Searching for Discomfort

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Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia,
Volume 1, Number 1, March 2017, pp. 187-201 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2017.0006>

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Searching for Discomfort

Sharmini Pereira with research assistance from P. Kirubalini

I

To be curious about the myriad relationships between historical knowledge and memory leads inevitably, in one way or another, to their collection and storage in some kind of physical form, however notional this might be. Here records will remain, stacked, shelved, filed in boxes, catalogued by codes and abstracted into 10- or 12-digit abbreviations. Waiting in lines, queues or piles, they take their position in an ever-increasing data bank of meta-information, perpetually linked to the past yet adequately disembodied to have currency in the present. Here they wait in a space of taxonomic darkness—until the request to be read, consulted or analysed awakens the record's exploratory potential to retrieve, remind and reassign perceived registers of knowledge anew. Herein lie the workings of the archive and the continuums of knowledge, understanding and, lest we forget, fabrication that move in and out of its clutches. The archive's preoccupation with grasping pieces of an ever-growing totality makes it unlike any other information system. The incompleteness of any archive is not an inadequacy but its strength and compulsive charm. This compulsion, Derrida tells us, is a kind of sickness, a *mal d'archive*¹ which underlines a widespread malaise in all of us to search for hidden truths, believing them to exist somewhere in the stacks and piles of the archive, even though we know this is just an illusion no matter how long we search, how much we search or how determined we are to find what we are looking for.

II

In November 2015 a researcher visited the Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design to conduct a keyword search for the word

[**Southeast of Now**
Vol. 1 No. 1 (March 2017), pp. 187–201]

“discomfort” from a selection of materials of their choosing. Research was limited to printed matter in English and included the following synonyms: ache, annoyance, displeasure, disquiet, embarrassment, hardship, soreness, trouble, uneasiness, distress, inquietude, malaise, nuisance, upset and vexation. The antonym “comfort” was also included. The research was limited to and conducted over seven days. The search results are listed below, ordered in the manner in which they were found, all of which are accompanied by their cataloguing number within the Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture and Design.

Sasanka Perera, *Artists Remember, Artists Narrate: Memory and Representation in Contemporary Sri Lankan Visual Arts* (Colombo: Colombo Institute for the Advanced Study of Society and Culture, 2012). SLACAAD 709.95493PER

“His installation created a sense of culturally induced **discomfort** in at least one exhibition. One recorded instance was, when his works were included in an exhibition of contemporary artworks of a number of Sri Lankan artists in the Colombo office of the German Technical Corporation between February and April 2004.” (p. 69)

“Nevertheless, despite such well-known examples to the contrary, the relationship between art and politics within modernism has been difficult while a lingering **discomfort** in mixing politics with art has endured (Landauer 2006: 1). This was mostly due to the perceived risk an artist has to take in venturing into politics through his art which might be interpreted as banal or naïve (Landauer 2006: 1).” (p. 7)

“This has mostly come about as a result of being imprisoned within the modernist credo of art that was ambiguous or **uncomfortable** with art that dealt with politics.” (p. 9)

“They were painted black and midnight blue....and with such compositions Jagath had brought out a very **disquieting** truth about these instruments of communication.” (p. 29)

“The kind of art that the Ceylon Society of Arts represented has been described by Weeraratne as ‘a manner of painting that perpetuated the tastes and ideals of an English middle class that was **embarrassingly** simplistic, and often sentimental and at best naïve’ (Weeraratne 1993: 13).” (p. 20)

“Dissanayaka also situated Shanaathanan’s work in the larger global context marked by political violence when he noted that ‘he is an artist for our time, and of our time, not only Sri Lanka, but for the **troubled** world in which we now live’ (*Ceylon Daily News*, July 1996).” (p. 32)

