

Portraits of Intervention | Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka
Curated by *Bansie Vasvani*

Exhibition March 31st – April 29th, 2017

Press Preview & V.I.P. Reception: Friday, March 31st 6:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

Aicon Gallery is pleased to present *Portraits of Intervention: Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka*, a group exhibition curated by **Bansie Vasvani**, featuring works by **Pradeep Chandrasiri, Liz Fernando, Janananda Laksiri, Bandu Manamperi, Danushka Marasinghe, Savesan Nallaiah, Anoli Perera, Pala Pothupitiye, Dominic Sansoni, Thisath Thoradeniya, Priyantha Udagedara, M. Vijitharan, and Jagath Weerasinghe.**

Situated off the southern tip of South India, the lush Sri Lankan island has drawn visitors for centuries. But the carnage of the 26-year civil war, which ended in 2009, between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils of the northeast almost tore the country apart. During the most strident phase in the late 1990s artists began to denounce terror, and visual arts took a prominent place as a critical voice. Many artists emerged as political individuals—some as rebels themselves loaded with an anti-establishment rhetoric. They became interventionists in their effort to expose the horrors and the aftermath of the civil war. Much like the voice of the subaltern, contemporary artists in Sri Lanka who felt marginalized and peripheral established their ideas and modes of expression from the consciousness of the outsider. In this way, their art became a radical language of resistance, with the intention of envisioning a space for uncertainty, deliberation, and thought. Many of the artists selected for this exhibition continue to foster this initiative and express their response to the lack of government support for war crime abuses, suppressed violence, inhuman treatment of refugees, women’s exploitation, and dislocation.



Anoli Perera, *Second Skin: Elastic Dress II*, 2010-12, Bra straps, elastic loops and iron brackets, Dimensions variable. Photo by Aaron Burton.

Portraits of Intervention is anchored by a series of works by the artist and theoretician **Jagath Weerasinghe** who coined the phrase “90s trend,” to describe a movement that exposed state sponsored terror, suppression, and insurgency. The collective effort by artists brought together by pain and common loss led to turbulent artistic modes often alluding to brutal violence and the tensions of urban dwelling. As a co-founder of the **Theertha International Arts Collective** in 2000, Weerasinghe was instrumental in shaping the raw expression of art through his own bold inelegant urban paintings of the fallen soldier—a mere pawn in the hands of the authorities-- which captured the here and now. In his recent sketchbooks, Weerasinghe depicts internal conflict and bodily degeneration from the consequences of the war with his trademark effusion of color, energy, and emotion. In these organic drawings, microscopic particles of disease are enlarged and fear is magnified as the male body appears to be dissected with its organs exposed. Weerasinghe’s unmitigated endeavor to forge new methods of art practices that question and upend power provides a framework for the works on display to be understood.

Anoli Perera on the hand other, who was also a founder of Theertha, dwells on women’s issues and the daily entanglement of emotion in a patriarchal world. Her large flowing red dress made with woven elastic, and drawings shaped from old sewing artifacts consecrate the role and place of women still relegated to



Bandu Manamperi, *Golden Barrel Man (Performance Still)*, 2013, C-print on archival paper, 30 x 20 in.

domestic chores. Issues of identity and freedom are formulated through the outline of the female figure in both her works.

Artists like **Pradeep Chandrasiri** and **Bandu Manamperi**, core members of Theertha, positioned their own bodies and lives at the pivot of their art making practices. Chandrasiri's installation references his firsthand encounter with being interrogated, and the work serves as a memorial space for ongoing concealed violence. Images of Manamperi's dynamic performances take the use of the body one step further in the way, for example, he conveys the force of violence by covering himself with Chinese fire crackers.

The body lurks beneath **Priyantha Udagedara's** ostensibly decorative paintings. Alluding to sex workers from the war surreptitiously employed in spas, the artist reveals how their lives and traumas are completely concealed. Bodies and shapes dangle more ominously in **Janananda Laksiri's** digital photographs that hint at the inherent insidiousness of political power. A similar kind of murky unease can be detected in **Danushka Marasinghe's** manipulated found photographs, while **Thisath Thoradeniya's** ironic charcoal drawings suggest human manipulation.

For **Pala Pothupitiye**, a permanent member of Theertha, maps are his *métier*. He uses old and new maps of Sri Lanka to reimagine colonial demarcations as much as he creates dialogues about insurgencies, isolation, and exclusion driven by greed and religious might. Similarly, archival images feature in **Liz Fernando's** diasporic vision of a lost culture.

Loss and the ravages of war bleed through **Dominic Sansoni's** deeply moving photographs of homes in the northern Tamil territory of Jaffna. Simple objects and furniture represent a sense of belonging that still remains inaccessible for many Tamilian's uprooted during the war from the region. This ordeal is expressed with ferocious honesty by the emerging Jaffna artists **Savesan Nalliah's** and **M. Vijitharan's** depiction of mayhem, chaos, and the brutal depredation of women in their hometown.

