Chapter 1

Pathways to Modernism: Changing Social Equations and the Formation of an ‘Art World’

‘It was Colombo that made Ceylon and not Ceylon that made Colombo.’¹

1.1 Introduction

This chapter charts the influence of modernism on colonial art practice and its institutionalization under conditions of modernity that shaped and brought about the emergence of a colonial bourgeois culture and changes in aesthetic taste. This chapter unveils the story of modern art by revealing the complexities and tensions created by three major conflictual currents: westernization and indigenization based on a belief of an ethnic continuity, elitist and popular tastes and the figure of the recreational amateur vis-à-vis professionalization of art, at the micro levels. These currents by no means act in isolation or coerce particular art movements or trends; they are interconnected, inter-dependent and ingrained in the colonial art world. Most critically, this tension can be seen to mark the dawn of a new kind of subjectivity as an outcome of the socio-political framework of modernity.

The emergence of western modes of art practice in Ceylon are intimately connected with the development of Colombo as a colonial port city and its connectivity with major political and cultural destinations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Hence, debates on westernized modes of art practice are necessarily coupled with the larger cultural discourse of cosmopolitanism situated in coloniality and modernity. Partha Mitter associates the birth of ‘new’ art in the Indian

subcontinent with westernization. Ceylon's separation from the Indian subcontinent as an independent political entity and its search for an exclusively Sinhalese Buddhist identity characterizes cultural activity of colonial modernity. Whereas on the one hand, Indian nationalism and cultural revivalism became driving forces behind the indigenization process in Ceylon, as a counterpoint to westernization. The conflict and contestation between Indian and western influences in the heterogeneous cultural terrain of Ceylon deeply impacted Ceylonese modern identity. On the other hand, the formation of an exclusive Ceylonese identity was inevitably connected with distancing itself from India; hence, Indian influences were not always welcomed or acknowledged. In this context, historically and culturally, India had been seen as both insider and outsider. As Perera argues 'Indigenization and colonization are simultaneously complicit and conflictual: these processes are neither separate nor direct opposites—indigenization does not begin where colonization ends.'

During the four centuries of Portuguese, Dutch and British occupation, Ceylonese culture witnessed the replacement of its old aristocracy with the colonial bourgeoisie who emulated the mannerisms and lifestyle of their metropolitan counterparts in the west. At the same time, the political, social and communication systems developed through modernism created the idea of a 'public' that was characteristically different from the earlier traditional rural society and the elitist 'civil' society. This division between the ruling elites and those they ruled over produced the modern nation state in south Asia. The conflict and contestation between the elitist and popular imagination extends to the modern discourse of art and is represented most starkly by a discrepancy of taste. Bourdieu argues that people's tastes express and reinforce their status and class position, which in turn is the result

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3 See Chapter 2 in this dissertation for detailed discussion.


5 My usage of the terms 'public' and 'civil' is based on the differentiation elucidated by Partha Chatterjee. For detailed argument, see Partha Chatterjee, "Two Poets and Death: On Civil and Political Society in the Non-Christian World," in Questions of Modernity, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 35–48.

6 Partha Chatterjee has argued in the context of nationalism that the two crucial social groups which carry the struggle forward are the proletarian and the intelligentsia. The intellectual 'will exchange second class citizenship for first class citizenship plus greater privileges based on rarity.' The proletarians will exchange 'hardships with snubs for possibly greater hardships with national identification.' Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse? in The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.
of the influence of their family background, the kind of education a person has had and his or her employment context. Moreover, these tastes are not fixed categories, they influence and borrow from each other and construct each other. For example, the elites appropriate, from time-to-time, certain elements from popular culture and the masses cultivate aspirations of ‘elitism’. Thus, contestation and appropriation of elitist and popular tastes fashioned the metamorphosis of the modernist taste.

Tapati Guha-Thakurta observes that ‘the colonial encounter brought into being a new social entity—the artist—with heightened self-awareness about individual identity and nationality’. She further states that ‘this encounter produced a special discursive and institutional space for art within middle-class society. Together, both art and artist—in their new privileged status and modernized conception—became important agents in the articulation of national sovereignty and middle-class cultural hegemony’. This changed the role and position of the artist and his/her self-perception in middle-class society. The emergence of the artist as an enterprising individual is associated with the change in patronage. The new ‘artist’ existed at two levels: amateur or professional. These categories differentiate the aesthetic choice and nature of engagement that an artist had with his/her craft and practice. Not surprisingly, while popular discourse on art was centred on amateurish practices, the art historical canon focused only on elitist practices.

1.2 Modernity and Port Culture

The nineteenth century saw the creation of a new world order when European powers transformed themselves by expanding and integrating seaborne empires, and also, with the evolution of nation states. This dual transformation not only configured the nature of political structures of the empire and the colony, but also resituated the power dynamics between the centre and the periphery. This conception, as Perera argues, transformed both European outposts into colonial port cities and their empires from ‘trading post empires’ into ‘territorial empires’. This transformation was accompanied by the reorganization of Europe into what would become ‘nation states’ and a large part of the extra-European world into a system of western European

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empires, with power within each empire vested in the central state. Colonial port cities arose and evolved as a consequence of colonizing seaborne powers. As nodal points in the colonial nervous system, the port cities became the primary and key sites of cultural and economic interchange and transformation that produced colonial modernity. As Kenneth McPherson has pointed out, port cities were sites where the people of the region met and interacted with each other along with agents of colonization from the west. These interactions were not simply a matter of European modernity confronting local traditions, or newly established norms of high culture confronting mass culture in the public sphere. 'They produced new sets of relationships in a new type of urban environment among the people of the region; between the coast and hinterland, and between Europeans and indigenous peoples.'

This new relationship radically changed one's experiential reality, thus marking a shift to the modern.

With the opening of new economic opportunities via steam and steel in shipping, the access provided by the network of railroads and a telecommunication system, European and non-European settlers were encouraged to settle in the growing colonial port cities. Such cities became adopted homes for the European ruling classes. While these cities were transformed into indisputably, cosmopolitan centres, they emerged as hubs for westernized cultural activities. Ronald Horvath notes that the 'colonial city was the political, military, economic, religious, social and intellectual access-point between the colonizers and the colonized.' These ports, unlike their pre-European predecessors, controlled their hinterlands, creating a new political and economic order based on the subordination of the interior by the

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11 The arrival of telegraph linked these major ports with one another and with Europe, and affected the nature of commercial decisions and transactions.
12 In the port cities of the Indian Ocean, cosmopolitanism affected only certain sectors of society in limited ways. If, however, the word is used simply to denote the presence of a variety of confessional, cultural, and racial groups within a single urban setting, then it can readily be applied to the major ports of the Indian Ocean region. Ibid., 83.
14 Economic activity in European-controlled ports rapidly intensified during this period as the British and Dutch exploited their new territories by developing plantations to produce cash crops for export, as well as extracting minerals and cutting timber. Gradually, the growth of a capitalist economy in the colony gave impetus to the expansion of port cities along functional, institutional and racial lines. Banks, modern business houses, new medical facilities and the increasingly sophisticated educational and cultural services that growing European communities demanded were serviced by a steady stream of arrivals from Europe. Physical and human resources combined to produce a more versatile mercantile and less traditionally oriented society. The development of an internal surface transport system and the availability of jobs in the colonial administrative and commercial machinery attracted the rural population from the interior to the coastal cities. The emergence of colonial cities with largely migrant populations aspiring to social and economic mobility, was a new development, rare in the premodern era. This, in a way, shifts the local power centres and alters traditional spatial and demographic politics. A primary function of colonial port cities was to expand European domination beyond the maritime world into inland territories, suggesting as Malcolm Cross has done that the colonial society was not just ‘influenced’ by Europe but actually ‘created by it’. 17

1.2.1 Birth of Colombo City

The Portuguese takeover of Colombo in the early sixteenth century, allowed the island they called Ceilao (Ceylon in English) and its inhabitants to start a larger exchange and dialogue with southwestern Europe. In so doing, ‘they drew the island and its peoples into what turned out to be the long-term processes of European colonialism and expansion.’ With the arrival of the British in the nineteenth century, Ceylon underwent changes that were much deeper and more multifaceted than the mere

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15 Ibid., 81.
encroachment or occupation on a geographical plane. Ceylon's strategic geographic location in the Indian Ocean made it necessary for the British colonial authorities to hold it as a Crown colony, separate from the territories in continental India which were under the British East India Company. Ceylon became a Crown colony of Britain in 1802 after being ruled for a few years from Madras. The arrangement made between the Company and Crown authorities in Calcutta and London largely determined the future of Ceylon as a separate political territory.

'Colombo, rather than evolving through "internal" or "organic" logic, was constructed from "outside" as an element of the British Empire.' As Brohier argues, 'Colombo is a city not a creation of the people of Ceylon's own choice or making but forced upon them.' Under the Portuguese, Colombo emerged as the principal port of the island—better access to the interior had perhaps been an important reason for the selection of Colombo over Galle. While Colombo became strategically important to administer the entire island, appropriating and strengthening Colombo gained importance in safeguarding British interest in the Bay of Bengal. This change in colonial interest transformed Colombo from its earlier position as a military checkpost to a port city.

As early nineteenth century travel maps demonstrate, Colombo was centrally located along the major world shipping routes, with links to Albany (Australia), Penang (Malaysia), Rangoon (Burma), Mauritius and Aden. Dharmasena notes that Colombo featured on three major routes: from Europe to Madras via Cape Town; to the Coromandel Coast and Calcutta and to Bombay and the Far East. Perera argues, based on the accounts of Ferguson, that this was further complimented by the development of Colombo harbour as a coaling station and a calling port in Asia, particularly for vessels plying between Britain and Australia. Henry W. Cave described it as 'a spot on which converge the steamships of all nations for coal and

19 Ibid., 2.
20 Ibid., 37.
21 Ibid., 38.
exchange of freight and passengers. At the turn of the century, Colombo was known as 'the Clapham junction of the East.'

Early nineteenth century Colombo was one of the largest most populated places in the Indian Ocean. It was a multi-ethnic, multicultural, cosmopolitan city that provided a meeting place for a large number of races and ethnic groups. Yet, it was also a divided city, organized along racial, ethnic and functional lines into three principal zones: the Fort, Pettah and outer Pettah (an Anglo-Indian corruption of the Tamil ‘Pettai’ meaning outside the port). These terminologies, while expressing the hierarchical ordering of the colonial space, also demarcate the white and the black sites as elitist or working class areas. Because of the city’s floating population, the many large institutions and the extent of their operations as well as the buildings that Colombo contained were far greater than what the capital of Ceylon required. Robert Percival observes that at the turn of the nineteenth century, Colombo, more than any other city in India, was built in the European style. Thus, Colombo evolved into a metropolitan space, far exceeding its role as the capital of Ceylon. In addition to being the seat of colonial administrative and economic system, it also emerged as the locus of ‘high society’ with its prestigious schools, clubs and large retail shops along with political, economic and social organizations.

The expansion of Colombo harbour and the building of a breakwater that was completed in 1884 confirmed Colombo as a major business centre of the island. Based on Panditharane’s account, Wickramasinghe notes, that a massive demographic change followed between 1901 and 1911; the rate of population growth in Colombo was double that of the island as a whole. Perera goes on to discuss how the renaming of roads, buildings and places re-signified the city space into an ‘imperialistic’ space, in turn establishing a new identity that erased the physical imprints left by the Portuguese and Dutch. It could also be argued that this new appropriation brought a new sense of belonging and subjectivity among the city’s population through re-orientation of the urban space. This new sense of place and location emerged as a

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29 Ibid. 49.
terrain for contestation and competition between cosmopolitanism and patriotism, based on newly scripted identities of class, race and gender.

1.2.2 Colonial Elites of Colombo

With the opening up of the colonial enterprise through plantation agriculture, transport and labour contracts, arrack renting, graphite mining, and education during the British period, the Burghers, (Ceylon) Tamils, Muslims and the low country Sinhalese who did not belong to the upper strata of ‘traditional society’ gained mobility and emerged as the colonial elite class. The Goviyagama (landlords/farmers) were considered to be the upper castes in the traditional Sinhalese caste system. The low country Sinhalese elites were largely from the three main non-Goviyagama castes: Karāva, Durāva and Salāgama. The colonial elites were a heterogeneous class with considerable traditional legacy. In this context ‘the British functioned as a ruling or overlord elite.’