Artists Remember, Artists Narrate: Memory and Representation in Sri Lankan Visual

immediately touched by this chaos. At the time the exhibition was held (2006), it was not too long ago that the battle for Sampur and Mavil Aru and the early spectacular military successes in the most recent bout of choreographed violence between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE enthralled many individuals who were glued to their television sets as if they were watching a series of war movies. It is precisely in this kind of context that television programs bring into local living rooms news bulletins, live coverage of events, experts' commentaries and interpretations, candle light vigils of 'professional' protestors and so on that one can watch in comfort and security while enjoying the evening tea or scotch as the case might be. It is in that same comfort zone that many ordinary individuals become military experts and political pundits making their own trivial opinions that would make no difference to the people who are directly at the receiving end of violence. Many individuals have become cheering spectators of their own destruction not really fathoming what is actually going on. This then is essentially the crux of the narrative that the two artists were narrating. Their hope was that while the exhibition was ongoing, the people who entered the Lionel Wend Gallery would go into the mock living room, browse through newspapers and watch television while being relatively oblivious to the sounds and scenes of destruction evident in the overall structure of the maze. Some did exactly this. But others had a more attractive distraction on the opening night. The foods and drinks available to visitors at one corner of the gallery proved to be a highly successful attraction in the context of which the awe of the destruction and the depth of narrative that the very vocal exhibit was attempting to narrate was drowned and marginalized from the collective vision and perhaps the conscience of the spectators. It was quite clear that over-consumption had the capacity to subvert senses of many citizens. Constantine and Manamperi were hoping this would in fact happen that would further prove their point.

In addition, as part of the national security regime that had emerged in Colombo, the Police Department on its own accord had mounted its own performance to augment the work of the two artists. They were diligently ensuring that no car was parked outside the gallery, and in fact hardly allowed individuals to slow down their vehicles. When the rain poured down it appeared that the constables abandoned their performance indicating perhaps that their script contained a Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the LTTE that no bombs would be transported, installed or exploded when it rains. When taken as performances however, the impromptu performances of the Police Department and the hungry public were more dynamic in making the arguments that the two artists were attempting to articulate than the staged performance of the artists itself.

It seems that rather than a mere commentary on the politics of our times, the artwork of Manamperi and Constantine was a scaled down simulation of our times, politics, collective lack of wisdom and structural amnesias. Indeed we are in a maze where reality is not seen for what it is. In that maze, television would always be the purveyor of fabricated news as truth and people would be the spectators. In the **comfort** of our living rooms, these are mere flickering moments that do not touch most people while most would hardly ponder to think about those directly involved, touched and hurt.

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"The association he makes between the words of the Buddha and the **unpleasantness** of war and destruction is clear enough." (p. 96)

"In the **comfort** of our living rooms, these are mere flickering moments that do not touch most people while most would hardly ponder to think about those directly involved, touched and hurt." (p. 98)

Malsha Fernando, *Scrap Book of Chandrajeewa, Newspapers & Magazines Collection from 1985–2010* (Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd, 2011). SLACAAD 730.925493FER

"Whenever an exhibition like Chandrajeewa's ends, I become **painfully** conscious of the lack of Gallery possessing permanent collection of this country's modern Art." (p. 66)

Ruwan Laknath Jayakody, *The Power of Sri Lanka Art 1943–2012* (Galle: Sri Serendipity Publishing House, 2012). SLACAAD 709.95493JAY

“Another figure, but this time a female in a bluish tinge, raises her frail skeleton, gasping for water like a leech pecking on skin to latch on (it must be mentioned that these gothic postures and grotesque gestures are not sex positions found in “the perfumed garden” or “Kama sutra”) while the figure from the mirror, now in a somnambulist trance, rests in a mummy’s crypt set against the blackish overcast blue of the sky at night with gleaming stars like chattering mice interlocked, while another man, once again slave-like, arms and legs hacked-off, his form draped on the floor in a state of **discomforting** abjection, decaying groin exposed, the blunted ends of his chopped humerus raised as if trying to shy away from light like the sun struck half man creature from Murnau’s *Nosferatu* in its last moments. The air is one of **unease** and apprehension, a portending of horrors, spiritual and ghostly all, which mirrors in an uncanny sense an alarming similarity to the claustrophobically vast denseness found in

Edward Hopper's work, along with the kind of dead to the world situations and hopeless characters found in an universe populated by post-modernists such as Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, the unrest of Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Natsume Soseki, Mesao Kume, Naoya Shiga and the Carcasses of Patricia Highsmith. This is the world of Kelum Chandrasekara's art, the world of a tortoise venturing outside its shell and ducking back into its terror soaked nightmare of being buried alive, suffocating on a shattered reality, like Buddha upon seeing the sick, the ageing, the dead and the ascetic – the desolation of our grimaces and wincing, our pangs and crashes into other beings and as a child like Morpheus descends upon our **troubled** days.” (p. 68)