Yet despite the issue driven nature of the works, contemporary Sri Lankan art is evocative of larger emotions and a transcultural sensibility. Intervention here that plays on ambiguity and deracination is expressed through creativity and self-actualization. The discovery of meaning in their art becomes a process for self-discovery and transformation. It is this approach in which the notion of self and identity merge towards formulating a discussion that embraces the whole of humanity.

Bansie Vasvani is an art critic and writer with a focus on Asian and other non-Western art practices. She investigates contemporary art that mines issues of cultural identity, politics, immigration, and the commingling of varied cultural influences. Bansie travels frequently to Asia and the Middle East to study, research, and write critically. Her work has appeared in *Hyperallergic*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *Aesthetica Magazine*, *Art Review Asia*, *Artnet news*, *Art21 Magazine*, *Daily Serving*, and *Modern Art Asia* amongst other publications. *Portraits of Intervention* follows her co-curated project *Crossing Borders: Seven Short Videos from China and India* that was screened at Anthology Film Archives in 2016.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Andrew@Aicongallery.com) for more information.

Anoli Perera



Anoli Perera

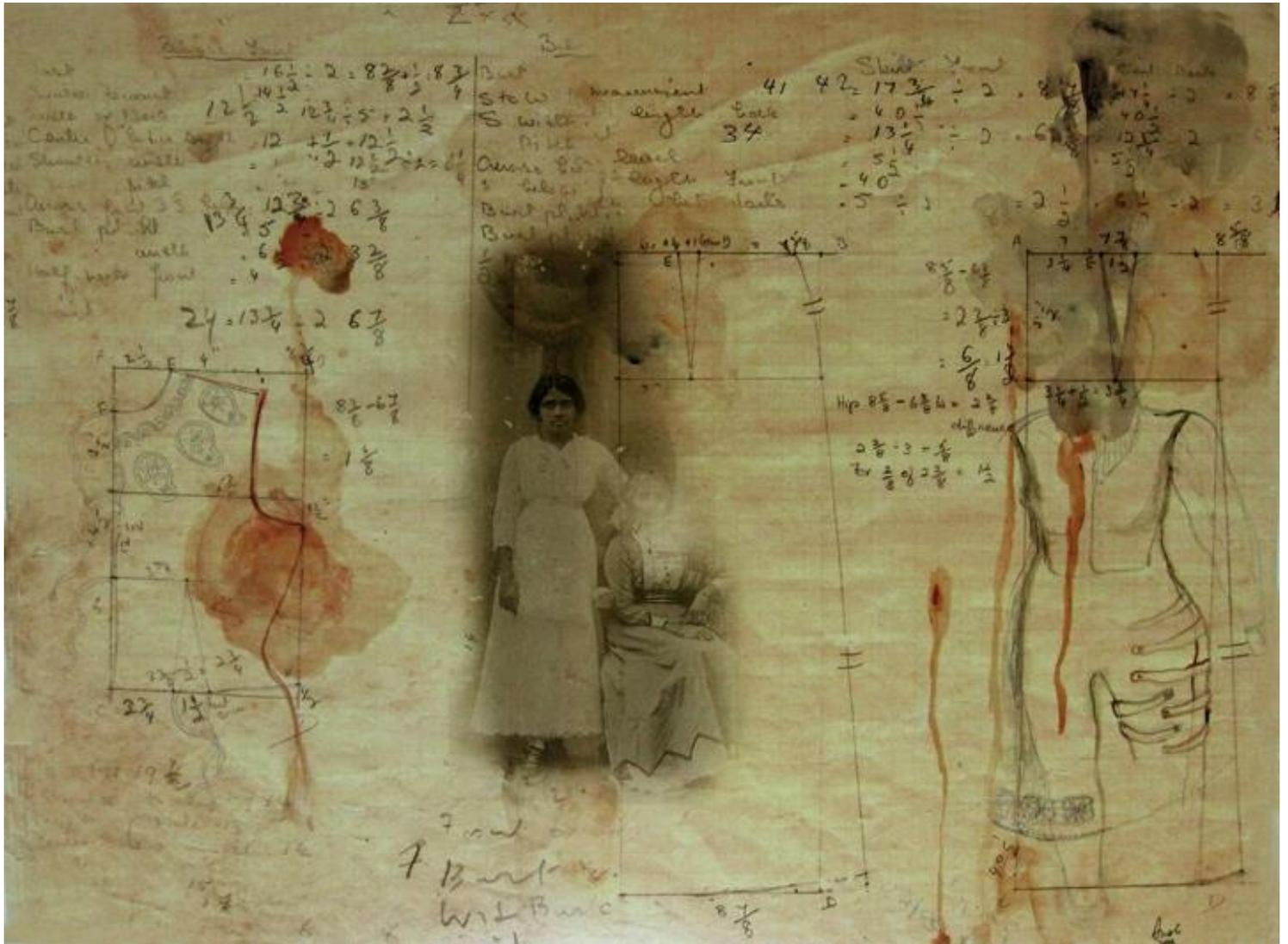
Second Skin: Elastic Dress II

2010-12

Bra straps, elastic loops and iron brackets

Dimensions variable

Anoli Perera



Anoli Perera

Sewing Book Series 1

2013

Print on Hahnemuhle photo rag archival paper, with watercolor, ink, and acrylic
15 x 20 in.