The introduction of the English education standard led to the creation of ‘brown sahibs’ and differentiated the elite from the rest. Patrick Peebles observes that higher education not only added an element of achievement, particularly useful within a system based on merit as opposed to inheritance, but also generated an enthusiasm for higher education among the rest of the society. This enthusiasm helped place the educated class at the top of the social ladder. The hard-earned wealth of the pioneer entrepreneurs, says Roberts, enabled them to educate their sons in the best schools, even send them abroad for education or professional training. The second and third generations used their education and social contacts to consolidate their elite status. Alternatively, capital accumulated from professional earnings or a judicious marriage provide another means to progress up the social ladder. Status became the motivating force behind every form of elitist cultural life which led to a

desire to further the interests of family, kin, caste and race that reversed the universalism of capitalism. 'This nepotism was to mark bourgeois conduct in the political and economic spheres in the decades to come,' says Jani de Silva.

37 This may be the reason that the bourgeoisie, as a class, did not develop any serious antagonism to the colonial ruler and why they remained satisfied with political concession and limited constitutional reforms, although much wealth was made by individuals.

Accumulated capital was invested lavishly in urban property to achieve a 'feudal façade'. In addition to clothing fashions and etiquettes, the urban elites also followed the latest European architectural styles to display their new wealth and competitive spirit. The elite neighbourhoods were located in the liminal space between the colonial community and the indigenous city. Areas of the city with highly superior services became their preference. In the decades following the 1860s, much money was spent on building palatial residences with mock-Italian decor, large gardens, 'wedding cake' architecture and imposing royal names. These bungalows and their lavish display of colonial material culture and hospitality required the services of a large housekeeping staff. Many of the sons of entrepreneurs and professionals emulated the British aristocracy in its penchant for dog-breeding and horse-racing that were considered to be the sport of Kings. The elite also created their own exclusive Oriental Club in the vicinity of the Cinnamon Gardens and began publishing their own newspaper, the Ceylon Standard in Colombo in 1898. By emulating their colonial masters, the Colombo elites produced a third culture that was neither fully British nor completely local. Based on Homi Bhabha's argument on hybridity and mimicry, Nihal Perera argues that the 'elite familiarization within the

39 Ibid., xxi.
40 Ibid., 260.
41 Ibid., 260–261.
colonial system was ambivalent; the elite were almost British, but not quite, and their formation was both incomplete and virtual.  

1.3 Development of Colonial Art Space

1.3.1 Art as a Mode of Colonial Governance

As in other European colonies, art became a vital means for documenting the newly occupied territories and its inhabitants. Before the use of photography, print reproductions played a major role in disseminating knowledge about the newly conquered lands. The circulation of printed images in the imperial cities strengthened allegiance to the Empire and justified the colonial project. Interestingly, in the era of 'print capitalism', these printed images of the colonies by the colonizers would have also had a strong impact on nation formation in Europe. Concomitantly, the enlightenment project including military, biological and ethnographic investigations and the natural curiosity of knowing the 'other' encouraged these colonial projects. In addition, the production and circulation of these images, while encouraging expedition to these exotic territories, also helped fashion the new bourgeois taste.

Even though there are several examples of Dutch ethnographic, biological and military documentation in the form of prints and drawings, early images of the island by the British were produced through the imagination of artists who had never visited the island. These images aimed to cater to the expectation and anticipation of the public in the metropolises. This was followed by the employment of amateur engravers and photographers by the colonial administration to document, categorize and classify objects and living beings in the colony. Military officers, engineers and surveyors were trained in topographical drawing and watercolour painting as part of their official education. Raheem and R. K. de Silva have identified some of these

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44 Ibid.

Professional engravers, photographers and watercolourists visited the colony in the first few decades of British rule. Henry Salt,\footnote{He came as private secretary and draughtsman to Lord Valentia when he undertook a four year tour lasting from 1802 to 1806 in India, Ceylon, Ethiopia and Egypt.} Andrew Nicholl\footnote{A celebrated Irish painter and watercolourist was specially sent from England to Colombo Academy to teach landscape painting, scientific drawing and design in 1846. He also learned mapping and engineering drawing at the Ordnance Survey Department in London’s Somerset House. He does not appear to have had any formal art training.} and Samuel Daniell\footnote{Came to Ceylon on his own. Unlike his brother William and uncle Thomas who visited India between 1785 and 1794, Samuel was determined to carve out a future for himself in Ceylon. He arrived in July 1805 and remained until his death in December 1811.} came as officials or professional artists. Later, much of their works were transformed into prints and made available to the public. Drawings and sketches executed in the colonies were copied by engravers stationed in England who had no first-hand knowledge of what they were depicting. The skill and realism in the depiction of original observation was hence drastically altered when transformed into prints.\footnote{In some cases, as Raheem has pointed out, the names of the artist of the original painting or drawing were not acknowledged by the engraver or publisher. For example, many of William Daniell’s works on Ceylon were based on the original drawings of his brother Samuel, but not acknowledged. In some cases, by the time the drawing reached the engraver, it was re-drawn by two or three other artists and was far removed from the original. Ismeth Raheem, \textit{A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings, Engravings of Ceylon by 19th Century Artists} (Colombo: British Council, 1986).}

With the growing demand for images of the colonies in the 1830s, artists based in England reproduced the drawings and sketches made in Ceylon. Works of Copley Fielding, James Stephanoff and John Varley belong to this category.\footnote{Ibid.}

Initially, the techniques of visual representation were used to produce documents of landscapes, natural history, archaeology and ethnography. In the process of documentation, the colonized and their lands had been objectified through classification and categorization, and made available for processing, handling and governing. Since these images were produced by the colonial power for the acute control over colonies, they inescapably carried a power discourse that was embedded in colonial ‘othering’. Also, in most cases these works were produced by colonial officers without an intent at artistic expression. They display a different kind of engagement, set of genres, and a hybrid style that conformed neither to the western high art tradition, nor to the local mode of visual expression. The worst kind of Victorian naturalism became the goal of artistic accomplishment. These images
carried the idea of East to the West, and constructed the idea of western representational methods among the colony's population. Eventually, what was popularly known as western art in the colony was not European high art. It is relevant to mention here that Archer and Partha Mitter argued that artists turned to the Indian subcontinent to seek their fortunes since the average artist fared poorly in England. Most of these visiting painters learnt their skills through apprenticeship in England, under sign board painters and engravers. They did not have the opportunity of studying old masters because in England these were hidden in private houses and not all artists could afford a visit to France or Italy.

1.3.2 Colonial Photography

Since there is no consensus between private and official accounts of early photography, the history of photography in Ceylon remains open to reassessment. The Ceylon Directory 1880-1881, recorded among the entries for important events in 1856: 'The photographic art was first introduced in Ceylon by Parting, June 24.' However, based on the advertisements that appeared in newspapers and journals between 1844 and 1850, Raheem and Colin-Thorne argue that the 'daguerreotype process was widely used before 1856 by photographers other than Parting, well known a decade before him.' In the following decades, the daguerreotype process was actively practised by individual photographers in major provincial towns for commercial and non-commercial practices. By the 1880s, with the advancement of photographic techniques and the portability of camera, photography became an essential medium to capture private and public events. Colombo witnessed the establishment of photography studios throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. These include: W. L. H. Skeen and Co. in the 1860s, Charles Scowen and Co. in the 1870s and Plate and Co. in the 1890s. By the end of the nineteenth century,

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54 Partha Mitter discusses the misrepresentation of these images in India, with minute details to show how the artists' lack of craftsmanship and understanding of local culture contributed in creating a monstrous image of Indian culture in general and Hindu gods in particular in the metropolitan. For further reading, see Partha Mitter, Much Maligned Monsters: European Reactions to Indian Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
57 Ibid.
the mushrooming of photo studios in both urban and rural towns aroused curiosity
about the medium among the general populace.\textsuperscript{58}

Portraiture, ethnographic studies, townscapes and buildings, plantation studies,
railway views, archaeological scenes, elephant \textit{kraals} (or capture) and royal visits
were some of the popular subjects for the nineteenth-century photographer. These
were marketable among locals as well as foreign visitors.\textsuperscript{59} By the mid-nineteenth
century, Ceylon attracted colonial photographers who were active in India and other
parts of Asia for its picturesque landscape. As Raheem and Colin-Thome point out,
these photographers were merely following in the footsteps of artists and engravers of
the earlier era. While these photographers were seeking an exotic colony to satisfy the
tastes, demands and desires of European curiosity, their selection of spots and themes
indirectly influenced locals to frame ideas about their own land and culture. Locals
actively reverted the 'gaze' and invested it with their imagination of the nation.

In addition to the commercial photography of professionals like Andree,
Lawton, Skeen and others that constituted the bulk of photographic work, there was
also a growing market for amateurs who exploited the medium commercially. The
division between amateur and professional domains in the field of photography was
more clearly marked in Ceylon in early twentieth century. 'This distinction was
relatively blurred until the 1870s, the government was forced to enlist the services of
amateur photographers in those cases where official documentary work had to be
carried out in remote areas where human and other resources were limited.\textsuperscript{60}
With
greater exposure and dissemination of photographs both in amateur and professional
circles, photography began to be appreciated as an artistic medium in addition to its
commercial utilization. Publications on photography from Europe, photographic
exhibitions and visiting photographers had significant impact on contemporizing and
aesthetizing commercial and amateurish practice of the medium. Further, 'the impact
was much stronger if the visiting photographer stayed long enough in Ceylon to
establish an affinity with the local photographers, as did photographers of the calibre
of Julia Margaret Cameron and Felice Beato.'\textsuperscript{61}

The camera captures the ordinary and reproduces it as 'extraordinary'. As an
act of objectification, it alters the way of seeing the ordinary and mundane and alters

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 11–12.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 32.
the relationship one has with self and surroundings. This shift in perception also encourages new imaginings and a new sense of being. Since photography was one of the key wonders of the Victorian era, it became popular among the masses (in Ceylon) before oil painting. It became the prime agent for popularizing ‘realism’ within the colony. Unlike oil paintings, photographs were amenable to reproduction through the letterpress and printed material that enjoyed a developed distribution system. In addition, the growth of the picture postcard industry contributed to this phenomenon and represented a more authentic way of capturing nature, amongst the middle class. Related to this was the medium’s connection to the colonial power, which made the local middle class perceive the medium to be more ‘advanced’, and therefore, more progressive. This sentiment produced a longing for photographs among the newly upcoming middle classes and helped to establish photo-realism as an important style of representation in the mindset of the educated class. In reality, the artificiality of the studio space and truthfulness of the visual appearance produced an ambiguous ‘expected realism’. The influence of studio mannerism, nevertheless gained popularity among the masses as ‘realistic’. The fantasy of being captured in exotic dresses, with props and picturesque backdrops, in the ‘artificial’ space of the photo studio further increased the local demand for photo studios. In this context, ‘photographic realism’ became the yardstick to judge the aesthetic standard of any kind of visual representation. Such ideas express many aspects of modernity, whilst cultivating a desire for exhibitionism.

By 1906, the Ceylon Amateur Photographic Society’s activities were in full swing. Even before its establishment, several members had already displayed their work at the Ceylon Society of Art exhibitions. The Photographic Society of Ceylon came into existence in 1935 and actively conducted annual shows with the participation of a good number of local photographers under the leadership of Lionel Wendt. These societies catered to elitist tastes that contested the ‘popular’ position of studio photography. The annual exhibitions, award ceremonies and newspaper coverage of these societies helped appropriate both amateur and professional photography within the rubric of self-expression, thus establishing a hegemony of

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62 Kajri Jain uses the term ‘expected realism’ to indicate the popular realism of Indian Bazaar paintings or calendar images. I see a similar artificiality within the reality of photography, specially in studio photographs which expect certain enactment in front of the camera.

taste for non-studio based professional work and placed photography firmly within the
discourse of high art. Lionel Wendt’s Surrealist landscapes, produced by using the
experimental techniques of photomontage, emerged as one of the most significant
cornerstones in the history of modernist photography in south Asia.\textsuperscript{64}

\textbf{1.4 Emergence of Elitist Art Practice}

The institutionalization of western modes of art practice initially emerged as part of
the leisure activity of western elites and Euro-Asians within the white city areas of
Colombo. It differed from the traditional local practice and the visual documentation
patronized by the colonial administration. Colonial documentation practices did not
impact the formation of modernist painting and drawing until copies of prints or
printed illustrations in books and newspapers came into circulation amongst the local
population.