“Nelun only paints things about which she is **distressed** and unhappy.” (p. 116)

“Bringing in personal elements to her art very much like Louise Bourgeois did, Anoli manages to unravel motivations, trepidations, ambiguities and problems while retaining a quality that unveils itself in **disquieting** modes, moods, and semblances which leaves a weighted sense of opposition suspended, making way for **uncomfortable** realities to surface and break through the veneer and sheen of conventional expectations.” (p. 217)

“While asserting that ‘becoming’ is ‘A moment where my thinking processes namely “**restlessness**”, “anti – conformity”, “curiosity”, “critic”, “intervention” finally come together which becomes a space of creativity in process.’” (p. 217)

“Not just war, but everything about the extent of the war, even so far away from the ‘warzone’ and I mainly looked at how it was all **uncomfortable** for us, from the road restrictions due to continual security checks, traffic cones and bombs going off.” (p. 226)

"In most cases the violence of an artist's work and its subject matter suffocates the viewer by the grip of chokehold, but rarely, very rarely does the work's beauteous **malaise** escape untangled through the barb wired fortress of art theory and hope remains not strangled, here in Vaidehi Raja's, she has achieved what seems to be the impossible." (p. 232)

"He has lived through the early demise of both his parents, the violent deaths two of his close friends (two brothers who were both shot separately one week apart) and seen his elder brother have his own marital **troubles**." (p. 270)

"In 1998 he joined the Sri Lanka University of Visual Arts and immediately had to face a severe mentally **distressing** problem, one of being ostracized." (p. 270)

"The impressionistic brushstrokes of this piece give a clear indication of disjointed emotions contained within. The central figure, imprisoned within the firm grasp of the fist, remains faceless and androgynous – a humanization of a community's constraint and **distress**." (p. 355)

Sylvia S. Kasprzycki and Doris Stambrau (eds.), *Artful Resistance, Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka* (Altenstadt, Germany: ZKF Publishers, 2010). SLACAAD 709.95493ART

“But however **vexed** the problem is, it cannot be bypassed whenever one tries to ‘understand’ or to ‘read’ the kind of art that was produced in the 20th century and labeled ‘modern’ in societies like Sri Lanka.” (p. 13)

“Writing on 20th century modernist art in countries like Sri Lanka demands an attempt to define the **tension**-loaded relationship between modernization and nationalism.” (p. 13)

“Her subsequent exhibition and large installation works (dinner six and comfort zone) have further probed into **uncomfortable** positioning of women in society, especially focusing on middle class women.” (p. 54)

“In this context, it is worth remarking that women’s ‘**uncomfortable** position in the society’ also extends to their artistic ambitions: ‘as a woman in Sri Lanka, you are not encourage to be an artist... every body is telling you to be a professional.’” (p. 70)

Neville Weeraratne, *43 Group—A Chronicle of Fifty Years in the Art of Sri Lanka* (Melbourne: Lantana, 1993). SLACAAD 709.95493WEE

“It had **embarrassed** him before the Peradeniya University community.” (p. 3)

“A kind of **malaise** hung over the country to be punctuated only by two fierce expressions of discontent, the first in 1848 – the so called Kandyan rebellion – and in 1915.” (p. 7)

“Unfortunately what the Ceylon society of Art entrenched was a manner of painting that perpetuated the tastes and ideals of an English middle-class that was **embarrassingly** simplistic.” (p. 13)

“He told with enormous glee of **discomfiture** of Dr. G.P. Malsekhara.” (p. 120)

Sasanka Perera (ed.), *South Asia Journal for Culture*, vol. 1 (Colombo: Colombo Institute for the Advanced Study of Society and Culture and Theertha International Artist’s Collective, 2008). SLACAAD 709.95493SOU

“Apparently, Archchi had become a **nuisance** to this crowd as he treated them with disrespect, ordering them around and **embarrassing** them with rude criticism.” (p. 40)

“A senior Ratnayaka told me that Hatton had withdrawn from the community perhaps because he was **embarrassed** about his own conduct.” (p. 41)

“It is interesting that Hatton’s pratibha to detect the cosmic anubhava was

not present in him in social situations. Perhaps, in some individuals, pratibha occurs at times of **distress** only as it in Hatton's case because they lack Vasana to develop pratibha needed to detect the dhvani in their own actions in everyday life that might produce hostile reaction in others." (p. 46)