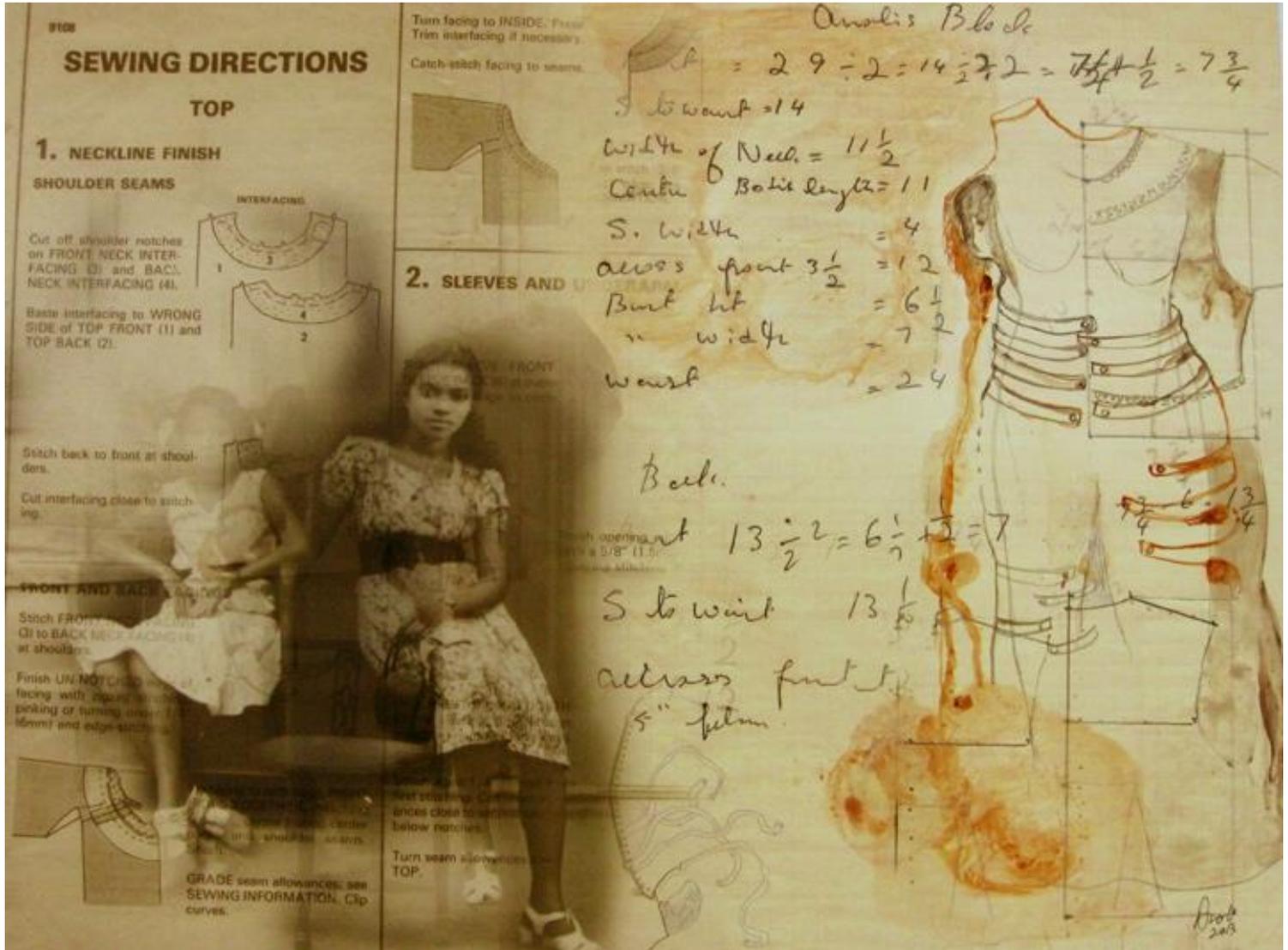
Anoli Perera



Anoli Perera
Sewing Book Series II
2013

Print on Hahnemuhle photo rag archival paper, with watercolor, ink, and acrylic
15 x 20 in.

Anoli Perera



Anoli Perera

Sewing Book Series III

2013

Print on Hahnemuhle photo rag archival paper, with watercolor, ink, and acrylic
15 x 20 in.

Anoli Perera



Anoli Perera

Sewing Book Series IV

2013

Print on Hahnemuhle photo rag archival paper, with

watercolor, ink, and acrylic

15 X 20 in.

Jagath Weerasinghe



Jagath Weerasinghe

Untitled (2)

2016

Acrylic on paper

29.5 x 30 in.

Jagath Weerasinghe



Jagath Weerasinghe

Untitled (1)

2016

Acrylic on paper

39.5 x 39 in.

Jagath Weerasinghe



Jagath Weerasinghe

Celestial Ferver Series

2007

Acrylic on paper

11.5 x 11 in.