The initial shift began with private art classes run by European amateurs and
professionals. Hippolyte Silvaf (1801–1879), a French artist from Pondicherry,
immigrated to Ceylon in the early 1820s. He struggled early on as a portrait painter
but improved his finances later by giving drawing lessons at his residence in Pettah.
Silvaf’s art school, established in 1834, was the earliest of its kind. Soon, there were
more than seven art schools run by individuals in the same area.\textsuperscript{65} W. Scott, in a
newspaper advertisement of 1900, specified rates for his drawing classes: Rupees two
for children and Rupees three for advanced pupils per month.\textsuperscript{66} Exhibitions by
traveller-painters in the early decades of the twentieth century—made possible by the
wide network of shipping lines—also nourished the city’s art culture and provided a
vibrant backdrop for the emergence of these local art classes. Newspaper data from
the period reveals a continuous flow of solo exhibitions in Colombo during the 1920s
and 1930s.\textsuperscript{67} These activities took place in elitist neighbourhoods close to the harbour
to attract travellers and Europeans living in Colombo and there was an entrance fee

\textsuperscript{64} For a detailed discussion on Lionel Wendt’s photography, see Manel Fonseka, “Rediscovering
Lionel Wendt,” in Lionel Wendt: A Centennial Tribute (Colombo: The Lionel Wendt Memorial
Foundation, 2000). See also Manel Fonseka, Lionel Wendt and Sri Lanka’s Modernism. The Gaze of
\textsuperscript{65} Jagath Weerasinghe, Twentieth Century Sri Lankan Visual Art (Colombo: Theertha International
Artist Collective, 2005).
\textsuperscript{66} Ceylon Society of Art Exhibition Catalogue (Colombo, 1900).
\textsuperscript{67} See, Chapter 4 in this dissertation for more information on these exhibitions.
for the shows. 68 Interestingly, these art practices were gradually localized after the 
1920s because of the expansion of Colombo beyond the white city area and the shift 
of elite residential areas to the Cinnamon gardens district. 69 

The Colombo Academy introduced the first drawing course in the 1820s. Andrew Nicholl, the celebrated Irish painter and watercolourist, was specially sent 
from England as an instructor in the Academy to teach landscape painting, scientific 
drawing and design in 1846. Judging from available records, J. L. K. van Dort (1831– 
1896), a Ceylonese-Dutch painter, became the first local artist to turn professional and 
paint in the colonial style. He trained under Nicholl and worked as a draughtsman at 
the Surveyor-General’s office. Completely illustrated by J. L. K. van Dort, the first 
local English periodical Muniandi, regarded as Ceylon’s Punch, was committed to 
social satire and critiqued colonial duplicity in 1869. 70 

The portability of art materials and their accessibility in the colony was crucial 
to the development of art practice. The Government Gazette (December 1811), for 
example, carried an advertisement for the sale of a graphic telescope used by Samuel 
Daniell and other materials like paper, chalk, paint and brushes. Similar 
advertisements reveal the availability of camera obscuras, camera lucidas, graphic 
telescopes, copy books, water colour cakes and good quality paper. 71 By 1820, sales 
of prints and engravings by British artists were regularly advertised in the Gazette. 

According to Raheem, 

> These prints are mainly on English subjects and landscapes, but engravings and 
lithography of the Ceylon scene by the British artists were available to subscribers 
and slowly overtaking the English scene in popularity. Laughlin in Prince Street and 
De Nays in Baille Street were the known warehouses for selling prints and art 
materials in Colombo. Their auction room included the works of some of the best­
known amateur artists like Lieutenants William Lyttleton and J. F. G. Braybrooke as 
well as professionals like Samuel Daniell, William Westall and Copley Fielding. In 

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68 Galle face hotel was a main venue for art exhibitions with entry fee. 
69 For a detailed account of the indigenization of spatial order of Colombo, see Nihal Perera, 
70 Muniandi ceased publication in 1871. The second comic magazine Appuhami appeared in 1890. 
According to Tilak Kularatne, whereas Muniandi aimed at the colonial society, Appuhami directed its 
attack on the Ceylonese trying to emulate the Europeans and enter higher echelons of Colonial society. ‘ 
Tilak Kularatne, History of Printing and Publishing in Ceylon: 1736–1912 (Dehiwala: Sridevi Printers 
71 Ismeth Raheem, A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings, Engravings of Ceylon by 19th Century 
the middle of the nineteenth century, the currently popular English artists’ prints that include those of Turner, picture postcards and prints of Nicholl, Silvaf and van Dort were also readily available in Colombo’s print market. Hence, prints and the materials were simultaneously made available for the city elites’ consumption. This simultaneity, while producing a connection between the material and the representational mode in the psyche of the local, encouraged them to paint in a similar manner using available material. These materials became a magic tool of realism with loaded meanings of cultural advancement.

Prints of Ceylonese landscapes and scenery gained popularity among the local population because of the familiarity of their content and the curiosity of looking at their own localities framed in the so-called ‘realistic’ style. Realism gained currency due to the familiarity of its content and its curiosity value. Even though these prints visually represented Ceylonese scenes, they differed from one another in terms of artistic engagement, and hence, quality. It is important to note here that these prints were circulated among urban elites by confusing or twisting the classical or academic norms of western painting. Since their content was familiar, the locals would have naturally developed a taste for the mode of representation as well. It is hard to believe that western academic painting or the naturalism of the professional painters made an easy passage to the colony and effortlessly transformed the local mode into a representational one.

Production of images of Ceylon in engravings, watercolour paintings and photography in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in a way, localized western techniques of reproduction and became familiar through circulation. The medium of paper and books demanded a new way of association with an image, quite different from the earlier palm leaf or mural painting traditions. The print media thus fostered an intimacy between the reader and the image. The portability of the book allowed images to travel between the imperial domain and local cultures and brought a new kind of ownership of images. These reproduced images also became part of the

72 Ibid.
souvenir culture. It is interesting to note that picture postcards were popularized at this time with similar images.74

1.4.1 Portfolio Sketch Club
The Portfolio Sketch Club (also known as Colombo Drawing Club) was formed in the early 1880s. Barbara Layard, the well known watercolourist of her day, was chiefly responsible for this.75 The club met regularly, on the first of each month, at the residence of one of its members, and a portfolio of sketches on varied subjects was circulated amongst members.76 They exchanged views on each other’s efforts and counted votes registered at the back of each sketch to choose the best work for each month.77 Their first exhibition was held on 16 August, 1887 to mark the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria at ‘The Coffee Tavern’ in Prince Street.78 The exhibition went on for four days. J. L. K. van Dort, who sent a sketch of the amateur art exhibition to a newspaper, wrote:

The first exhibition of amateur work held in Ceylon was opened last August. It was initiated by and carried out under the energetic management of Hawtrey Thwaites, assisted by Colonel Clarke, Colonel Clive, Major St. George and H. Armitage among others. An attractive collection of paintings in oil, watercolour, and monochrome was brought together, but there were very few specimens of plastic art, of painted pottery, or metalwork. It is hoped that this exhibition may be followed by others in Ceylon, where at present there is little if any encouragement to art.79 This observation reveals that the colonial administrative and military officers were major patrons of this venture. This amateur club exhibited crafts as well. The

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75 She was born in Bagatelle, Colombo in 1834 in the house, which since the visit in 1870 of the Duke of Edinburgh was called Alfred House and occupied by the de Soysa family. Miss Layard’s father, Charles Edward, came out to Ceylon at the beginning of the last century and joined civil service. In 1804, he married Barbara Mooyaart, daughter of the last Dutch Governor of Galle, by whom he had 26 children. R. K. de Silva, Nineteenth Century Newspaper Engravings of Ceylon-Sri Lanka. (London: Serendip Publication, 1998).
78 First advertisement calling for exhibits in oils, water colours, crayons, black and white, models in clay, woodcarving, metal work and lace, appeared in the newspapers of 22 February, 1887. 79 The Graphic, December 24 (1887).
catalogue of the second exhibition of the Ceylon Amateur Society of Arts (1889) revealed the names of military officers and respectable ladies of the European community as committee members and prize winners. Original paintings, watercolours, pen and ink drawings and photographs comprised the major categories of exhibits mentioned in the same catalogue. Annual exhibitions of amateur art were held in a small ‘store’ on Main street in the Fort area. With the increasing number of exhibits, the venue was moved around 1900 to the chamber of the Legislative Council. A wider circle of artists formed that included members of the British mercenaries stationed in Colombo and planters from the upcountry tea estates.

1.4.2 Ceylon Society of Art

The success of two amateur art exhibitions greatly encouraged the move to establish a Society of Arts in Ceylon (henceforth CSA). A resolution to inaugurate a Society of Arts was adopted and a committee appointed to draft its constitution, at a meeting on 10 December, 1891 in the committee pavilion of the Agri-Horticultural show. The first exhibition of the society was held in the Public Hall and formally opened by the Governor on 7 December, 1892. The society came into existence at a time when the Academy was breaking its ties with the European art world. The available writings on colonial and postcolonial Ceylonese art often mention that the society was organized along the lines of the British Royal Academy of Art, with their primary focus on Victorian and Edwardian academic ‘studio painting’ in the colony. However, field records reveal it to be a ‘feeble echo of the Royal Academy of London.’ It is difficult to distinguish their activities from that of the pioneering amateur formation, the Colombo Drawing Club.

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Following the custom of official salons or the academy, the society also held annual exhibitions with a competitive section and gave awards. These exhibitions were mostly organized as part of the carnival of the horse-racing week in the month of August every year. As a congregational gathering of the wealthy engaged in a leisure activity that was a form of colonial self inscription, the art exhibition presented itself as an extension of this space of leisure. The exhibition catalogues of CSA and newspaper reports give us a picture of the categories of exhibits along with an insight into the nature of art patronage. The 1893 exhibition included architectural drawings and needlework along with oil paintings, watercolour paintings and black and white photographs. In 1896, exhibition categories broadened to include flower and fruit, figures, landscapes and seascapes, all of these in both oil and water colour, still life in black and white and water colour painting on silk and satin, splash work, artificial flowers, wood carving, piano backs, brass works, modelling sculpture and bronzes, embroidery and other needle work. The Ceylon Observer, reporting on the 28th annual exhibition in 1920, stated that painting designs for lace and borders for sarees, designs for woodcarving, posters and tiles were also exhibited in the applied arts section. Interestingly, M. Sarlis, a commercial artist who painted the walls of the Buddhist temples in the populist style, participated in the non-competitive section along with professionals like Amarasekara and J. D. A. Perera in the CSA show of 1927. He exhibited a large painting depicting an historical event in Ceylon. These accounts reveal that the division between professionals and amateurs, elitist and popular art did not exist in the exhibitions of CSA. Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon states that a number of prominent European and Ceylonese ladies and gentlemen volunteered to offer prizes for the best work. This persuaded many amateur artists to take to their studies with greater zest and keenness. The participation of women in such exhibitions has also been noted in exhibition catalogues and newspaper reports, along with the highly important roles they played as administrators in the running of the CSA.

CSA sponsored many exhibitions of the traveller-painters and amateurs who were visiting from other countries. This included exhibitions of paintings by several

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85 Photographers were also categorized as professional and amateur.
86 Ceylon Society of Art Exhibition Catalogue (Colombo, 1896).
87 The Ceylon Observer, August 10, 1920.
88 The Ceylon Observer, August 16, 1927.
distinguished Royal Academicians in 1930 and 1933. The Society argued that the principal aim of exhibiting these foreign artists was to educate the students and the public who could not afford to visit art galleries in other parts of the world. CSA exhibitions were held in places like the public library, the Technical College, and Royal College, where the local public had better access, unlike the earlier exhibitions which had been held in the Galle Face hotel.