Art South Asia—The First International Program of Visual Culture from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (SHISA, 2002). SLACAAD 705. 95493ART

"However steep the contours of this debate are, the more **disquieting** questions that arise seem ultimately to stem back to connotations of categorizing art and craft under the western canon simply by the fact that the division itself, of beauty and use, intellectual pleasure and vulgar joy of recognition, preserve as well as demonstrate the privileged view of the cognoscenti." (p. 47)

Lionel Wendt—A Centennial Tribute, The Lionel Wendt Memorial Fund, Colombo, 2000. SLACAAD 770.925493WEN

“One recalls with delight many such explosive attacks, which must have caused incautious critics considerable **discomfiture**.” (p. 41)

Tariq Jazeel, *Sacred Modernity, Nature, Environment and the Postcolonial Geographies of Sri Lankan Nationhood* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013)

“*Paradise* is an aesthetic illusion of sorts, and in this very sense speaks to what I have been suggesting through this part of the book is the tropical modernity’s aesthetic seduction; a seduction that in fact hides a much more uneasy **discomfort**.” (p. 163)

“We can read this **discomfort** both in terms of the classed exclusions that Lunuganga undeniably instantiates, but also and in the context of my arguments, given the Artist’s Shanathanan’s own biography we can read this **discomfort** in terms of the ethicized politics and conditions of hospitality embedded within the estate’s aesthetic composition.” (p. 164)

Fareed Uduman, *Fareed Uduman, Paintings, Poems and Cartoons* (Colombo: Zeppelin Advertising Service, 2005). SLACAAD 750.92095493UDU

“My father was an enigma and sometimes an **embarrassment** to most of his family and friends.” (p. 5)

Neville Weeraratne, *George Beven—A Life in Art* (London: Amici Dance Theatre Company, 2004). SLACAAD 750.92095493WEE

“For all but the most intrepid the steps were faltering and insecure, often **embarrassingly** native and clumsy.” (p. 7)

Neville Weeraratne, *Art of Richard Gabriel* (Colombo: Moosajees, 1999). SLACAAD 750.92095493WEE

“Fortunately for him the letter telling him about the award arrived ten days late and so he was saved the **embarrassment** of having to receive it in person.” (p. vi)

“At international showings of their work they have won prizes and the praise of discerning critics much to the **discomfort** of their conservative, local dissenters.” (p. 3)

Tribute to a Father

My father was an extraordinary man. During his lifetime he painted dozens of startlingly original, vibrant and (at times) surreal paintings: that were untitled, undated, unsigned and unframed. He painted on cardboard, hardboard, plywood or on any other material he could lay his hands on. He nailed these to the wall and painted beautiful pictures that nobody understood. Most of them ended up behind cupboards and doors cobwebbed, dusty and forgotten. Pieces of his life, heart and soul; the unquenchable fire that raged within. Most of his early works have sadly perished. Some were gifted and now hang overseas. In the sixties he was fleetingly captured by *Nilhal Fernando* who exhibited some of his paintings at "Studio Times". After he died in 1985 I began this wondrous journey of collecting his paintings, dusting, repairing and framing them. Some paintings were used to replace broken windowpanes! One had pictures on both sides! I could not believe what I saw. I knew he was gifted and special.

Laki Senanayake walked into my home one day, saw these paintings and was amazed that nobody had seen them. He gave me the confidence and courage to arrange an exhibition at *Gallery 706* in June 1993. Laki aptly named it "*Odd Man Out*". The exhibition was excellent. The comments in the visitor's book were indeed a pleasure to read. The paintings were not for sale. Everyone wanted to know why he was unknown in the "circuit" when he was alive. I had no answers. *Ellen Dissanayake* wrote a wonderful review, which was published in the *Sunday Observer*. This is reproduced elsewhere in the book and also deals with his technique and originality: subjects that I am not competent to write about. During the years after the exhibition I retrieved another 6 paintings, which are also included in this book. I had to title all the paintings with my own perceptions of them, helped by some hazy recollections of discussions we had during or after a painting.