Jagath Weerasinghe



Jagath Weerasinghe

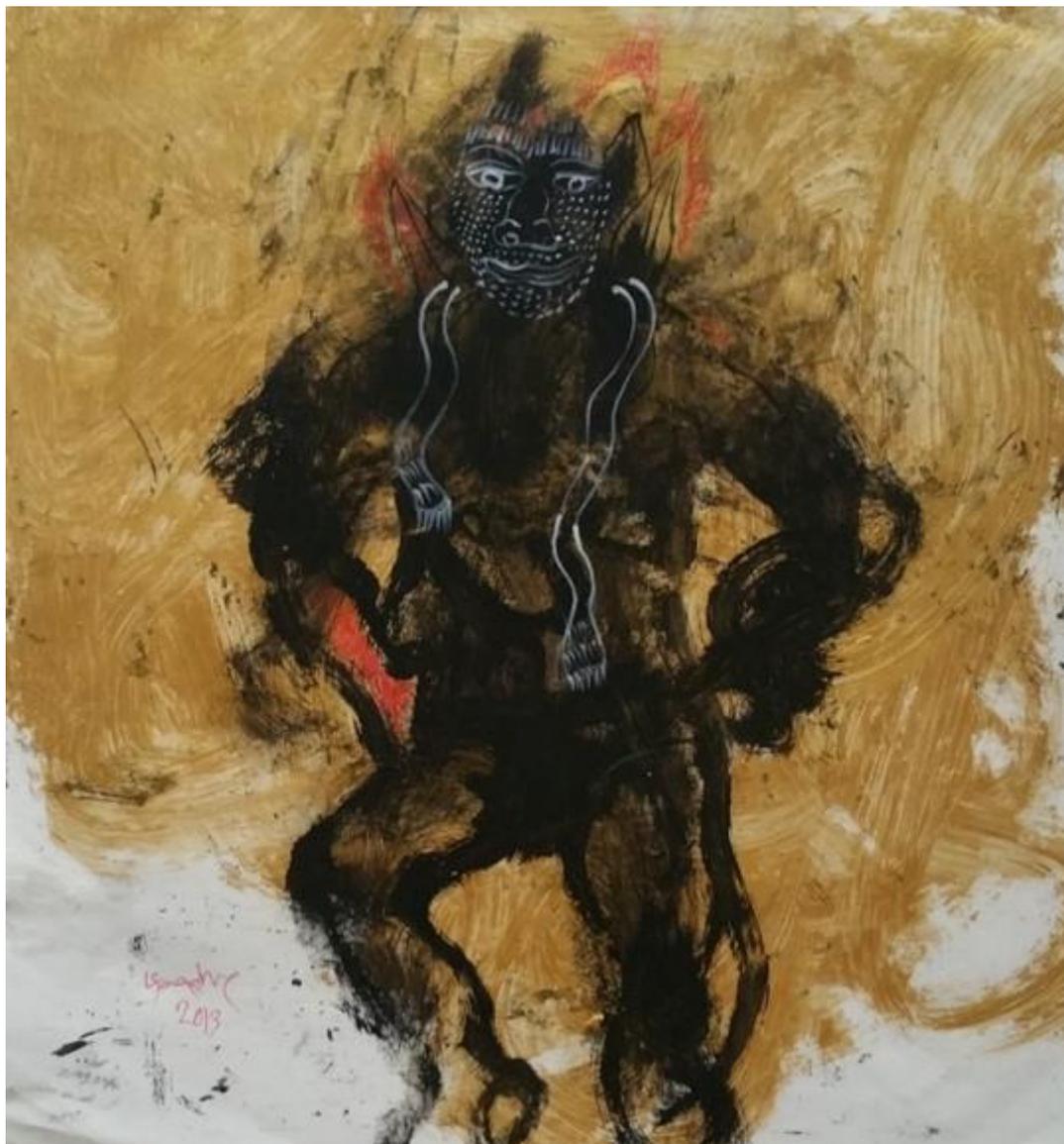
Untitled I

2016

Acrylic on paper

20 x 16 in.

Jagath Weerasinghe



Jagath Weerasinghe
Celestial Ferver Series I
2013

Acrylic on paper
11.5 x 11 in.

Jagath Weerasinghe



Jagath Weerasinghe

Untitled II

2016

Acrylic on paper

20 x 16 in.

Danushka Marasinghe



Danushka Marasinghe

At a Distance

2013

Single-channel HD video

4:35 min,

Danushka Marasinghe



Danushka Marasinghe
Night Watchmen (Ed. 3/5)
2014
Digital print on archival paper
24 x 36 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes I (Ed. Of 3)
2011
C Print on Archival paper
16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes II (Ed. of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes III (Ed. of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes IV (Ed. of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori

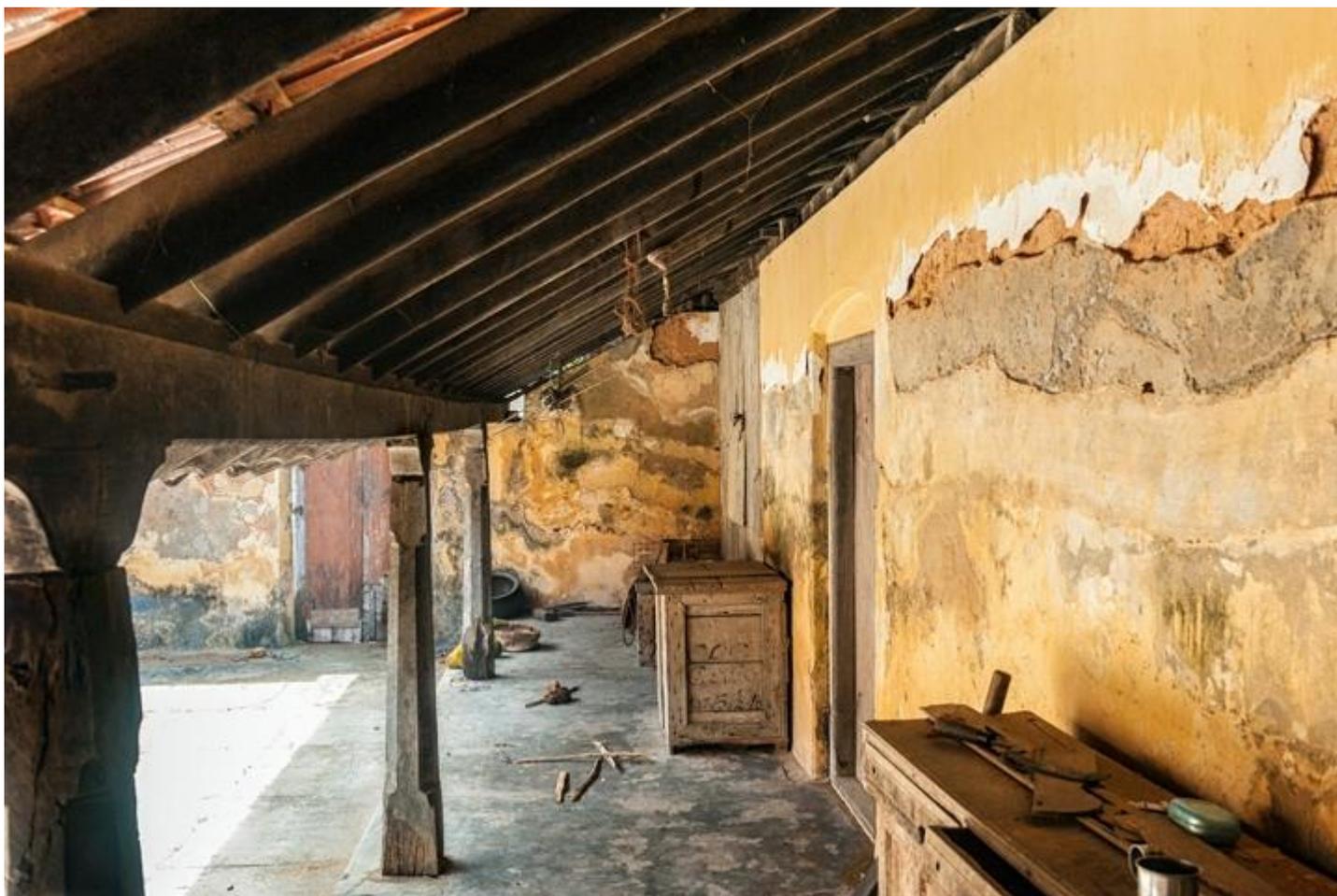
Jaffna Homes V (Ed. of 3)