In 1919, The Ceylon Observer reported the opening of an art showroom by CSA in Fort at the Pettah, Colombo library. Members could display and sell their works here during other than exhibition times. The room was also available for the display of loan exhibits of interest to art students and visitors to Colombo. The showroom was located close to the harbour in the main commercial and administrative area of colonial Colombo, revealing the commercial and educational intention of the CSA. Chairman, M. A. G. M. Fletcheter, compared the CSA show of 1928 with those in the ports of the Far East and concluded that the Colombo show was as good as any of those. Amarasekara, while discussing the scope of art practice in Ceylon on a radio broadcast pointed out that at present the demand and patronage comes mostly from Europeans. These statements reveal the art society’s economic dependence on the port culture.

With the growing number of exhibitions and exhibits at its annual show and the criticism from the press about their poor display, CSA was forced to think of an art gallery with a permanent collection of artworks. This led to a public debate on the necessity and nature of the art gallery. C. F. Winzer, with his experience of London and Paris, was sceptical about building an art gallery along western lines and following western ideals.

A good picture costs at least 50 pounds and any of the great masters would be out of Ceylon’s reach, costing, as they would, thousands of pounds. The solution lay in having a gallery of Ceylon art…. This would be a very great service to visitors to Ceylon too, they would be not much interested in Western Art as seen in Ceylon, but

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90 The Ceylon Observer, March 8, 1933.
91 Since Colombo was a transit point, the artists who travelled through Colombo got an opportunity to have time for sketching, painting in the hill stations and a chance for exhibiting their works in Colombo. Initially exhibited at the Galle face hotel, the venue later shifted to the Colombo public library, Technical College, and Royal College with the emergence of CSA as prime sponsor of these exhibitions.
93 The Ceylon Observer, March 1, 1928.
94 Radio interview reproduced in The Ceylon Observer, April 11, 1929.
would find much to instruct and interest them in the masterpieces of Oriental Art....

This would especially be the case for visitors who had not much time to spend in Ceylon and therefore were unable to visit its historic sites. 95

Interestingly, Winzer mentioned two kinds of art worth displaying in the permanent collection of the gallery in Colombo: the works of Western masters and the ancient and medieval art of Ceylon. This reflects the typical colonialist claim that the present did not belong to the orient. Further, his idea of a gallery based on the models of the colonial museum expressed the anxiety of showcasing the country's heritage to transit passengers. An editorial in *The Ceylon Observer* expressed similar concerns.

Ceylon is not an isolated outpost of the Empire. It is a half way house between England and Australia. An art gallery here would stand as much, if not more, chance of being visited by Anglo Australians as similar galleries in their own home towns.

And there must be many wealthy Anglo Australian collectors who would feel it an honour to have their names associated with such a gallery in Colombo. 96

The two opinions quoted above share a consensus on the idea of gallery as a place to cater to the expectations of visiting foreigners. While suggesting a commercial interest, they also indicate that even after the awakening of nationalism, art in Colombo was closely knit with the port culture and the European tourist culture, distant from the national life and local people.

The proposal for an art gallery thus gained in popularity, and in 1913, the CSA focused attention on the need for a public appeal. 97 They collected funds through fancy bazaars, 98 exhibitions, magic shows and the artists' presentation of Tableaux Vivants. The government contributed Rs 30,000. The first stage of the gallery project was completed in 1932. 99 The building, using modern engineering methods combined western and eastern architectural styles. The gallery, flush with natural light during daytime, was adorned with vernacular roofing, Dravidian columns and a guardian lion stone carving at the entrance. *The Ceylon Observer* described the design of the gallery as follows:

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95 *The Times of Ceylon*, December 17, 1920.

96 *The Ceylon Observer*, March 2, 1929.


99 1932. *The Ceylon Observer*, July 30, 1932 reported that the Governor will be declared open the permanent collections of Ceylon gallery on 10 August.
An elephant frieze with perforated plaques will run along the front base of the building, and there will be other decorative effects as well. The doors will be of beautiful Kandyan design. This building projects the identity of the society as oriental rather than Victorian. Interestingly, this text also signals the newly emerging elitist consciousness of local identity based on the idea of a reinvented past vis-à-vis Kandy as the symbolic seat of Buddhist culture in Ceylon.

Similarly, forced by nationalist sentiments in the 1930s, the CSA included an oriental art section in its exhibition. The CSA, at its annual general meeting in 1934, discussed the possibility of making copies of ancient paintings in the country by utilizing the local artisans/artists. It also considered having a special section on ancient painting at its annual exhibition in 1934. It hosted three exhibitions of the Indian revivalist movement that included the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and students of Santiniketan. While these observations unveil the changing nature of the society, they also question the belief that the CSA only patronized Victorian values. In fact, the amateurish nature of the society allowed no distinction between the Victorian and its other and patronized all kinds of 'elitist popular' aesthetics under the banner of art.

Although the society was an amateur organization, three professional artists were associated with it. In terms of their engagement and individual style, they stand apart from the others who indulged in ‘inept trifling with the picturesque’ and ‘a sterile and lifeless academism.’ Professional artists like Gate Mudaliar Theodor Rajapakse (b. 1869) and Mudaliar A. G. C. S. Amarasekara (1883–1983) were members of the committee in 1892 and 1896 respectively. Later, Amarasekara became the first Ceylonese to hold the post of Honorary Secretary in the CSA while Rajapakse served as Vice President. Yet another professional associated with the CSA

100 *The Ceylon Observer*, July 21, 1931.
101 This was the time when the dress reform movement was very active. Dr. G. P. Mallasekara, an active member of the CSA, was the secretary of the National Reform Society. The dress reform movement not only invented, propagated and popularized the national dress among the locals but also considered the necessity of fostering the study and use of the national languages, and knowledge of the country’s history, the promotion of the growth of food production and the production of home spun cloths. *The Ceylon Observer*, July 25, 1931. It is important to note here that Mahatma Gandhi visited the Island in 1928 to campaign for the home spun cloths.
102 *The Ceylon Observer*, April 8, 1934.
103 Senake Bandaranayake and Albert Dharmasiri criticized point blank everyone associated with the CSA, and randomly categorized their works as 'inept trifling with the picturesque' and 'a sterile and lifeless academism'. Senake Bandaranayake and Albert Dharmasiri, *Sri Lankan Painting in the Twentieth Century* (Colombo: The National Trust, 2009), 34.
was David Paynter (1900–1975). Theodor Rajapakse was the only son of Gate Mudaliar Samaon Rajapakse, the great philanthropist. He studied art initially under the Royal Academician, Seymour Lucas and followed this with stints under the celebrated portrait painter, Kossuth of Wiesbaden, Professor Morisset of Paris and Pender Davidson of London.\(^{104}\) Amarasekara, a self taught painter and a teacher, exhibited at the Royal Academy (London) in 1932 and 1936. He also exhibited with the Royal Society of Portrait Painters (London) in 1935.\(^{105}\) David Paynter, a Euro-Asian, studied art at the Royal Academy schools in England where he was a contemporary of Eric Newton. He worked in Italy for 18 months and exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy and the New England Art Club between 1923 and 1939. He also exhibited in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Brighton, Hull, Manchester (The International Exhibition), Pittsburgh (Carnegie Institute) and New York (The World Fair). He worked as a lecturer in Art at the Government School of Art. Since most members of the society were amateur artists, these three famous painters fashioned the image of the CSA. Amarasekara who affirmed the society’s image with academism, emerged as the controversial spokesperson of the society. His name and his style of painting not only became synonymous with the CSA, but also symbolized the new identity of the artist as self-aware, nationalist and acclaimed professional.

1.4.3 Sketch Club of the Dutch Burgher Union

The other amateur club active in those days was the Sketch Club of the Dutch Burgher Union.\(^{106}\) Kumari Jayawardena observes that the Dutch Burgher identity is more or less a class identity.\(^{107}\) Hence, the practice of painting became an indicator of status or the ‘stock’ and an activity of leisure. Most club members were landscape painters and also exhibited with the CSA. Apart from a few annual exhibitions, the club organized two major retrospective exhibitions: J. L. K. van Dort in 1921\(^ {108}\) and W. W. Beling in

\(^{105}\) The Times of Ceylon, June 8, 1936.
\(^{106}\) The Portuguese pursued a policy of actively promoting conversion to Catholicism and marriage with local inhabitants. The Dutch and the British who followed the Portuguese, often married into this mixed community during the years when there were few European women in Ceylon. When the Dutch surrendered to the British in 1796, many people of Dutch origin chose to migrate. Some of them, employed as traders, priests and government servants stayed on. This group was designated ‘Burghers’.
\(^{108}\) The Times of Ceylon, August 6, 1921.
Van Dort was a skillful draughtsman and illustrator and Ceylon's first topographical artist. Beling initiated the early steps towards modernist art by paraphrasing the impressionist idiom. Both artists functioned as key agents of modernity differently in popular and elitist domain by adopting the material possibilities of modernity within their new subjectivities, in an important historical juncture. Their artistic activity and social concerns have to be read against the larger reformist role played by the Burgher community in colonial Ceylon. These exhibitions by the Burgher Union may be read as an assertion of community identity to resist emerging Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. The Sketch Club of the Dutch Burgher Union held their second exhibition in 1922.

1.5 Predicaments of Art Education

Writings on Indian art in the colonial period emphasized the role of art schools in modifying public taste and tailoring the notion of art in major colonial cities in India. Unlike other colonial powers, the British made a long-lasting impact on the artistic culture of the colonies through their art schools. Partha Mitter observes that when the British Raj established art schools in nineteenth-century India to train Indian craftsmen to suit English tastes and cater to the utilitarian requirements of the British market, they were in the midst of confusion between art education and technical education in the aftermath of the industrial revolution. The colonial government introduced a course in drawing, as early as 1820, at the Colombo Academy, and a course in drawing and painting at Colombo Technical College in 1896. Alfred Baertlam (1869)—trained in Art at the Science Department of Royal College of Art, London and City & Guilds Institute of London in technology—was sent to Ceylon by the Colonial Office in London to initiate art education at the Colombo Technical Institute.

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109 The Ceylon Observer, October 23, 1928.
110 Sketch Club exhibits included works of W. W. Beling, W. G. Koch, Mr. Sam Koch, C. L. Beling, Miss Grace Van Dort, Miss Aline Van Dort, Mr. Emast Van Dort, Miss. G. Leembruggen Winzor, Wheatcroft, Miss. Legn Claire, Mr. Gooch, Mr. Joseph Silva, Miss Baker and Mrs. Chas de Silva. There were also exhibits on loan from E. G. Koch, Mr. James Ashton, Dr A. Nell and K. Tonnassaint sent some fine photos of the ruins of Ceylon and Mandativu respectively. Ceylon Daily News, August 4, 1922.
college in 1902. He also served as the secretary to CSA.\textsuperscript{113} When Nicholl was appointed as an instructor in landscape painting, design and scientific drawing at the Colombo Academy, his duties were confined to training 40 students.\textsuperscript{114} The Central School Commission was of the view that this training would prepare these students on graduating to a certain level of excellence, not so much to become artist or painter, but to join Government Engineering & Survey Department which was heavily under staffed.\textsuperscript{115} However, their impact on local art practice was negligible. The administration conceived drawing and painting skills either as a support to surveying and engineering courses or to produce certificate holders to teach art in schools.\textsuperscript{116} Given the fact that classes in sculpture and photography commenced as late as 1934 at Colombo Technical College,\textsuperscript{117} it could be argued that the idea of drawing and painting as self expressive media emerged much later in the institutional history of art. This could well be the reason for the earlier generations of painters in Ceylon being either self-taught or foreign-trained. Artists who could afford foreign training belonged to the colonial elite class of Colombo and its suburbs. General public tastes in art were moulded by two different sources: the popular Buddhist temple murals and lessons of the art school classes. The crosscurrents of populism and elitism fashioned the character and dynamics of modern taste. Unlike in India, school education was widespread and played a major role in injecting western values and attitudes among the middle classes in Ceylon. By introducing art in the school curriculum, the colonial government’s efforts brought in a new notion of art which was different from both the colonial white city based art practices and the traditional art practices. They brought art into a secular public space. This practice was situated in the educational activities of the colonial middle class, away from the caste-based producer-consumer relationship.