In or around 1971 "*The Nation*" a LSSP weekly ran a cartoon competition, which my father won week after week and was finally retained as their Cartoonist. These cartoons, which I managed to retrieve, are also presented here and show his remarkable awareness of local and world politics and his (obvious) communistic leanings. His other writings were penned in a fat blue monitor's exercise book from where I have selected ten poems he had written during his lifetime. They give us a glimpse into his private world.

My father was an enigma and sometimes an embarrassment to most of his family and friends. He remained a zealous non-conformist right up to the end. Although born a Muslim he called himself a humanist, an atheist, a communist and a rationalist. Essentially an urbanite, he rarely ventured out. Most of his paintings thus seem to be manifestations of experiences and images captured in the city. He was a voracious reader of Science, Politics, Philosophy, Religion, Medicine, Literature and Art. The knowledge he accumulated during his lifetime was incredible.

This final tribute to him comes with some sadness. That he was never recognized for his art, his profound love and what he stood up for in his life. Nobody reached out far enough to free him. But he selflessly reached beyond all parameters to free people from pain, to shield the weak from the strong and to offer his bruised shoulder for anybody to lean on. I hope this book will bring his spirit alive - again.

Jomo Uduman
166/1, Rampart Road,
Etul-Kotte, Sri Lanka.

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"This is the sort of friend we have lost,' lamented Gabriel, 'a man who though himself in great **distress** was still solicitous of his neighbor's need.'" (p. 27)

Neville Weeraratne, *The Sculpture of Tissa Ranasinghe* (Colombo: The National Trust, Sri Lanka, 2013). SLACAAD 730.9254931WEE

"These have a fluidity and an urgency that overcomes **embarrassment** and hesitation." (p. 44)

"The smith, or founder, is a master of fire. It is with the fire that he controls the passage of matter from one state to another... and is an art that should be practiced by one who is accustomed to the sweat and many **discomforts** which it brings... he who wishes to practice this art must not be of a weak nature, either from age or constitution, but must be young, strong and vigorous... in

the same techniques as had been used in the theatre murals. The design was a composite of the many attractions of Sri Lanka presented for the edification and pleasure of the tourist.

The bronze bas-relief plaque presented to the International Court of Justice at The Hague in the Netherlands was unveiled after many months of waiting on 4 February 2000. It measures 120cm x 60cm and is called *The Peaceful Resolution of Disputes*. A gift of the Government of Sri Lanka, the plaque illustrates an incident narrated in the ancient Sinhala chronicle, the *Mahavamsa*, concerning a visit of the Buddha to the island.

According to the chronicle, the Buddha in his lifetime visited Sri Lanka on three occasions, to Sumanakuta mountain (Siri Pada – Adam's Peak), the island of Nagadipa off Jaffna, and finally to Kelaniya. It was at Nagadipa that the Buddha preached on the subject of concord. The *Mahavamsa* account begins as follows:

"The most compassionate Teacher, the Conqueror, rejoicing in the salvation of the whole world, when dwelling at Jetavana, in the fifth year of his buddhahood, saw that a war over a gem-set throne was about to take place between the nagas Mahodara and Culodara, uncle and nephew, and their followers. Now he, the Sambuddha, took his sacred alms-bowl and his robes, and from compassion for the nagas, sought them out in Nagadipa.

"The naga Mahodara was then king. His younger sister, married to another naga king, had a son called Culodara. Now it happened that Culodara's mother had been given a splendid throne of jewels as a gift from her father. When her father, the old naga king died, the dispute arose over the ownership of the throne. War became imminent between nephew and uncle...

"Hovering in mid-air above the battlefield, the Master called forth dread darkness over the nagas and, comforting those who were **distressed**, he once again spread light abroad. When they saw the Blessed One they joyfully paid homage at the Master's feet.

"Then preached the Vanquisher to them the doctrine that begets concord and both nagas gladly gave up the throne to the Buddha."

There is another legend on the same theme concerning a dispute between two brothers. They both claimed the throne at Kelaniya

addition this art holds the mind of the artificer in suspense and fear regarding its outcome and keeps his spirit disturbed and almost continuously anxious." (p. 66)

"He not only directed the students but also contributed to the labor himself. Clearly he was well-accustomed to the sweat and **discomfort** of metal-crafting." (p. 145)

"Hovering in mid-air above the battlefield, the master called forth dread darkness over the Nagas and, comforting those who were **distressed**, he once again spread light abroad." (p. 74)

"Tissa, therefore, dares to show the Buddha in **distress** and wounded as in *Mara Yuddha*." (p. 81)

"Whereupon a large number of students, some one hundred of them, decided to show their **displeasure** by boycotting their classes." (p. 82)

achievement" of Keyt's work, Beling wrote of "the *finality* and maturity of his work."