2011

C-print on archival paper

16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



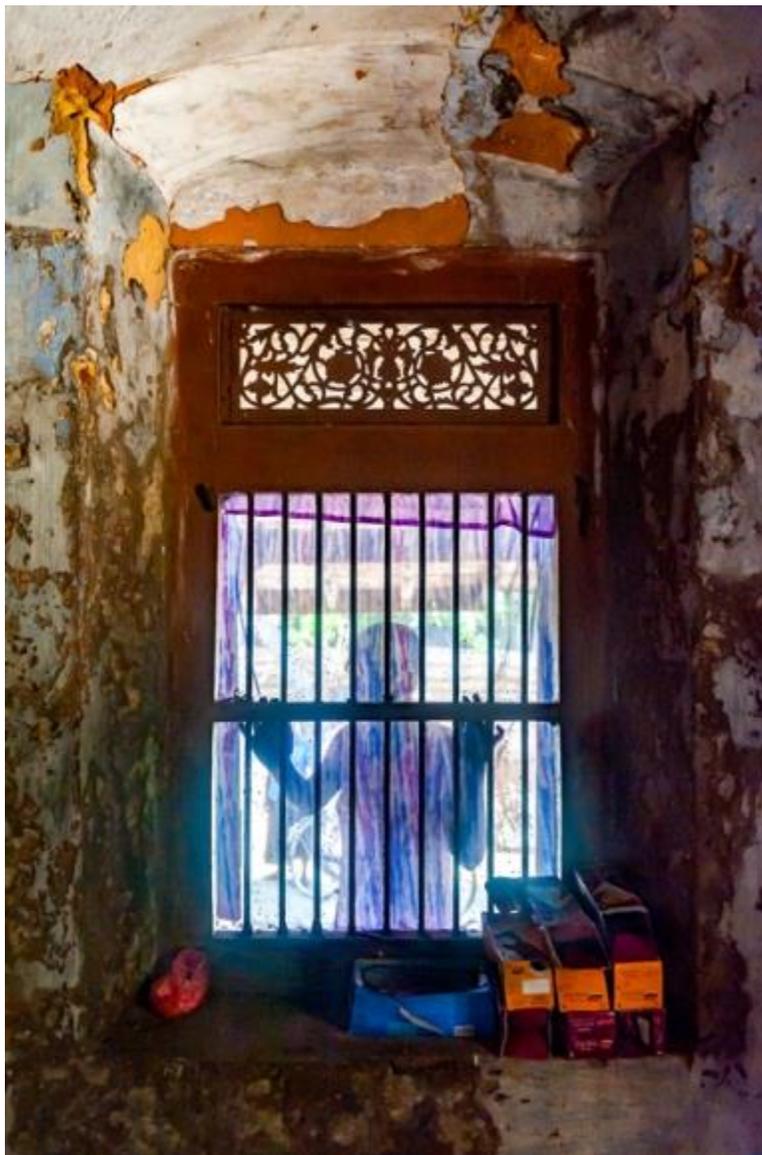
Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes VI (Ed. of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes VII (Ed. of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
16.5 x 23 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes VIII (Ed. Of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
23 x 16.5 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes IX (Ed. Of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
23 X 16.5 in.

Dominic Sansori



Dominic Sansori
Jaffna Homes X (Ed. of 3)
2011
C-print on archival paper
23 X 16.5 in.

Janananda Laksiri



Janananda Laksiri

Untitled (16)

Archival pigment print on archival paper
60 X 40 in.

Janananda Laksiri



Janananda Laksiri

Untitled (18)

Archival pigment print on archival paper

66 x 40 in.

Janananda Laksiri



Janananda Laksiri

Untitled (21)

Archival pigment print on archival paper

30 x 50 in.

Janananda Laksiri



Janananda Laksiri

Untitled (22)

Archival pigment print on archival paper

40 X 66.5 in.

Liz Fernando



Liz Fernando

Passage of Time

2016

Mixed media instillation with photoprints on Japanese paper on glass

Dimensions Variable

M. Vijitharan



M. Vijitharan

Untitled (1)

2016

Mixed media on paper

18 x 31 in.

M. Vijitharan



M. Vijitharan

Untitled (2)

2016

Mixed media on paper

25 x 31 in.

M. Vijitharan



M. Vijitharan

Untitled (3)

2016

Mixed media on paper

30 x 24 in.

M. Vijithiran



M. Vijithiran

Untitled (4)

2016

Mixed media on paper

12 x 16.5 in.

Pala Pothupitiye



Pala Pothupitiye

Galle Map

2015

Acrylic on archival digital print

33 x 52 in.

