

ARJUNA GUNARATHNE

2024

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SFG

OUTLINE

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21.05.24 - 18.06.24

SASKIA FERNANDO GALLERY

The basic theme of this art exhibition is 'the reflection that a person who lived in a post-colonial mental mood that encounters with the Western social reality'. On the one hand, these paintings of his reveal the subjective reflection and on the other hand, these paintings depicts harshness of urban objectivity. Thus, we can create a paradox that manifests as follows:

Themes of loneliness, division, and the challenges of communication emerge from the contrast between the dynamic landscape and the solitary figures, inviting viewers to contemplate the complexities of Inhuman connection within a fragmented world.

From a Western perspective, these paintings show us the fear of isolation that the South Asian man encounters through re-exploring the essence that he loses in the ultra-modern Western world. Thus, these artworks reflect a Western modernist self-expression while also evoking a post-colonial spectrum in the spectator.

Deepthi Kumara Gunarathne

Arjuna Gunarathne's *Outline* offers a glimpse into the artist's visceral interiority as he navigates the complexities and nuances of existing in an unfamiliar space. The exhibition presents the fantastical imagination through which the artist essays the loneliness and alienation of the migrant experience while finding mirth in the quiet existence he has carved out for himself and his family. Filtered through the prism of Gunarathne's emotional wavelengths, this latest series explores an uninhibited childlike imagination through an engagement with pigment pen, watercolour and crayon, reinterpreted from the many schools of visual art he is trained in.

Gunarathne oscillates between styles, techniques and conventions of Mughal miniature traditions, mural painting and British academic practice, blending the East and the West seamlessly as he synthesises a visual vocabulary that is uniquely his. His engagement with material explodes onto paper and canvas, like an avalanche of colours and a brilliant use of composition. In a style that is quintessentially inspired by the fauvists, they open up the artist's emotional landscape to the viewer.

Gunarathne leans into visual distortions to heighten the sense of fear and uncertainty in a style similar to the German expressionists and blends it with an explosive use of colours. Desolate and gloomy townscapes are reimagined as two-dimensional and laid-out like patterned textiles, as the unfamiliar opens its doors and invites the tacit possibility of warmth. His work echoes the feelings of anticipation that accompany many immigrants who leave their familiar lives behind to start anew. The pastel shades and vibrancy achieved by his pigment pen, convey a poetic hopefulness and joie de vivre.

The content solitude that emerges in the company of loved ones comes through in Gunarathne's family portraits. His loved ones float in space untethered to the reality outside, like figures in the tradition of East Asian art. Even in their preoccupations, they seek comfort in each other's presence and are held close to each other by an invisible twine. Guided by his training in miniature traditions at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, the artist paints them with meticulous attention to detail. This very private world becomes visible to us through a patchwork of translucent, coloured candy wrappers also reminiscent of the warmth and comfort of patterned quilts.

The universe the artist creates for himself is filled with euphoria and magic, away from the routine and monotony of existence. Within the boundaries of this private world that the artist retreats into is a garden of abundance filled with evergreens that are larger than life. It is a scintillating and vivid sanctuary filled with arching boughs and canopied shade that encircles him and his occasional companions. He blends into them, becoming a part of his surreal imagination, and at other times he comes across as a figure in sharp contrast to the world around him.

Outline while being a deeply personal narrative also communicates a communal experience drawing from his observation of the many migrants and refugees around him. In a new place and culture, life becomes both expansive and constrained. Individuals who leave behind the comfort of their home countries are greeted with uncertainty and amidst this, it is the warmth of loved ones that offers them respite. Gunarathne, through his practice, finds subtle but magical poetry in the experience.



Talk to Me 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Border II 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 75cm x 100cm



