***Ritualising the Disfigured: Memorials of Healing from Sri Lanka***

Recent works by Chathuri Nissansala

**New Delhi, August 12th 2021:**Presented by Anant Art gallery *Ritualising the Disfigured: Memorials of Healing from Sri Lanka* is an online, solo show featuring works by Chathuri Nissansala at www.anantart.com

*The war has ended*

*and we can breathe better now,*

*The war has ended*

*but in a short time*

*we forget everything,*

*everything-*

*and all that flesh!*

*-Shiromi Subasinghe*

A survivor of the civil unrest that scarred the landscape of Sri Lanka for three decades, Shiromi Subasinghe, in her poetry, reminds us of the stakes of forgetting the acts of violence and injustice that her country continues to struggle with. Now adorned with war memorials, the entire landscape of Sri Lanka gives a dubious account of history, highlighting the victory of some, and burying the truth, pain and suffering of the others. While multiple events of brutality in the past continue to be brushed under the carpet, wounds resurrect every time the country witnesses more acts of terrorism and loss of innocent lives, like during the Easter day bombings in 2019.

Chathuri Nissansala’s artistic oeuvre furthers the inquiry raised by her mother, Shiromi. As a second-generation civilian, a witness to the civil war and its impact on contemporary politics and social culture, her multidisciplinary practice questions the subjects of nationalism, patriarchy, and religion in Sri Lanka. While investigating the complex politics of post-war memory and the subsequent dissemination of post-truths, Chathuri comes to terms with her own identity by revisiting, recovering and bridging the turbulent past of Sri Lanka with her present condition.

For her recent body of works, Chathuri steps into the shoes of an archaeologist scavenging for overlooked, discarded and disfigured figurines of idols at various locations in Sri Lanka that have witnessed mass acts of violence. Her reinterpretation of these material remains from Kochchikade, Dehiwela, Jaffna, Biyagama, Wattala and Kelaniya, sites marked as popular destinations of dark tourism, raise poignant questions about the politics involved in their commodification and mass subversion of the truth.

Considered bad omens or possessed by evil spirits, these allegedly maligned objects are often immediately discarded from any ritual practice and worship at either home or religious sites. Chathuri changes the fate of these broken embodiments by turning them into memorials that testify and heal the political turmoil associated with them. As she invokes motifs and patterns embroidered with colourful beads based on the healing folk rituals of Matara in Sri Lanka, she not only puts a salve on these mutilated sculptures but also, herself and a generation of Sri Lankans who continue to battle with the shifting sands of the country’s political scenario since the last four decades.

Chathuri borrows from her apprenticeship under Somapala Pothupitiya, one of the last descendants of the Navandanne caste, skilled in the costume-making tradition of Matara, that are stitched as a part of exorcist rituals. Her engagement with intricate analogies and technical skills to sew these ceremonial costumes extends their possibility of being redefined in the present domain, blurring the distinction between folk and contemporary art and invoking the rich cultural heritage of Sri Lanka. By embellishing these found, defaced idols with traditional embroidery, her sculptures enact similar ritualistic performances that imbibe them with a new life and a chance to carry the message of peace and hope across the country.

* Oorja Garg

**About the artist:**

Chathuri Nissansala (b.1993, Colombo) is a multidisciplinary artist working

with performance art, painting, sculpture and graphics. Her works raise poignant

questions about notions of gender, class and nationalism in Sri Lanka. A recipient of

the Commonwealth Scholarship, South East Asia by Indian Council for

Cultural Relations, ICCR (2012), Chathuri acquired a Bachelor in Fine Arts (Painting)

from Chitra Kala Parishath, Bengaluru (2017) and Master in Visual Arts (Painting)

from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara (2019).

She has performed and exhibited across Asia, some of these include Responses to

Memory, curated by Oorja Garg at Gillehri Arts Initiative (2020); 15th Virtual Concert:

Celebrating Women’s Month in South Africa, curated by Bernadette Muthien

(2020); Umnyama 2020, curated by Pranamita Borgohain and organized by Young

Hearts, India (2020); Lock Unlock: Edition 9 organised by Dagmar Glaustnitzer Smith

(2020); Webinars organised by Huxxyduxxybox performance art collective

including The Action Poetry, curated by Frank Bready Trejo (2020); Be-coming

Tree, curated by Jatun Risba, O.Pen, Danielle Imara and Chris Grady (2020)

and Performance Art Project: Asia in collaboration with Rah Residency, Iran (2020).

She also participated in the Student’s Biennale, Kochi Muziris Biennale, India

(2016).

She has participated in various workshops and residences including a series

of online conversations Chronicles of Confinement, organised by Hector

Canonge, New York (2020); Artsathone, organised by British Council, Colombo, Sri

Lanka (2019) and Body workshop, facilitated by Nikhil Chopra and Madhavi Ghore,

organised by HH Art space in collaboration with Asia Art Archive and Serendipity

Art Foundation, Vadodara (2017).

Currently, she is carrying out her apprenticeship under artist Somapala

Pothupitiye and learning the traditional practice of costume-making at Mullegama Art

Centre (MAC), Colombo, Sri Lanka.

**About Anant Art gallery:**

Established in the early 2000s, Anant Art gallery has been one of the leading galleries in promoting contemporary South Asian art practices. Since its inception, it has engaged with a cross-section of young and established artists, providing multiple venue exhibitions, residencies and art fair representations. Aesthetically inclined towards the miniature technique and conceptually robust artworks, our vision is to promote various art forms in collaboration, and facilitate a new generation of art collectors and patrons by a meticulously curated platform.

**The show will be on view from 12th August to 12th September, 2021 at www.anantart.com**

For further information, contact us at contact@anantart.com, or call us at 9205809630

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