Pala Pothupitiye



Pala Pothupitiye

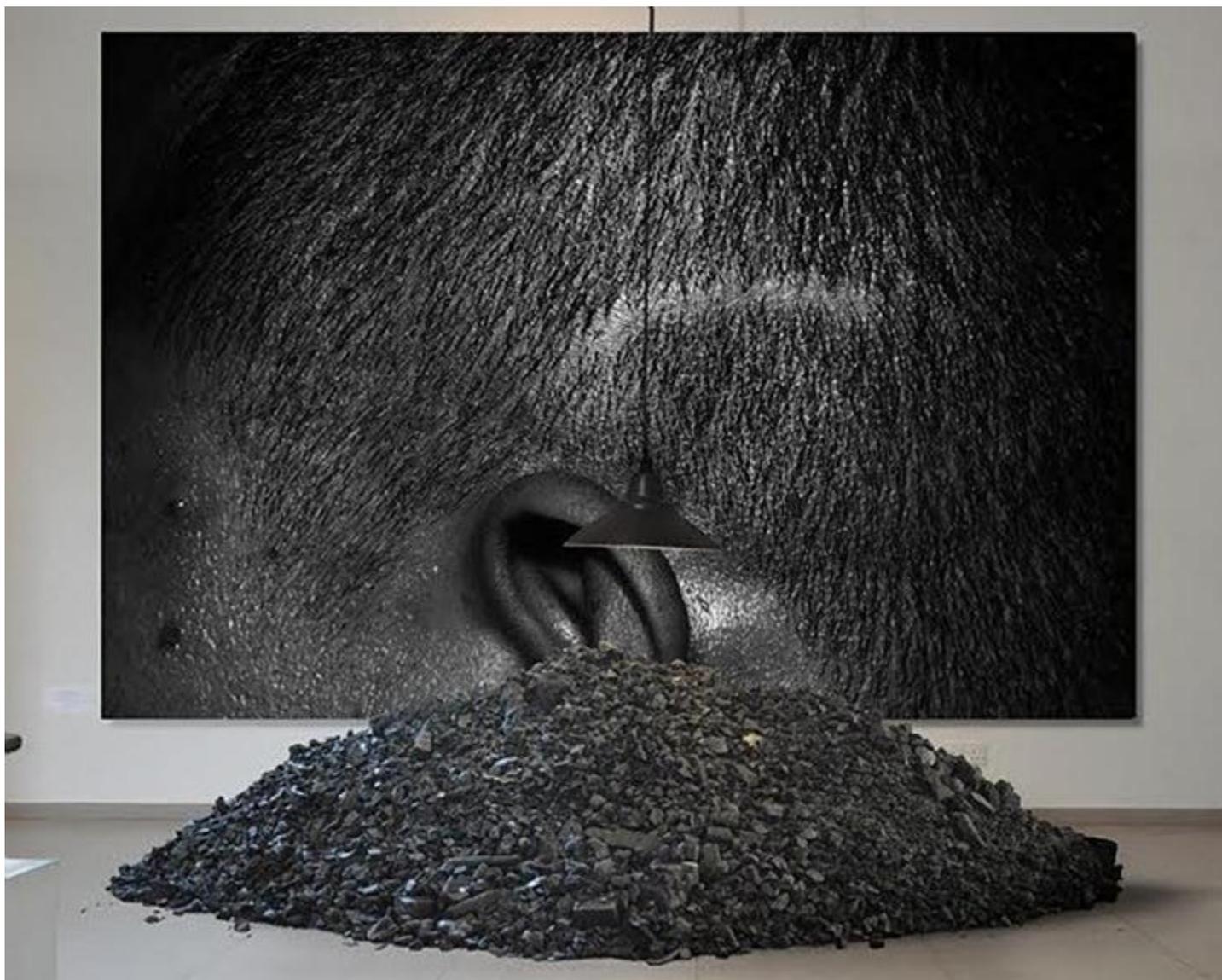
Visakuru Visithuru - Venomous Beauty

2016

Acrylic on canvas

35 x 49 in.

Pradeep Chandrasiri



Pradeep Chandrasiri

Things I Told, Things Not Heard, and Things I Tell Now!

2016

Acrylic, ash, and tumeric on canvas

Dimensions Variable.

Priyantha Udagedara



Priyantha Udagedara

Wanamali

2016

Mixed media on canvas

63 x 43 in.

Priyantha Udagedara



Priyantha Udagedara

Wanamali I

2016

Mixed media on canvas

63 x 43 in.

Priyantha Udagedara



Priyantha Udagedara

Wanamali II

2016

Mixed media on canvas

63 x 43 in.

Savesan Nalliah



Savesan Nalliah

Flesh I

Acrylic on canvas

82.5 x 47 in.

Savesan Nalliah



Savesan Nalliah

Flesh II

2016

Acrylic on canvas

48.5 x 73 in.