The years that followed the 1936 Exhibition saw Keyt enter a period in which the dominant mood was that of the Raudra Rasa. This period saw the awesome "Vibhatsa Rasa", "Mahesvara" and "Yama and Savithri" - all in 1938. These paintings evoke terror and turmoil through themes associated with Shiva the destroyer and Yama the God of Death. These are in stark contrast with works associated with Krishna such as "Varsha Vihara" (1937), "Sri Krishan and the Gopis" (1936) with their air of erotic contentment and harmony.

Three books of Keyt's poetry published in 1937-38, analyzed elsewhere, offer some insight into personal **disquiet** experienced by the artist during this time.

Keyt visited India in 1939. On his return to Sri Lanka in 1940 he completed the magnificent murals at the Gotami Vihare in Borella. Keyt, like his artist-ancestors before him, was fulfilling a creative act of devotion. The George Keyt Foundation is currently working on a project to preserve the frescoes in association with the Ministry of Socio-Cultural Integration and the Dayake Sabha of the temple.

About 1942/43 saw the appearance of the Nayika paintings which more than any other group of paintings by Keyt, represents a special high point of perfection. The convention of the *Nayika* (heroine, or beloved) has been inspiration for some of the most exquisite North Indian miniature paintings. In the Hindi *Rasikapriya* of Keshav Das (c.1590), *Nayikas* are divided into several classifications according to physical, aesthetic, psychological and other criteria as well as situations.

Keyt's *Nayika* paintings of the 1940s are gems of disarming sensuality and grace that do not necessarily require reference to this essentially literary tradition. The *Nayikas* of Keyt are simple, unadorned and free of elaborate jewellery and coif-

ures, unlike the *Sigiriya* women.

Large, stylized araliya-like leaves luxuriate in the pictures, mirroring in their flow the smooth easy lines of the female forms. The element of nature is part of the spontaneity, the naturalness and the effortless grace which moves through these classic paintings. In some of the Kangra miniature paintings, landscape and nature (rain, lightning, storms, the moon) reduce the human element somewhat. What is primary in the *Nayika* paintings of this convention is the evocation of a particular mood, or *rasa*, which is largely literary in origin. The human aspect is the central focus in the *Nayika* paintings of Keyt though their mode is inspired by the poetry and music of the Indian traditions.

Notwithstanding their titles, "Woman with Bird" (1944), "Girl Bathing" (1942), reproduced in Martin Russell's monograph on Keyt, are in a sense, as Keyt agrees, all *Nayika* paintings of this period, easily associated with a distinctly Sri Lankan rural setting.

Keyt's *Nayikas* are romantic in the best sense of the term, not sentimental or cloying. They are delicate without being fragile. They represent, as I have written before, all women in general and no woman in particular. Yet the impetus which brings them before us is real, not imaginary or literary although Keyt does not aim primarily at a identifiable and direct physical likeness of his Muse.

"Abhisarika" (the title echoes a definite *Nayika* type in the *Rasikapriya*) is an exquisitely beautiful painting c.1940) set in an indeterminate interior with cushions and drapery, not foliage, and is (if one stretches a point), indeed a *Nayika* painting. Here the Muse is more realized and identifiable. "Kusum Reading" (1968) is also a specific portrait which again captures the particular essence of grace and delicacy. After the 1940s, Keyt returns to the *Nayika* theme and in the 1960s and 1970s follows the Indian *Nayika* genre and its classifications

Exhibition Catalogue, George Keyt (Colombo: Lionel Wendt Gallery, 17-21 April 1991). SLACAAD 750.745493KEY

"Three books of Keyt's poetry published in 1937-38, analyzed elsewhere, offer some insight into personal **disquiet** experienced by the artist during this time." (p. 20)

III

The results obtained by the word search for "discomfort" attest to the way in which the usage of a word evolves and meanings become unmoored, giving rise to new definitions and contexts. As the excerpts make plain, different writers use the same word to talk about entirely different events, people and ideas.

