

Grosvenor Gallery x SFG

The Persistence of Memory: Chandraguptha Thenuwara & Jagath Weerasinghe

9 October - 31 October 2025

Premise for Selected Artworks

Chandraguptha Thenuwara and Jagath Weerasinghe's works selected for this presentation draw from their reflections on Sri Lanka's changing political landscape a decade after the civil war.

Both artists' careers have been profoundly shaped by the island's tumultuous contemporary history, marked by ethnolinguistic conflict and political unrest. The works included in this selection, created between 2021 and 2025, respond to recent events, including the global pandemic, the 2022 people's protest movement (Aragalaya) against the Sri Lankan government's economic mismanagement, and the subsequent political transition.

Works by Chandraguptha Thenuwara

The selection of works by Chandraguptha Thenuwara includes two paintings and an earlier series from his 2021 exhibition *Blinds*, along with pieces created in tandem with his recent show *Neo-Glitch* (2025).

Both series are rooted in his earlier *Glitch*, through which the artist likens the persistence of social and political issues, despite changes in government, to distortions on a television screen caused by voltage fluctuations or other disruptions. The corrupted image becomes a metaphor for maladministration. The series laments the absence of political will and accountability, urging citizens to see through corruption and false promises, demand action on socioeconomic issues, and pursue reconciliation.

In *Neo-Glitch*, the artist reflects on the persistence of social and political issues in Sri Lanka despite the changes in government. Thenuwara revisits the series begun in 2016 to delve into the shortcomings of democratically elected systems, as he reflects on the democratic elections of 2024 that marked a seismic shift in the country's political landscape with the rise of a socialist government.

Extending from this visual trajectory, the *Blinds* series explored the political climate of Sri Lanka, with window blinds echoing how the artist, like many others, experienced the world outside through partially obstructed views. The uncertainty of that time, mediated through this metaphor, invites viewers to "read between the lines" and confront their own sociopolitical realities.

The genre of landscape as a site of expression in the artist's work unveils itself as one loaded with political and mythological imagination that has shaped the island's political history. Encompassing the earth filled with greenery and the sky above, Thenuwara's landscapes depart from mere aesthetic contemplation to raise questions about the history of violence and the uncertain socio-political futures embedded within the terrain. By reflecting on the failures and fragilities of democratically elected systems, his distorted terrains probe the unresolved issues of a nation caught between contested identities, economic precarity, and political disillusionment.

The skies, with their shifting colours, which might otherwise signal renewal and hope, also become obscured in *Neo-Glitch: Skyscape*, mirroring the uncertainties that cloud the nation's future.

Harkening back to 1987–89, a period in Sri Lankan history often referred to as *Bheeshanaya* (terror) and marked by extreme violence and bloodshed, *Neo-Glitch: Inescapable Landscape III* urges viewers to reflect on the country's past while imagining its political future.

In addition, Thenuwara highlights Sri Lanka's status as the country with the second-highest number of enforced disappearances in the world. Inspired by the Virgin of Vladimir, the Mother-and-Child motif has been a recurrent theme in Thenuwara's four-decade-long practice. While celebrating the precious bond between mother and child, the partly autobiographical *Blinds: Hope* reflects the anguish of separation experienced by countless mothers and underscores the persistent lack of political accountability and the unresolved pain of families left searching for their loved ones.

Works by Jagath Weerasinghe

Jagath Weerasinghe presents a gradual yet profound shift in his artistic practice, which spans over four decades. While the artist's early works were marked by an inability to comprehend the brutal violence and bloodshed that defined Sri Lanka's post-independence landscape, and by the guilt of witnessing ethno-nationalist violence unfold, his more recent work focuses on the underlying forces that drive such violence.

The artist's gestural language, once dominated by youthful anger and righteous frustration, now captures the disarray and confusion that have characterised his attempt to rationalise the seemingly irreconcilable political and social dilemmas in *Troubled Land*. Taking the often-romanticized image of the island as the 'pearl of the Indian Ocean,' Weerasinghe's *The What Island?* challenges this narrative as he reflects on the complex history of violence and conflict that has shaped the nation.

As the artist contemplates the wars that have erupted across the globe since the pandemic, *Under the Dark Sky: Red Sea* unfolds as an ocean of red, lamenting the countless lives lost in conflicts worldwide. In *Under the Dark Sky: Amidst the Rubble*, the figure in the foreground, with its hand pointed downward in the classical *bhoomispars* gesture, bears witness to the devastation that has razed countries and claimed countless innocent lives. Weerasinghe's works are autobiographical, often positioning himself as both a helpless bystander who passively observes the unfolding chaos and a victim within a flawed system that mobilises religious fervour and rhetoric to perpetuate violence.

The artist's practice continues to evolve into an observation of the systemic issues that perpetuate extremism and violence, offering a critical view of the forces shaping contemporary global conflicts.

Weerasinghe's gestural brushstrokes, sporadic and charged with energy, mirror his attempt to grasp the bewildering and flawed logic behind global liberalism and its repercussions. Through these works, he explores how systemic injustices have created an escalating wave of violence and suffering for innocent people worldwide. His works no longer merely reflect disillusionment but evolve into an observation of the systemic issues that perpetuate extremism and violence, offering a critical view of the forces shaping contemporary global conflicts.