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When I decided to undertake research on modernism in Sri Lankan art in 2005, a Norwegian mediated peace talk between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE was underway, therefore that was a time of 'no war.' My artist friend Jagath Weerasinghe encouraged me to undertake research on the Ceylonese modernist artists' collective, the 43 Group. He felt that being a Tamil accorded me a privileged position as both 'insider and outsider' to probe Ceylonese modernist art. At that time, I did not fully realize the impact and irony of my outsider position and its meaning in the present Sri Lankan political and military context, probably because of the reality of no-war. But the whole situation changed drastically when the war re-escalated in 2006. At the time I joined JNU in 2007 to pursue my research, the war shattered my hopes. On the other hand, my preliminary readings revealed lack of available literature in Sri Lankan art history and the limitations of available secondary materials, and thereby of archival reading. Trained as a painter, I was hesitant to embark upon an archival reading. I went to Colombo in June 2008 expecting to do archival reading, visit museums and view some important personal collections. During that period, the war reached its zenith with frequent air raids in the Tamil North and East and the militants retaliated with bomb blasts in the city of Colombo. The heart of Colombo city that was my major site of inquiry for elitist art activities in pre-independence Sri Lanka was transformed into a military zone. In routine house searches and roadside checking, my Tamil identity was forcibly pushed me into the position of being a suspect or a stranger. In this shift, accessing some of the state institutions located in high security zones of the city proved to be a challenge. The large scale loss of both human lives and property in the most crucial war of this century demoralized me completely. In the middle of my research, I was extremely concerned about the feasibility of doing the project at this historical juncture. But providence has a way of opening avenues and suggesting alternatives. The amount of support and encouragement I received from my research supervisor, friends and family helped overcome the uncertainty. In the backdrop of a most violent period in the history of modern Sri Lanka, their support helped me paint a glossy picture of Sri Lankan art.

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