\textsuperscript{113} Before coming to Colombo he had thought painting in school of science and arts and Department of Education in London. Arnold Wright (comp.), \textit{Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources} (London: Lloyd’s Great Britain Publishing Co., 1907), 112, 420.
\textsuperscript{116} In 1902, the Drawing and Art Department was headed by an Instructor of Drawing and consisted of a staff of four artists and art teachers including some women artists who constituted 'the ladies painting class'. Senake Bandaranayake and Albert Dharmasiri, \textit{Sri Lankan Painting in the Twentieth Century} (Colombo: The National Trust, 2009), 35.
At this juncture, understanding the nature and dilemmas of school art education in colonial Ceylon is crucial in mapping the metamorphosis of taste. The Administrative Report of 1954 mentions that the teaching of art had progressed along modern lines; art was no longer thought of in terms of drawing objects but considered as a means of expression.\textsuperscript{118} Nevertheless, this was not an easy passage. The Administrative Report of 1904 discusses the gendering of drawing as an academic discipline within the English public school curriculum: 'Drawing is becoming more general as a subject, is taken in only one boys' school but taught in several girls' schools, and the number of teachers who have taken the technical college course is increasing.'\textsuperscript{119} The Principal of the Government Teachers Training College mentioned in his report of 1904 that drawing was thought of as one among the 11 other subjects. 'The drawing lesson was divided into free hand, free arm, black board and geometrical drawing.'\textsuperscript{120}

When the Colombo Technical College did away with its civil engineering and surveying courses in 1910, Amarasekara, a self-taught artist and founder of the private art school called 'Atelier' in 1909, was specially engaged to teach painting at the college.\textsuperscript{121} The college's Drawing and Art Department conducted the drawing certificate examination for teachers.\textsuperscript{122} Combining British polytechnic and art school practices, the Technical College provided a rather jumbled mix of existing western notions and methods of teacher training, technical education and art practice. This, in a way, blurred the distinction among the categories of artist, art teacher and others who apply artistic skills for industrial purposes thus creating an ambiguous conception of art which encouraged the cultivation and persistence of amateurism rather than professionalism.\textsuperscript{123}

Rev. L. J. Gaster's paper on artwork in schools at the teachers' conference in Kandy in 1918 reveals the situation as follows:

\textsuperscript{119} Ceylon Administrative Report, 1904-II, A-10.
\textsuperscript{120} Ceylon Administrative Report, 1904-II, A-10.
\textsuperscript{121} Ceylon Administrative Report, 1910-II. Technical and Industrial education. Art Education at the time of Amarasekara combined art teaching, consisting mostly of formal exercises in perspective, and the study of colour harmonies. In the major technical fields such as draughtsmanship, the technical college provided useful courses. L. P. Goonetilleke, ed. The Doyen of Painters in Ceylon. Felicitation Volume. Presented on the Occasion of the 84th Birthday of Galle Mudaliar, A. C. G. S. Amarasekara (Colombo) 10—11.
\textsuperscript{122} Ceylon Administrative Report, 1910, 1911, 1912.
\textsuperscript{123} It is interesting to note here that at the popular level, art teachers of schools are still considered to be artists and there is no distinction between a studio based practitioner and a signboard painter.
In many English schools 20 years ago, drawing was a subject to which little or no serious attention was given. ... But end of the last century saw to a considerable extent the end of this state of things and new schemes for the teaching of drawing in schools gained increased attention. But the first transition from the old to the new failed to escape from coping of conventional examples. Later, with the appointment of an Inspectorate of Art in schools and the influence of Winzer and his successor Geoffrey Beling, there was greater emphasis on the indigenous tradition and local context. Winzer's career as an Inspector of Art complemented his interest in art teaching and practice, without which he found no art education possible in its real sense. After the noted European artist Hudson spent considerable time in the island as an art teacher, Winzer commenced private classes for portrait, figure and landscape painting in Colombo. His aesthetic sensibility, his familiarity with contemporary art, his wide and sympathetic understanding of oriental art and his awareness of new developments in art education enabled him to lay a new foundation towards a more vital development of art than the mechanical reproductions and imitative work that had prevailed before.

Reporting about the conditions of art education at the time he assumed responsibilities as the Inspector of Art in the Education Department of Ceylon, Winzer elucidates the deficiencies of the system as follows:

In the majority of schools where after the examination, the pupils were requested to state the reason for which they are taught drawing, the answer was, after some hesitation, 'to get the school grant.' This idea was fostered to a great extent by the fact that pupils who had failed in other subjects were not presented for drawing examination. The immediate result of such a conviction was to reduce drawing in many cases to a rapid and thoughtless process, the work having no value from an educational or artistic point of view. In other schools, the lesson was a rite, the origin and the purpose of which remained unquestioned. The teachers work under the difficulties unknown in western schools, lack of space, light, insufficient equipments, and limited time being their chief handicap. Many of them have not grasped the method of teaching, correcting, and interesting the pupils. There is little, if any literature available in the schools. ...

124 The Ceylon Observer Weekly, August 20, 1918.
The natural tendency of the pupils is towards an elaboration of details at the expense of form and proportion. Sense of depth and perspective are conspicuously absent. Their decorative sense on the other hand, is highly developed and entirely instinctive. Many a pupil incapable of making an outline drawing of a simple object successfully composes an intricate design, based on natural forms, whether foliage, fruit, or flower. I may add that the theoretical explanation of design is apt to confuse and deaden this natural gift.

The attraction of colour is very strong, and though very often foreign to western ideas of harmony, the work in this line is generally effective. … Memory drawing is yet in its infancy; the pupil memorizes a picture or a photograph far better than an actual scene or object. … In the drawing of familiar objects all attention expected to be paid to the model, is generally discarded and idealized or rather standardized mental vision serves as basis for the work (e.g., cup and saucer, mango). … What seems essential is that the subject should be, more and more removed from the purely mechanical process into which it is apt to degenerate owing to insufficient stimulus as regards both pupils and teachers. … Lack of variety results in stagnation of the executive faculties, but should also require a greater effort mentally.

The advantage of correlating drawing with such subjects as geography in all schools and sewing and embroidery in girls’ schools have not been yet sufficiently realized.128

Winzer’s observation, while revealing the ambiguous situation in colonial art education also represents the prejudices, anxieties and dilemmas of a colonial art educator. It shows the gap between colonial policy and practice. Colonial art teaching’s emphasis on three dimensional illusionism and Winzer’s inclination towards the approach of design also become clear. Moreover, his suggestion to link the subject of drawing with the discipline of geography in all schools and with needle work in all girls’ schools, placed art education in a hierarchical relationship with other subjects and, also created a gender disparity.

Winzer later modified the existing British syllabus for the teachers’ drawing examination by introducing questions on theory and teaching of drawing. He also substituted western ornamental designs with Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic designs in connection with the examination that led to the publication of a short drawing handbook for the Sinhala medium teachers and a book of design based on Sinhalese lettering.129 These changes can be read as efforts to strengthen art education in

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vernacular schools with emphasis on local artistic traditions. The Administrative Report of 1925 noted the distinct improvement in the original work of the pupils, especially in boys' schools, and the increasing number of art rooms in schools.\textsuperscript{130}

Winzer also strongly propagated the idea of 'exchange' to improve the quality of art and art education. For this, he organized and supported several exhibitions and lectures on contemporary issues in art in governmental art institutions. The most momentous one was the exhibition of Japanese prints held at the Mardana Technical College.\textsuperscript{131} This particular exhibition was politically and artistically important against the backdrop of the popularity of these prints among the Parisian modernists and the Indian revivalists. Through this, Winzer hoped to broaden art discourse beyond pseudo-academism. His other important venture was the organization of a countrywide school art exhibition in Colombo in 1928 by the Education Department; this was the first such exhibition in the country. No less than 135 schools were represented, and over 2,000 exhibits displayed.\textsuperscript{132} Later, CSA took the cue and organized art exhibitions by schoolchildren annually, with participation from schools across the country.\textsuperscript{133}

Based on the exhibits displayed at the school art exhibition, Winzer observed that the real limitation of art lay in the attitude of the middle class who fashioned their taste from the reproductions and 'degenerated' forms of western art.

Sometimes in a rather dreadful way, children under pressure and control, succeed in imitating the perpetration of their elders. Most of us have seen in Ceylon, framed by proud parents, gloomy still lives, or worse still, copied from oleographs—swans amid lilies or a stag in a snow-storm... in fact exotic art with a vengeance.\textsuperscript{134}

In a newspaper interview, Winzer correctly identified the problems faced by art practice in general, and art education in particular. He stated:

Ceylon students of art borrowed western ideas, and that there was little to differentiate between one of the art shows in Ceylon and that of a provincial town in

\textsuperscript{130} Ceylon Administrative Report, 1925-A-9. Education.
\textsuperscript{131} A Japanese print exhibition in aid of the Maradana Industrial School was held at the Royal College Hall on December 17–19. The following works including coloured wood cuts were exhibited: Outomaro (1753–1806), Hokusai (1760–1849), Hiroshise (1797–1858), Harunbu (1718–1770), Masanoby (1761–1816), Koriusai (eighteenth century), Yeisen (early nineteenth century), Sadahide (early nineteenth century), Sadagiku (eighteenth century) Kunisada (1786–1865), Hiroshige (1797–1858), Shothi (nineteenth century), Brush Drawings (nineteenth century) and Kakemons. The Ceylon Observer, December 15, 1925.
\textsuperscript{132} The Ceylon Observer, March 27, 1928.
\textsuperscript{133} The Ceylon Observer, June 23, 1933, June 23, 1936, June 14, 1938, July 6, 1940.
\textsuperscript{134} Winzer on School art exhibition. The Ceylon Observer, March 27, 1928.
Europe. The painting was all done on western lines. This would be all right if Ceylon students had western masterpieces to teach them. This was not so, and the copies of the great works of European artists that came to Ceylon were not worth much. Whereas in the matter of Oriental art, the Ceylon student had the finest masterpieces to follow in the famous frescos at Sigiriya and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{135}

Here, he stressed the malicious influence of badly reproduced copies of western art. Winzer suggested that the only solution to this problem would be to study the original Ceylonese paintings which were locally available. Further, his emphasis on art teaching based on studying original works of art, while reiterating the methods of academicism, substituted it with local originals. Winzer thought that the decay of the industrial arts in Ceylon was due to the lack of new decorative motifs; the old designs were obsolete. He emphasized the importance of nature as a source of fresh ideas.\textsuperscript{136}

His emphasis on nature needs to be read against the background of traditional and oriental claims of revivalism based on tradition and the historic past. He differed drastically from this kind of historicism. He recommended the study of original Ceylonese art but did not support the revival of traditions. Unlike several contemporaries, Winzer was never a formalist. He was concerned that technical preoccupations would suppress the spontaneity and imagination of the students.

The culture of the mind, which in art should be concurrent with technical preoccupations, is we are afraid, not sufficiently attended to; taste is distorted and promise of spring is rarely fulfilled. More encouragement is needed: not from outside or above, but together with material help from those members of community who sincerely wish that art, the flower of culture and civilization, should flourish in Ceylon as the flower.\textsuperscript{137}

However, in 1952, his successor Beling cautioned that one could not expect all schools in Ceylon, or even a majority of them to work along these progressive and enlightened lines. Many art masters of the old tradition, long trained in the imitative mechanical methods of the past, found it difficult to appreciate the freedom of modern creative methods or the valuable results they produce. Many schools did not fully appreciate the value of art as a means of education.\textsuperscript{138}

Beling acknowledges the change in attitudes of some teachers. Such teachers realize that the principles of art are not light and shade, perspective and naturalistic

\textsuperscript{135} The Times of Ceylon, December 17, 1920.

\textsuperscript{136} Winzer on School art exhibition. The Ceylon Observer, March 27, 1928.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.

representation of photographic realism. Even a camera can achieve that. Rhythm, pattern, design, decorative quality, harmony and unity are important qualities. Technique, if it is to mean anything other than skill at imitating appearance or mere manual dexterity of manipulating material, must be related to the vision and expression of the child.139 By saying this, Beling implicitly marked the general terrain in which he worked as an artist and art educationist. His remarks reveal his stand against imitative academism and his inclination towards Parisian modernism. Beling agreed with Winzer that a sense of design was the connecting thread between eastern and western modernist art. Further, Winzer and Beling’s idea of design reveals their familiarity with the contemporary Bauhaus approach of design. Paul Klee’s Pedagogical Sketchbook (1925) and Wassily Kandinsky’s Point and Line to Plane (1926), published by the Bauhaus movement, tried to identify an abstract and universal grammar of visual expression.140 Some of the tenets of Gestalt psychology141 parallel ideas developed in Klee and Kandinsky’s textbooks of design.