Writing about archives Carolyn Steedman remarked, "The past is searched for something...[but] the object has been altered by the very search for it... what has actually been lost can never be found. This is not to say that *nothing* is found, but that thing is always something else, a *creation of the search* itself and the time the search took."²

With Steedman's remarks in mind, what follows is one of potentially many observations that ponder the use of the word "discomfort".

IV

An installation by an artist is capable of producing discomfort,³ either culturally or when painted in black and midnight blue.⁴ By contrast Nelun only paints things that are discomforting⁵ while the large-scale installations of another artist, Anoli, bring to light the discomfort of women in society, "as a woman in Sri Lanka, you are not encouraged to be an artist...everybody is telling you to be a professional".⁶ So immense was the 43 Group painter George Keyt's discomfort that he published three books between 1937–38.⁷ For the family of the painter Fareed Uduman, being a discomfort to the family and friends was part of his enigma rather than an element of his work.⁸

Should the Ceylon Society of Arts be criticised for making "discomfort" a painting style, as a reaction to English middle-class tastes,⁹ or should they be celebrated for their stand against class-orientated art practices? Moreover, the relationship with class and discomfort in Sri Lanka also resides behind what one author describes as tropical modernity's aesthetic seduction,¹⁰ which refers here to the class exclusivity of places such as Lunuganga, the country home of the renowned architect Geoffrey Bawa.

All things considered, discomfort is not always a serious matter when it gives delight to laughing at the discomfort of critics, as has been, and may still be, the case regarding the career of Lionel Wendt.¹¹ Overall, however, these are exceptions, much like Wendt himself. Discomfort causes pain. As is the case when someone stops to think about Sri Lanka's lack of a permanent collection of modern art.¹² Until things change, there is comfort to be found in living rooms.¹³

V

The Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture & Design is a public space and educational resource located in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The organisation was established in 2013 and collects materials in English, Sinhala and Tamil related to the development and study of visual culture in Sri Lanka. In addition to housing a reading room, the archive also hosts a programme of free public talks that engage with the contents of the archive. To this end, the archive is one of the first public spaces in Jaffna, following the cessation of hostilities, to create a space for discussion. Through its collection of catalogued materials and talks it aims to encourage debate, support historical correctives, raise

questions and open up more critical exchange across histories, generations and modes of practice in Sri Lankan art, architecture and design. The archive is located at 199 Temple Road, Jaffna in a traditional, recently restored Jaffna courtyard house. It is open to the public from 10 am–5 pm, Friday to Monday.

NOTES

- ¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press [1995] 1998).
- ² Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 77.
- ³ Sasanka Perera, *Artists Remember, Artists Narrate: Memory and Representation in Contemporary Sri Lankan Visual Arts* (Colombo: Colombo Institute for the Advanced Study of Society and Culture and Theertha International Artists' Collective, 2012), p. 7.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 29.
- ⁵ *The Power of Sri Lanka Art 1943–2012* (Galle: Sri Serendipity Publishing House, 2012), p. 116.
- ⁶ Sylvia S. Kasprzycki and Doris Stambrau (eds.), *Artful Resistance, Contemporary Art from Sri Lanka* (Altenstadt, Germany: ZKF Publishers, 2010), p. 70.
- ⁷ *Exhibition Catalogue, George Keyt* (Colombo: Lionel Wendt Gallery, 17–21 Apr. 1991), p. 20.
- ⁸ Fareed Uduman, *Fareed Uduman, Paintings, Poems and Cartoons* (Colombo: Zeppelin Advertising Services, 2005), p. 5.
- ⁹ Neville Weeraratne, *43 Group – A Chronicle of Fifty Years in the Art of Sri Lanka*, (Melbourne: Lantana, 1993), p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Tariq Jazeel, *Sacred Modernity, Nature, Environment and the Postcolonial Geographies of Sri Lankan Nationhood* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 163–4.
- ¹¹ *Lionel Wendt – A Centennial Tribute* (Colombo: Lionel Wendt Memorial Fund, 2000), p. 41.
- ¹² Malsha Fernando, *Scrap Book of Chandrajeewa, Newspapers & Magazines Collection from 1985–2010* (2011), p. 66.
- ¹³ Perera, *Artists Remember*, p. 98.

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