasinghe

Before pursuing an artistic career, **Jagath Weerasinghe** trained first as a conservator. He received his BFA in Painting and Sculpture in 1981 at the **University of Kalaniya, Colombo, Sri Lanka**, followed by certifications in the conservation of paintings in 1985 from **ICCROM** and the conservation of rock art in 1988 from **Getty Conservation Institute** in the USA. In 1991, he earned his MFA in Painting from the **American University, Washington, DC**. Currently, Weerasinghe is Senior Lecturer at the Post-Graduate Institute of Archaeology of the **University of Kelaniya**.



Jagath Weerasinghe at exhibit "Celestial Fervour of Art", 2009, Theertha Red Dot Gallery, Pitakotte, Sri Lanka.

In the past, Weerasinghe did not consider drawing to be a formal artistic medium; instead, it was always linked to his archaeological practice. "As 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," he explains. After his participation in the "One Year Drawing Project", "the blindfold was lifted"; he now sees drawing as something "akin to meditation". It has become quite important in contemporary art, he says, particularly in Sri Lanka where "meticulous drawing has become part of the repertoire of art making".

[Editor's note: This post was amended from the original after publication in response to comments from the subjects.]

KF/KN/HH

Related Topics: **Sri Lankan art, drawing as art practice, gallery shows, Asia expands**

Related Posts:

- **Middle East heads West: Ayyam Gallery opens in London, Jeddah** – October 2012 – growing prominence of Middle Eastern art prompts new gallery openings in UK and Saudi Arabia
- **Indian Highway: Opening borders of dialogue between China, India – round up** - August 2012 – contemporary art exhibition highlights parallels, contrasts between two developing nations
- **MoMA collects numerous drawings by Hajra Waheed** – February 2012 – reflections on a childhood spent in a Saudi Arabian oil compound
- **Japanese artist Hirotoshi Iwasaki draws time with video – picture feast** – August 2011 – artist looks at time, space and memory through drawing and animation
- **Sri Lankan art on map with Pala Pothupitiye's 2010 Sovereign Asian Art Prize win** – March 2011 – Pothupitiye vows to use prize money to promote Sri Lankan art worldwide

Subscribe to *Art Radar* **for more on contemporary art from South Asia**

This entry was posted in **Book art, Chandraguptha Thenuwara, Colombo, Drawing, Gallery shows, Jagath Weerasinghe, London, Overviews, Political, Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan, War** and tagged **43 Group, Breese Little, Chandraguptha Thenuwara, Colombo Art Biennale, Drawing, drawing exhibition, Henry Little, Jagath Weerasinghe, Josephine Breese, Kristin Franclemont, London art exhibitions, London art galleries, Saskia Fernando, Sri Lankan art**. Bookmark the [permalink](#).