Thisath Thoradeniya



Thisath Thoradeniya

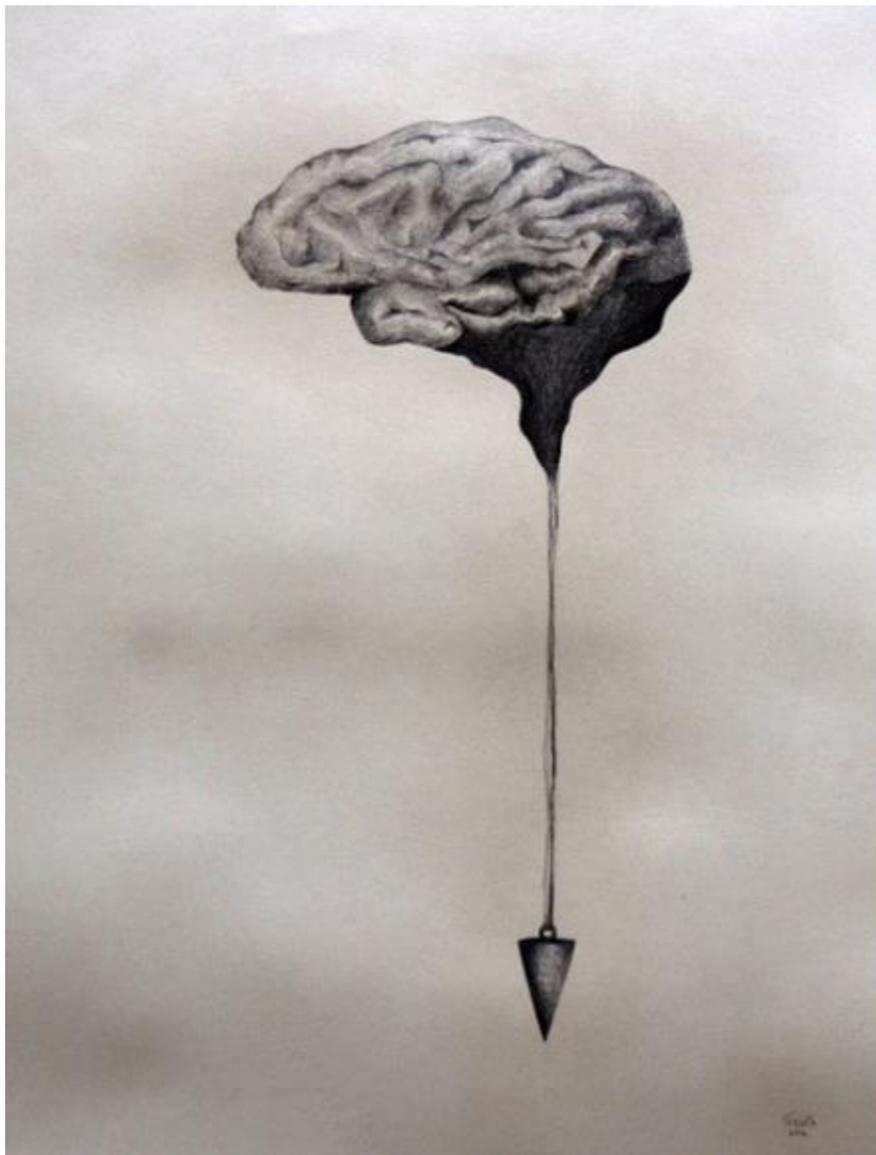
The Last Drop

2016

Fiber cast with gypsona, iron, and brass

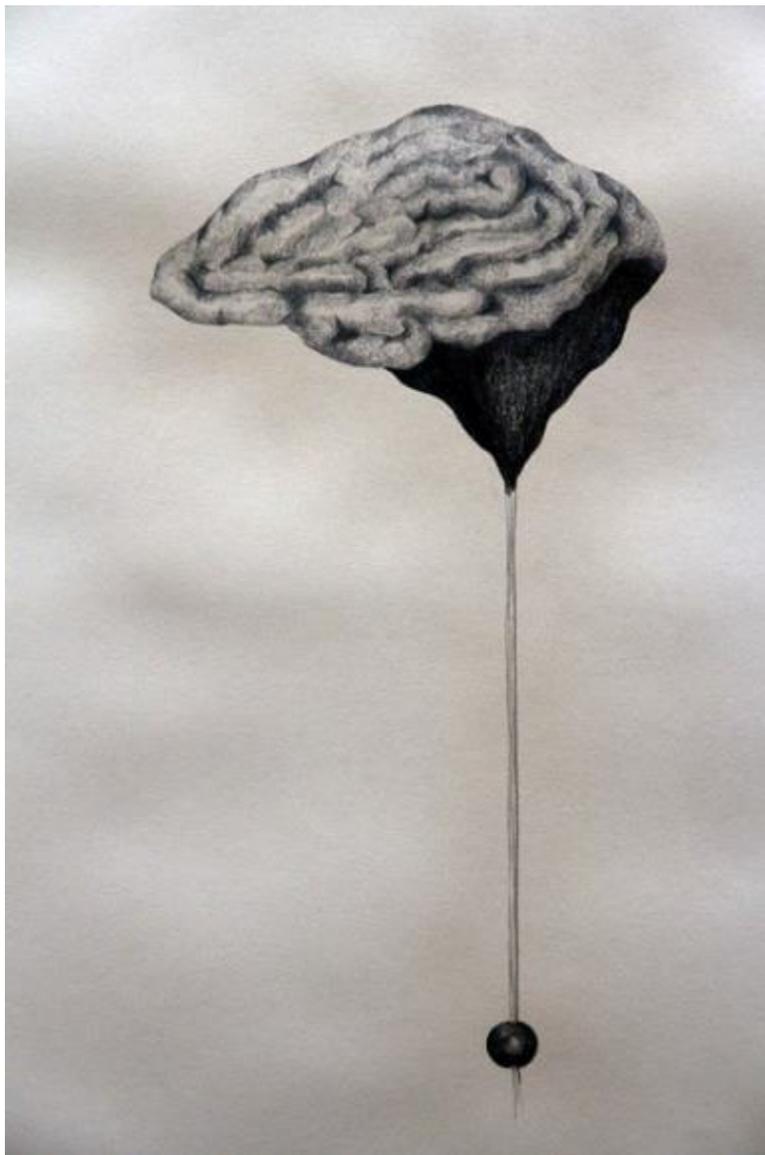
9 x 21.5 X 8.5 in.

Thisath Thoradeniya



Thisath Thoradeniya
Gray Matter III
2016
Graphite on acid free paper
31.5 X 25.5 in.

Thisath Thoradeniya



Thisath Thoradeniya
Gray Matter IV
2016
Graphite on acid-free paper
31.5 x 25.5 in.

Bandu Manamperi



Bandu Manamperi
Bandaged Body (Performance Still)
2003
C-print on archival paper
20 x 30 in.

Bandu Manamperi



Bandu Manamperi
Highly Explosive (Performance Still)
2010
C-print on archival
20 x 30 in.

Bandu Manamperi



Bandu Manamperi
Golden Barrel Man (Performance Still)
2013
C-print on archival paper
30 X 20 in.

Bandu Manamperi



Bandu Manamperi
Perforated Body (Performance Still)
2008
C-print on archival paper
30 x 20 in.