1.6 Early Twentieth Century Buddhist Temple Murals

An equally significant parallel development to ‘white city’ art practices, was the fashion for Buddhist temples in the suburban areas of Colombo to be decorated with murals in a hybrid style, influenced by renaissance and post-renaissance illusionism of Europe after the 1880s. Much of the coastal population of Ceylon converted to Christianity as colonialism progressed along the southern coastal areas. A consequence of this religious conversion led to an adaptation of western lifestyle and

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139 Ibid., 49–50.
140 Two later books, Gyorgy Kepes’ Language of Vision (1944) and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy’s Vision in Motion (1947), further elaborated the theory of ‘visual language’ and gave it a scientific rationale; both were written while Kepes and Moholy were teaching at the School of Design in Chicago, founded as the ‘New Bauhaus’ in 1937.
141 Gestalt psychology was initiated by Max Wertheimer (1880–1943) at the University of Frankfurt in 1912; he and his students Wolfgang Kohler (1887–1967) and Kurt Koffka (1887–1941) became its central theorists. Gestalt psychology challenged the traditional notion that the ability to make sense out of visual data is culturally learned; according to Gestalt theory, the brain spontaneously orders and simplifies sense data into structured, wholistic patterns. Wertheimer and Kohler worked in Berlin after 1914 and 1921 respectively; all three scientists immigrated to the United States in the 1930s, where they became a prominent intellectual force (Sahakian).
mannerisms. The early phase of these murals represents a naive adaptation of the representational mode with mythical content. However, in the final decades of the nineteenth century with the onset of Buddhist revivalism, a patriotic slant began to appear across mural projects and their subjects during the 1930s.\(^{142}\)

1.7 Passage to Local

Ceylon’s resistance to nearly 600 years of European colonialism gained momentum with the emergence of the Indian nationalist struggle and Gandhi’s *Swadeshi* movement. The period between 1920 and 1930 became culturally explosive, with Colombo, Galle and Jaffna being the epicentres of these developments. Buddhist revivalism, workers’ movements, the activities of the *Mahajana Sabhas* and dress reform movements were important reactions to the call for *Swadeshi* attitude. These religious and social movements, along with a growing awareness about the Pali chronicles and archaeological material of the precolonial past (both mythical and historical), ignited the idea of ‘national art’ or a ‘search for new art.’ On the other hand, the very same developments led most critically to the monumental claim, appropriation and construction of Ceylonese identity and history as the achievements of the Sinhala-Buddhist. From this moment onwards, the two became politically and culturally synonomous with one another.

The 1920s and 1930s were ideologically motivated decades and shaped the future conceptual framework, social equation and class position of Colombo’s art practices. The causes and consequences of this development are manifold and complex. Unlike the period before, which witnessed an imitation of elitist culture in the metropolitan centres of the west, this period was marked by the impact of modern art movements from other parts of the world, especially Post-Impressionism and Cubism, the Bengal school and Santiniketan. But unlike the Bengal school, artists’ groups in this period displayed a less insular and more cosmopolitan attitude. The three important factors in Ceylon that fashioned the artistic activities of this period were the activities and ideology of Winzer and the formation of the Ceylon Art Club, the emergence of nationalist sentiments in the colony and inspiration from the Bengal school and Santiniketan. These developments formed an alternative to the existing

\(^{142}\) See Chapter 5 in this dissertation for a detailed discussion on colonial period Buddhist temple murals.
urban art culture derived from the activities and amateurism of the CSA and their pretensions of sentimental ‘Victorian realism’. Together, these influences gave rise to the idea of art in Colombo.

1.7.1 Impact of Indian Revivalism
As Michael Roberts argues, ‘Nationalism in Ceylon was influenced by the Western traditions and Western thought. It was also a reaction against the cultural impact of imperialism. It was also, one can add, inspired and prompted by the nationalist movement within the neighbouring subcontinent.’ Hence, the mechanics of churning out of a ‘new art’ from the colonial city culture after the 1920s was largely governed by the influence of Indian intellectualism. Apart from visits by the Indian National Congress leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal (1918), B. G. Tilak (1919), Sarojini Naidu (1922), Mohandas Gandhi (1927), Jawaharlal Nehru (1931) and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya (1931 and 1937), the works of the Bengal school and Santiniketan electrified the space of art practice from the 1920s. Contemporary Indian art exhibitions arranged by the CSA and the CAC focused on discussions that posed challenges and possibilities of a ‘new eastern art’. In this context, Tagore’s important visits to Ceylon in 1922 and 1934 were crucial to the history of Ceylonese art. This also marks the beginning and end of the CAC that encouraged the search for a new art, based on the present and past via western and eastern lexicons. Thus, this was a period when mindless westernizing trends were countered by indigenous forces both ideologically and artistically. Notions of the artist as a creative individual with imagination and social commitment, the artwork as a means of self expression and as an achievement of a particular ‘race’ were also produced in this process of indigenization which symbolized the new in the context of local modernity. The impact was long lasting.

In his first visit, Tagore aspired to galvanize the island community towards the larger imagined Indian nation. Since the island was colonized in all ways, it could only be accommodated into the larger India through a de-westernization process. That was why Tagore commented: ‘Cultured Ceylonese youth, most of whom had a foreign

144 Tagore arrived in Colombo in October 1922 and delivered two public lectures titled ‘The Forest Universities in India’ and ‘The Growth of my Life Work’ respectively. The Ceylon Daily News, October 12, 1922.
education wanted to get deeper into the depths of Indian civilization. Further, his addresses in many regional towns reflected the idea that Ceylon was once a part of India and now separated by western values of materialism.

I have had a very strong desire that it should be, because Ceylon is part and parcel of India. Your blood is the same as runs in our veins, our culture and history are closely linked together and so are our people and your people. Politics should not have the effect to divide us. We must come once more closer to each other; we must try our best to establish a living relationship between this and other parts of India. This is one of my wishes, and I came here to appeal to you because of our sense of kinship.

Following his first visit, the local newspapers followed Tagore closely and constantly published accounts of his foreign travels and exhibitions. This, in a way, aroused the educated middle class to empathise with the developments in the political and artistic spheres in India. Indian debates on how tradition and the historical past could be accommodated or invested in the making of the present and how to maintain continuity between the past and present, gave a new sense of direction in the search for a new national identity in Ceylon. This sentiment was unambiguously expressed in the following editorial published in *The Times of Ceylon* in 1933.

It would be far from wrong to assume that most thinking men have felt that the time has come for Ceylon to take up the thread of the Fine Arts where it was left with the coming of foreign influence. The inauguration of individualistic national art, capable of expressing the national characteristics and peculiar genius of people, is an essential of progressive development. ... Bengal school of Art which was inaugurated over two decades ago in India, would be a step decidedly in the right direction. ... The new art to be evolved will have to take into consideration the gap of time that divides us from the past and the present outlook in life. The harmonizing of present with the past will be the chief difficulty in the task. In addition, it would be well if the vanishing remnants of the past are not allowed to die out altogether and are studied with this purpose of ushering in a revival of art and culture in Ceylon.

Even though Tagore’s second visit reflected similar sentiments, his mission was more progressively artistic and cultural than the first one. He said: ‘We are now separated by circumstances. Original art and culture suffered as a result of this disassociation as a plant suffers when it is transferred to a pot uprooted from the soil. With politics, I am not concerned. My mission is of spiritual delights of art and beauty far and wide.

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146 *The Ceylon Daily News*, October 12, 1922.
have no other gift to offer you. I do not wish to reform the world, but to please it.\textsuperscript{148}

It is important to note here that his second visit coincided with the anti-Indian movement organized by various Sinhalese groups against the Malayalee migrant labourers and Indian traders.\textsuperscript{149} On his second visit, he acknowledged the political difference between colonial India and colonial Ceylon and put forward the idea of an identity based on shared culture. 'I do not know sufficiently of your culture, but I do hope you have a contribution to make to Indian culture. Politically, you may be apart but culturally, you are part and parcel of India. We want you to come to us to share our heritage.'\textsuperscript{150} His message became more explicit with the cultural troop that he brought with him. Nandalal Bose who visited the island with him, symbolically exhibited his large drawing of Sangamittra bringing the sacred Bo-tree to Ceylon from India, along with several large drawings on mounted silk and nearly 150 other works (out of which 56 were Tagore’s). The intention behind exhibiting these drawings was to highlight the similarity between the cultural and spiritual mission of Tagore and that of Sangamittra, the daughter of Ashoka who is believed to have brought Buddhism to the island. This helped further the Sinhalese belief that their cultural advancement happened with the coming of Buddhism. Tagore’s mission included an art and craft exhibition by Tagore and the students of Santiniketan. Tagore’s address on ‘The Ideals of Indian Art,’ was accompanied by classical and modern Indian dances, recitals of his poems in Bengali and English and solo songs by an Indian orchestra in Colombo, Galle and Matara.\textsuperscript{151} The responses were significant in all the regional towns.

An editorial in The Ceylon Observer assessed the relevance of his ideas on art in revitalizing contemporary art practice and moving away from amateurism and imitation.

Artists in Ceylon are no longer satisfied with being frankly imitative. Some of them are feeling their way towards the development of an individual and indigenous note in their work. In their search for fresh ideals, they are asked to go back to ancient Sinhalese art, but they need guidance and inspiration. Tagore’s timely visit has given them an opportunity which should be eagerly grasped. They are now brought into

\textsuperscript{148} Associated Press of India quoted in The Ceylon Observer, May 4, 1934.


\textsuperscript{150} The Times of Ceylon, May 10, 1934.

\textsuperscript{151} The Ceylon Observer, May 14, 1934.
more intimate touch with an art movement that has great significance for the East. ...

If Indian artists had to be imitative, it was better for them to copy from their own models of past than to strive to confirm to distant European standards. ...

There has yet been no great advance from the stage of amateurism in the matter of art in Ceylon. 152

Tagore’s second visit created a wave of change in the cultural sphere which led to the mushrooming of cultural societies and groups, a wave of press activity and the significant shift in cultural perception that encouraged youngsters to take up art as a profession. This attracted many people towards Santiniketan for inspiration to produce ‘eastern art’. ‘With three weeks of Tagore’s stay in Ceylon, the Sinhalese assimilated and absorbed the spirit of Santiniketan. Tagore represented a twentieth century ambassador of culture, akin to Ashoka’s ambassador of 2,000 years ago.' 153 The CSA organized three contemporary Indian art shows around the same time. 154 The CAC too organized a solo exhibition by Sunayani Devi and exhibitions of contemporary Indian art. Apart from the inspiring lectures of Tagore, Winzer organized a lecture by Stella Kramrisch. 155 The CSA organized a lecture series entitled ‘Ancient to Modern Indian Art’ by art critic Venkatachalam. Later, a Tagore society was inaugurated in Colombo in 1944. 156

1.7.3 Winzer and the Ceylon Art Club

Winzer, painter and Inspector of Art in schools, lived in Ceylon from 1920 to 1932. He had a momentous impact on contemporary painters and paintings. His charismatic leadership was evident both as an Inspector of Art and at the Ceylon Art Club (henceforth CAC). He helped the club challenge the dominance of the CSA, and contributed to the development of a new concept of art based on the approaches of French modernism and Indian revivalism. Even though he came to Ceylon as a

153 Dr. W. Balendra referred to the poet’s visit to Ceylon two years ago in the course of a lecture on Rabindranath Tagore, the poet of India, delivered at YMBA.
154 The third Indian art exhibition, organized by the CSA and the first post war exhibition, opened by the Governor, in the Colombo Art Gallery, was made possible by the visit of Mukul Dey. He was a student of Santiniketan and formerly the principal of Government College of Art Calcutta. He brought to Colombo a comprehensive collection of Indian art, which included works of Mughal, Rajput, Kalighat, Orrissa, Bargh, Ajanta and the modern Bengal School. The Ceylon Observer, January 17, 1946, January 20, 1946, February 7, 1946.
155 ‘Significance of Indian Art’ was the subject of her lecture at the university college hall. Members of the Ceylon branch of Royal Asiatic Society, those of the Ceylon Art Club and the CSA and the residents in the University college were invited. The Daily News, January 15, 1923.
156 The Ceylon Observer, August 8, 1944.
colonial education inspector, his approach was not confined to the official Victorian academic tradition, or as in the case of E. B. Havell, to the orientalist notion of art based on the idea of revivalism that propagated a return to tradition. Winzer’s idea of art was a combination of tradition and modernity. His concerns were more about art rather than the programmed art of colonialism or nationalism. Further, while disseminating the vision of modernism beyond Colombo into the regions, he brought artists with ‘modern’ sensibilities under one umbrella. His approach revived pedagogy and practice and opened up a new discourse on art in Ceylon. This paradigm shift was not confined to the circle of artists who worked with him, it forced the CSA to change and adopt a more liberal approach.

Winzer's own work seems to fall broadly within the academic mainstream of the period. However, his minimalist drawings and simplified compositions influenced the early works of Keyt, Beling and Kanagasabai none of whom had visited Europe early in their careers. They were familiarized with post-Impressionism and Cubism through Winzer and his collection of reproductions. He helped organize an exhibition of the works of Keyt and Beling in 1930, which can be recognized as the first modernist exhibition in the island.

Under the guidance and leadership of Winzer, the CAC provided a centre where artists dissatisfied with existing amenities could display their works. The club was established in 1922 and active till 1932 with the aim of raising the standard of art in Ceylon. It is interesting to note the similarity in location with Santiniketan. In 1920, Tagore started Santiniketan in rural West Bengal while the CAC was located in the vicinity of a Buddhist temple in the then rural landscape of Colombo. Members included C. F. Winzer, W. A. G. Beling, Justin Daraniyagala, David Paynter, George Keyt, D. Lokuge, S. R. Kanagasabai, J. D. A. Perera and R. W. Jeyasinghe. Rabindranath Tagore was an honorary life member of the CAC.

156 The Daily News, June 18, 1923.
This group and its activities are significant in the passage and development of modernism in the country.

*The Ceylon Observer* reports:

The Ceylon Art Club justifies its existence by fulfilling its objective namely the encouragement of local art, by exhibition, by instruction, by lecture and by library. The unpretentious building in a rural area of Colombo, namely the coconut groves surrounding the Buddhist temple at the second division Mardana, is the home of the Club, where a fairly well stocked library is kept. The members are set to be over a hundred and fifty. Classes are regularly held and are well attended. In the matter of exhibitions, they are primarily for the benefit of the students.161

*The Daily News* reported thus on the club's beginnings:

[For] the present day Ceylonese students of art, whose taste has been formed by the exclusive contemplation of the reproductions from western art...CAC is doing yeomen service to local art students in arranging exhibitions of this nature, for the acquaintance of many Ceylonese with Indian art does not extend beyond the gaudy representation of Sunday magazines. ... The visitor to the exhibition unconsciously strays in the club's library and reading room where he is confronted by a number of magazines almost covering the table and weighty volumes of art.162

The club arranged exhibitions that underscored its ideological position and commitment163 in cultivating an alternative taste. It is also worth mentioning the Indian exhibitions organized by the CAC as part of this activity. Starting with an exhibition by Sunayani Devi of watercolour paintings in 1923164 which were 'good specimens of eastern art,'165 the eighth annual exhibition of the CAC in 1930 went on to display over 150 works by contemporary Indian artists. The list included Rabindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, K. Mazumdar, Sunayani Devi, Nalini Mazumdar, Y. Katsuta, Ishwari Varma, Pulinbihari Datt, M. B. Gupta, M. N. Nabendranath Tagore, Ashit Kumar Ray and Rabindranath Dutt.166

These Indian art exhibitions proposed the first alternative to pseudo academism and

162 *The Daily News*, June 18, 1923.
163 An exhibition of paintings and drawings by Winzer was held at the Royal College on 13 and 14 July. The proceeds were to be in aid of the CAC. *The Daily News*, July 10, 1924.
165 Twenty two artworks were displayed of which 4 found purchasers locally. Five of them were not to be sold at the express desire of the artist. *The Ceylon Observer*, June 16, 1923.
166 *The Daily News*, October 14, 1930.
ignited the idea of contemporary eastern art that had roots in a modern sensibility and deeper understanding of tradition.

The annual exhibitions of the CAC showcased a wide range of work from foreign artists as well. Unlike the CSA which displayed western art and artists indiscriminately, the CAC was more selective in its approach. Its exhibition profiles reveal the club’s ideology and artistic mission. Following Sunayani Devi’s exhibition, the club exhibited photographic representations of French masters sent from Paris. They also exhibited the works of Y. Kondow (Japan), B. Hoefer (Germany), Otto Scheinhammer (Germany), Medici prints of works by the great masters and reproductions of the Ajanta frescoes and eighteenth century Sinhalese Buddhist decorative arts loaned by Andreas Nell. The club represents an intermediate phase between westernization and indigenization, amateurism and professionalism, elitism and populism. Some of its members were earlier associates of CSA while a few others went onto to join the 43 Group.

1.7.4 Lionel Wendt and the ‘43 Group’

Under the charismatic leadership of Lionel Wendt, the first professional artists’ group came into existence in 1943.

On 29 August 1943, seven people met in Lionel Wendt’s house in Cinnamon Gardens Colombo to form the 43 Group. They were Ivan Peries, his brother, Lester James Peries, Aubrey Collette, George Claessen, Richard Gabriel, and their host, Lionel Wendt. They nominated a committee consisting of Wendt, Ivan Peries, Collette, and Gabriel from among those present; and co-opted W. E. G. Beling, Ralph Claessen, Justin Daraniyagala, S. R. Kanagasabai, George Keyt and Majusri Thero. Harry Pieris was to be the secretary; and George Claessen, treasurer.

Some of its members were earlier associated with Winzer and his CAC. Lionel Wendt himself was a great admirer of Winzer’s modernity and supported him openly on all occasions. Therefore, this group can be seen as a logical culmination of the

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167 The Ceylon Observer, June 21, 1923 reports about the exhibition as a forthcoming event of the exhibition.
170 The Daily News, April 29, 1930.
172 The first two men exhibition by the modernist painters George Keyt and W. J. G. Beling was held at the Ferguson Memorial Hall and C. F. Winzer wrote an appreciative forward to the Catalogue. The Daily News, January 13, 1930.
CAC. They held their first exhibition in a warehouse at Mardana which also housed the Photographic Society of Ceylon. One of its founder members, George Keyt commented:

Happily for us 43 Group is no narrow, fanatical body in its reception of modern art and the welcome it has always extended to western trends in Europe and what it could gather from such vital trends in America. In fact its main cause of origin was the rejection of obsolete and the dead in the art of Ceylon and all that has resulted from the obsolete and dead deriving from the art of Europe.\textsuperscript{173}

It was decided to keep the 43 Group to a minimum: no president, only a 20-member committee including an Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer.\textsuperscript{174} The minutes of the August 1943 meeting underlines the self criticality that comes with the assertion of artistic agency by stating: 'It is the intention of the Group that contributing artists will select their own work before submission and the usual practice will be to exhibit all works submitted.'\textsuperscript{175} This helped overcome the problems faced by the CSA when it relied upon the selection committee that pandered to its prejudices and endorsed its tastes.\textsuperscript{176} It not only recognized the individual artist's freedom but also acknowledged multiplicity in expression. Hence, in the absence of a manifesto, the group evolved as a collective of artists who had different ideologies and embraced diverse artistic approaches to art.

Collette, a member of the 43 Group, shared his thoughts about the group in a radio broadcast in Melbourne, 1991:

It was made up of artists who were so diverse in style and temperament. We were by no means a school of painting in the sense of impressionists in Paris or the Heidelberg school of Australia. Each member had his own individual style and outlook, and yet we held together as cohesive whole.\textsuperscript{177}

However, like many other writers, Dissanayake argues that the un-stated aim of the group was to break away from the academism of nineteenth century European studio painting and to create a synthesis of twentieth century western European art and Ceylon’s ancient heritage of Hindu and Buddhist culture. ‘What members of the 43 Group held in common was not a style but a conviction that Ceylonese art could be

\textsuperscript{173} Keyt in a foreword to the sixteenth exhibition of the Group.


\textsuperscript{175} Neville Weereratne, \textit{43 Group: A Chronicle of Fifty Years in the Art of Sri Lanka} (Melbourne: Lantana, 1993), 22.

\textsuperscript{176} In this way, the society had repeatedly rejected the works of George Keyt, Justin Daraniyagala and W. J. G. Beling. Ibid., 21–22.

\textsuperscript{177} Collette radio interview quoted in Ibid., 19.
modern without sacrificing specifically Ceylonese values and traditions. ¹⁷⁸ Between 1943 and 1950, the group held annual exhibitions of their work, they sponsored exhibitions of Kandyan dancing, reproductions of Ajantha frescoes, French Impressionist prints and photographs of Khmer sculpture. In the early 1950s, they exhibited in London and Cambridge, Paris, Venice and Sao Paulo. Between 1955 and 1959, they organized five more group shows in Colombo. The last two exhibitions were held in 1964, in January with their anniversary show being held in November.

Ironically, while accepting the 43 Group’s attempts at localizing western styles, the same writers were critical of the mixture of ‘western academism and oriental content’ in works associated with the CSA.¹⁷⁹ Most of the writings now approach the group rather formalistically and locate their work within the binary of academism and Parisian modernism. Many scholars have opined that another reason for the creation of the 43 Group was to question the dominance of CSA in the art of that time. However, the conflicts and differences seem to be much more complex. The artists of the 43 Group shared similarities with those of the CSA in their choice of subjects: still life, portraits, landscapes and local people. This could be the reason behind a few artists belonging to the CAC and later to the 43 Group whilst collaborating with CSA, from time to time, in spite of their many disagreements. For example, the exhibition committee of the CSA in 1932 included C. L. Beling, J. F. P. Daraniyagala, George Keyt, J. D. A. Perera and David Paynter.¹⁸⁰ George Keyt was a committee member in 1933 as well.¹⁸¹ J. F. P. Daraniyagala gave an illustrated lecture on Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso under the auspices of the CSA.¹⁸² Daraniyagala, Keyt, Beling and Ivan Peries also exhibited with the CSA at different points in time.

Similarly, both groups of painters tried to rephrase the western style of painting with Ceylonese content. The CSA artists objectified their local surroundings and people in the tradition of Victorian academic realism. Ironically, the academic style advocated by Amarasekara in the Atelier school and the CSA, and David Paynter and J. D. A. Perera at the Government Technical College’s art department and

¹⁸¹ *The Ceylon Observer*, March 28, 1933.
¹⁸² *The Ceylon Observer*, June 29, 1933.
the CSA, never came to terms with realism in its European historical and conceptual terms. While they attempted to paint realistically, their approach was very subjective and this was a common predicament of their so-called experiments with realism. In case of the 43 Group, they too empathetically imbibed alien influences but also looked to the modernist’s focus on individuality which further amplified and endorsed the artist’s subjective position.

The three major painters of the 43 Group, Keyt, Daraniyagala and Ivan Peries went to the extreme of romanticizing the modern artist as a creative individual and placed themselves in a self-imposed exile. While Keyt and Daraniyagala moved away from Colombo to work in Kandy and Pasiyala respectively, Ivan Peries took the risk of struggling in London as a professional artist. This changed the status of the artist who now perceived his/her self as a ‘unique individual who was no longer prepared to be bound by social conventions and followed his/her own destiny in the pursuit of an artistic ideal. The disorientation created by urbanization, individualism and modernization perturbed these artists. Thus the search for the modernist pictorial idiom was invariably connected with the artist’s own search for the self. This search was bi-focal—cerebral and empathetic.

In the 1930s, populist academic realism gained appeal among the gallery-visiting public and occupied centrestage across middle class drawing rooms. Around the same time, popularity of Sarlis’ chromolithographs and temple murals depicting Buddhist mythical content in the popular style of Indian calendar art reached its zenith. Art education helped disseminate similar popular genres as did printed illustrations in newspapers and literature throughout the island. Hence, the popular realism circulated through these images, now inherent in all sectors of Ceylonese society, became indexical with Buddhism and nationalism. Most members of the 43 Group, like those of the Ceylon Society of Arts, belonged to the Burgher community or the Karāva caste. 184 Daraniyagala, Wendt, Ivan Peries and Harry Pieris imbibed a contemporary approach to art through their art training in Europe. Although Keyt and Beling did not visit Europe, they were inspired by printed reproductions of Parisian

184 The Sinhalese fishing caste who migrated from South India between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Goviyagama (farmers) is the dominant caste in the Sinhala Buddhist caste hierarchy. Karava, Durava and Salegama are the other important castes among a total of eighteen. For further reading on Karava elites, see Michael Roberts, Caste Conflict and the Elite Formation: The Rise of Karava Elite in Sri Lanka 1500–1931 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
modernism available in Colombo. The stance against populism and the embracing of the Parisian school can be read as an elitist attempt at establishing 'difference'. This politics of difference emerged as a key feature of Ceylonese elitist identity under the influence of modernity.

Although Amarasekara, J. D. A. Perera and David Paynter were known as professionals associated with the CSA as were Winzer and other CAC members, the former were, first and foremost, art teachers. Paynter mentioned in a radio broadcast of 1939 that 'less than half a dozen painters in Ceylon made a living out of art. But they were pioneers who had both to study their craft and try to educate the public.' In this context, the 43 Group became the first professional artists' collective. It is relevant to note here that Kanagasabai who was a charismatic Art Inspector in the Department of Education in northern Ceylon and Manjusri Thero who was a monk and also documented temple mural paintings were unable to continue exhibiting with the group partly because they were not city elites and followed a different mode of art practice. In contrast to the CSA, very few women artists exhibited with the 43 Group. Moreover, the 43 Group made a limited contribution to art education, their principal concern being gallery display which appealed to the tastes of elite society. Individuality and professionalism, became major challenges for the artists due to lack of public institutional support and an embryonic art market. Art operated largely as a class phenomenon in colonial Colombo. The individual artist's success depended on his/her capacity to network socially with the upper strata of society, in some cases with kith and kin relations as well. In this context, artists who belonged to wealthy elite social backgrounds managed to find a steady clientele for their works and opportunities to exhibit abroad.

1.8 Women Artists: A Practice In-between

'In art history the status of an art work is inextricably tied to the status of the maker.' Easel painting and the Victorian ideals of womanhood entered the colony simultaneously through the same channels of colonialism. There is an

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185 *The Ceylon Observer*, March 29, 1939.
186 Kanagasabai who trained at the Madras School of Arts and Crafts was the only Tamil artist associated with Winzer, then a founder member of the 43 Group. He founded the Winzer Art Club in Jaffna in 1938 with the help of Beling, to promote art practice and education on the principles of Winzer.
interconnectivity among the ideas of Victorian womanliness, femininity and art practice. The Victorian ideals rigidly schematize the roles of men in the outside world and the roles of women inside the family and home, where they protect traditional moral and spiritual values. In this segregation, ‘fine arts’ were considered to be part of a public, professional activity. What women make, which is usually defined as ‘craft’, could in fact be defined as ‘domestic art’. It was also viewed as minor, delicate, personal part time ‘hobby’. In this context, women entering the artistic field were only allowed in, as Jordan aptly terms, as ‘public amateurs’ or ‘private professionals’.

The history of easel painting in Ceylon starts with the activities of public amateur ‘lady’ art practitioners. As noted earlier, they actively contributed to the formation of amateur art clubs, and later, the CSA where they held administrative positions as well. The participation of women occurred at two levels. Initially, wives and daughters of the British administrators or the European community representing the creamy layer of society were involved in art making and teaching as part of their Victorian lifestyle or as a leisure activity. These women’s sociability and respectability, linked with their family’s social position, played an influential role in their art activities. It allowed them an unrestricted freedom to move away from the generally expected roles of a Victorian woman. Next was the entry of local elitist women into the male preserve. The local elites’ advancement in capital earnings and women’s education encouraged a few women to go abroad for art training in prestigious world art institutions. Veronia Peiris studied at the Slade School and the Royal College of Art London. Suchila Wijayasuria who graduated from St. Martins School of London also exhibited with the 43 Group. Muthuvaloe who finished her training in sculpture and painting from Madras and later studied at Santiniketan in 1937, also exhibited with the CSA. Saline Wiekremaratne, who trained at Santiniketan, also participated in the 30th Anniversary show of Amarasekara’s Atelier school. Maisie de Silva, from a newly rich southern family, passed the University of Cambridge Junior School Certificate Examination with a distinction in Drawing. She was trained under Emily Florence Mason and Amarasekara, and was the youngest member of the CSA. She served on its committee from 1945 to 1969 and exhibited

188 Ibid., 70.
190 Wheatland, Show, Gordo Milne are some of the names that appeared in the accounts of CSA annual shows in the early decades of the twentieth century.
with them as well. In addition, she was the first Sri Lankan woman artist who participated in an international exhibition in India (1945), Canberra and the U.K. 192 Similarly, Sita Kulasekera also trained at the Madras School of Arts and Crafts and was active in the 1950s, participating in the 43 Group exhibitions, including at the their London exhibition alongside other important local modernists.

Further, colonial administrative reports record that several girls were trained in drawing and needlework at the girls' schools. 193 'The only difference between the education of boys and girls was that certain "accomplishments" such as domestic science and needlework were provided for the girls.' 194 From newspaper accounts of the time, it is evident that several women artists such as Bertha Janze, 195 Mrs. Amarasekara, Grace van Dort, Maisie de Silva and Sita Kulasekera exhibited at the shows of CSA, Atelier School of Art and the 43 Group alongside other prominent male artists. Bertha Janze, Fortune Don and S. V. W. Gunawardena were trained at the Atelier school. Phyllis Edwards, Aliien van Dort and Grace van Dort exhibited with other Ceylon Art Club members and painters of Bengal renaissance. 196 Interestingly, these accounts throw up several other names of women artists most of whom were unmarried. 197 This shows how the professional career of the woman artists was limited by their family obligations. Maisie de Silva who concentrated on portrait paintings of her family members and who took a 10-year break from painting after her marriage, clearly expressing her priority for family over art. As a woman from high society, she had to sacrifice her social life to balance the family roles with her art practice.

My family comes first and foremost. I have never felt that I have sacrificed anything. I believe that a woman’s place is in the home but if the person happens to be talented and an artist as well, painting or sculpture or whatever it is, must only be a hobby.

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192 *Senior Artists’ Exhibition Catalogue* (Colombo: Ceylon Society of Arts, 1974).
193 *Ceylon Administrative Report, 1904, 1916, 1924*.
195 Born in 1901, foremost watercolourist, trained in Atelier School of Art, Exhibited from 1920s to 70s. *Senior Artists’ Exhibition Catalogue* (Colombo: Ceylon Society of Arts, 1974).
I for myself usually kept away from high society life as much as possible to devote my time and energy to painting.\textsuperscript{198}

This may be the reason why even women who received art training abroad like their successful male counterparts, disappeared with time. From the accounts of city art exhibitions, one could observe that the hierarchy between art and craft, professional and non-professional, male and female become firmly established with the emergence of the first professional painters’ collective, the 43 Group. This is in contrast with Parker and Pollock’s observations on European modernism.

It is not without irony that their final victory and entry into the full academic curriculum occurred precisely at the point when the hegemony of academic tradition was successfully challenged and finally destroyed by new ‘avant-garde’ theories and practices. On the other hand, when avant-garde artists turned from academic theory and took up the hitherto less prestigious field of portraiture, landscapes and still life, women could and did take full part in radical movements in art based upon these areas of representation.\textsuperscript{199}

In the Ceylonese context by contrast, the entry of male artists into ‘less prestigious field of portraiture, landscapes and still life, only served to further displace women from the terrain of ‘fine arts’ and pushed them to search for new avenues in craft. Thus, the emergence of craft and weavers’ organizations with an active participation of city elite women was not an accident and led to the revivalism of weaving and the textile industry in the 1950s and 60s with major contributions from Minnette de Silva,\textsuperscript{200} Ena de Silva,\textsuperscript{201} Barbara Sansoni\textsuperscript{202} and Swanee Jeyawardena.\textsuperscript{203} They were followed by Chandramani Thenuwara, Rahana Jeyewardena de Soysa, Marie Gnanraj and Tilak Samarawickrema, the only male amongst an otherwise female dominated area of practice, experimentation and innovation. This development also had a bearing on the vernacular architecture movement of Geoffrey Bhawa. His commissioned works brought about a new aesthetic collaboration between local hand woven textiles and interiors of vernacular modern architecture. That actively fashioned the local craft

\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Moise de Silva 1907–1997: Portrait of an Artist} (Exhibition catalogue).
\textsuperscript{200} Asia’s first women architect.
\textsuperscript{201} An important artist from a Kandyan elite family. She introduced the art of batik to Ceylon in the 1960s.
\textsuperscript{202} Sansoni, with her weave of bright colours, brought the local woven textile into the urban elites’ interiors. She also documented the vernacular architectural styles of Ceylon in her sensitive pen and ink drawings.
\textsuperscript{203} Artist, art teacher, batik and tie-dye designer and one of the few women artists who exhibited with the 43 Group.
as an ingredient in elitist modernity. In addition, women also played key roles in art education. Cora Abraham, a founding member of the Melbourne Art School, Colombo, provided art education for young children. Likewise, Florence Mason and Sita Kulasekera conducted art classes for schoolchildren in Colombo. While easel painting as a new medium of expression gave agency to urban women, the Victorian ideals countered it with set roles for wife and mother. Given the situation, these women artists were forced to renegotiate their roles within the art world. The women artists found new modes of art practice combining art teaching and designing, which was different from the so-called professional world of the male artist. The above observations show that the women artists, like their male counterparts, initially took up easel painting with an ambition to display in the galleries. With time, their careers evolved to balance domestic responsibilities and personal creative impulses. The gender disparity in colonial education and prescribed roles for women among the city bourgeoisie fashioned the art practice of women differently by situating it in the space between the personal/public, professional/amateur and art/craft binaries. This circumscribed (yet liminal) space allowed woman artists to fulfill their expected roles as part of the social responsibility towards being ‘respectable family’ women while also being involved in art practice. Art teaching and craft based practices, in addition, helped them supplement the family income without losing either their personal ambition for art making or social status. Caroline Jordan explains this practice in a different colonial context.

Among the reasons colonial women made art were to sell for charity, to repay a favour, to swap with their friends, to demonstrate to their pupils, to amuse their children, to present as a gift to a distant relation, to thank a benefactor, even to memorialise the dead. Their art functioned as part of the social glue that women used to hold the extended family together and to keep the family integrated into the wider community.\(^{204}\)

Social acceptability of women’s artistic labour in non-professional art practices, on the other hand, kept them away from the preserve of the gentlemen’s art circles. As Parker and Pollock aptly point out, ‘women artists have not acted outside cultural

history, as many commentators seem to believe, but rather have been compelled to act within it from a place other than that occupied by men.\textsuperscript{205}

1.9 Conclusion
This chapter reveals how modernity introduced a new notion and practice of art within the local bourgeoisie both at the elitist and popular levels. The rupture between the inclusiveness of the colonial port culture and the exclusive elite politics, demarcates the external and internal, material and ideological borders of the colonial art world. This was further governed by the interrelated processes of westernization and indigenization, amateurization and professionalization, and elite and popular taste. Artistically, the CSA and the CAC/43 Group represent major stylistic positions: realist and anti-realist. But these positions do not correspond exactly to their western equivalents qualitatively. They were relativized through the existing mode of aesthetics, circulation methods, and art education as well as other colonial institutions of mediation. Further, Sinhala Buddhist nationalism produced an alternative art space at the periphery, adopting the popular realistic style that put the elitist art space under siege and continually went on to contest it. The influence of the Bengal renaissance and Indian nationalism played a crucial role in the production of modernist art. The Ceylonese modernist painting can be described as an admixture of Parisian Modern, Indian revivalism and the local cultural politics. As is the case with the elitist identity, the art world too, was marked by a duality and ambiguity.