Border III 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 100cm x 75cm



Border IV 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 100cm x 75cm



Border V 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 100cm x 75cm



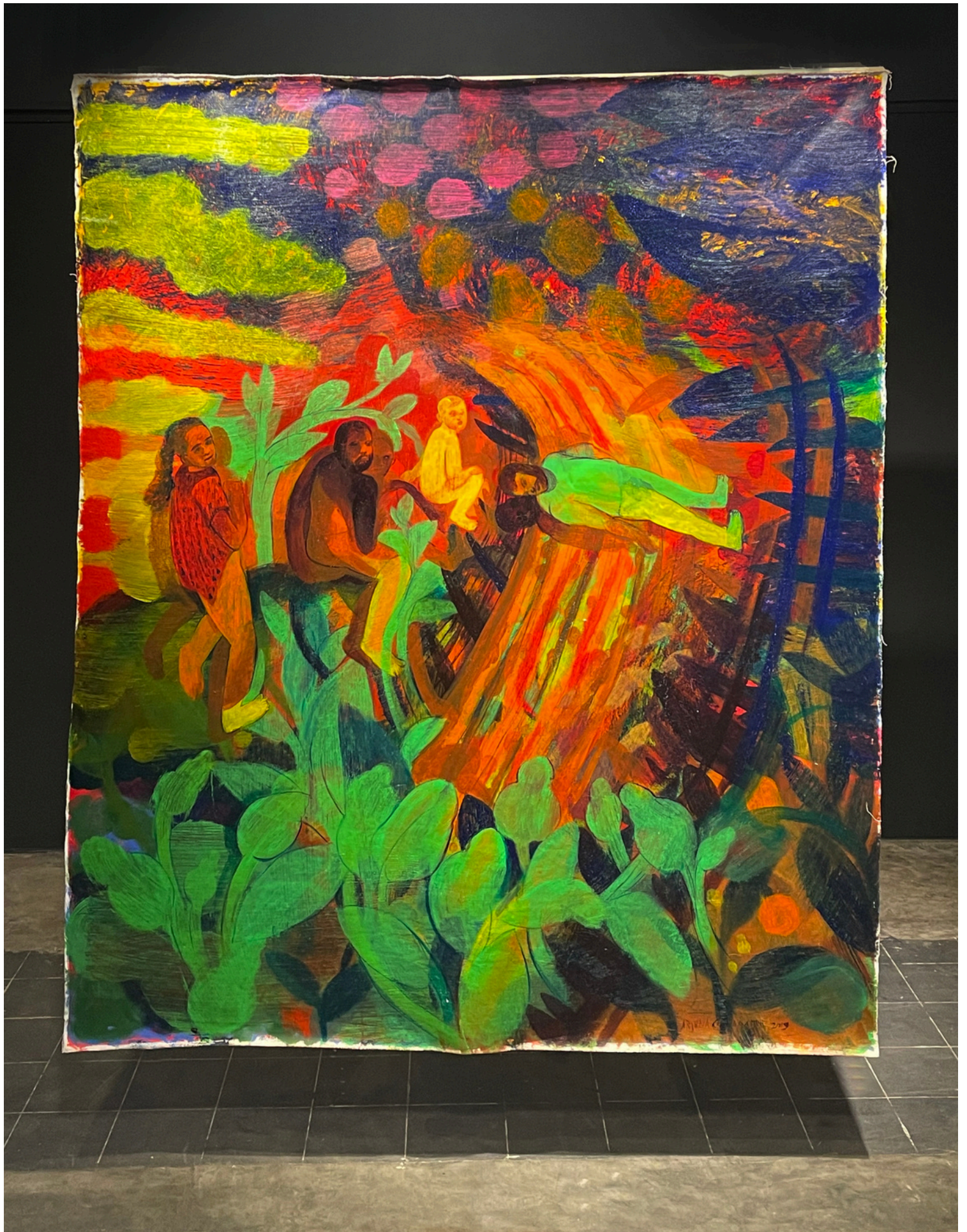
Lonesome III 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Lonesome 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 42cm x 30cm



Bull Session 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Past to Present 2019, Oil on Canvas, 220cm x 180cm



Family 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



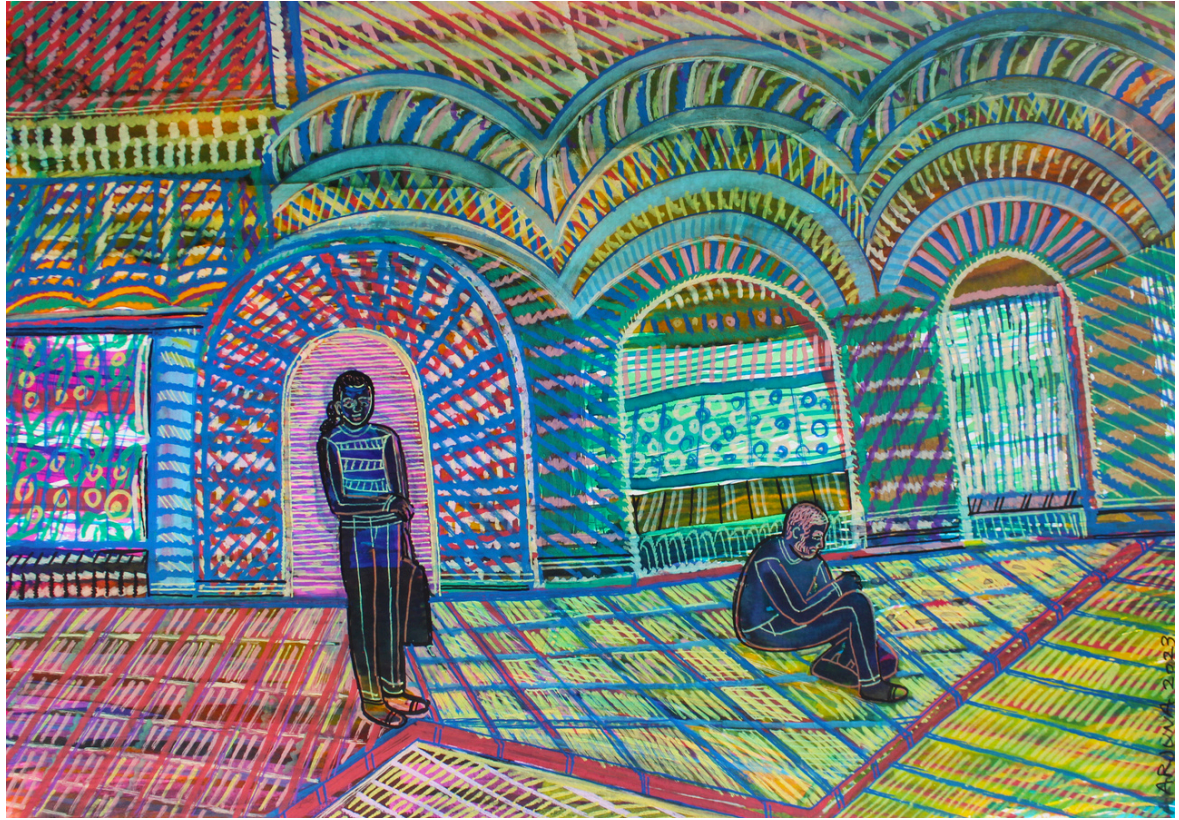
Memory 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 40cm x 50cm



Working Visa III 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Working Visa II 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Working Visa I 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Time Out 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 30cm x 42cm



Pass the Time I 2008, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 42cm x 30cm

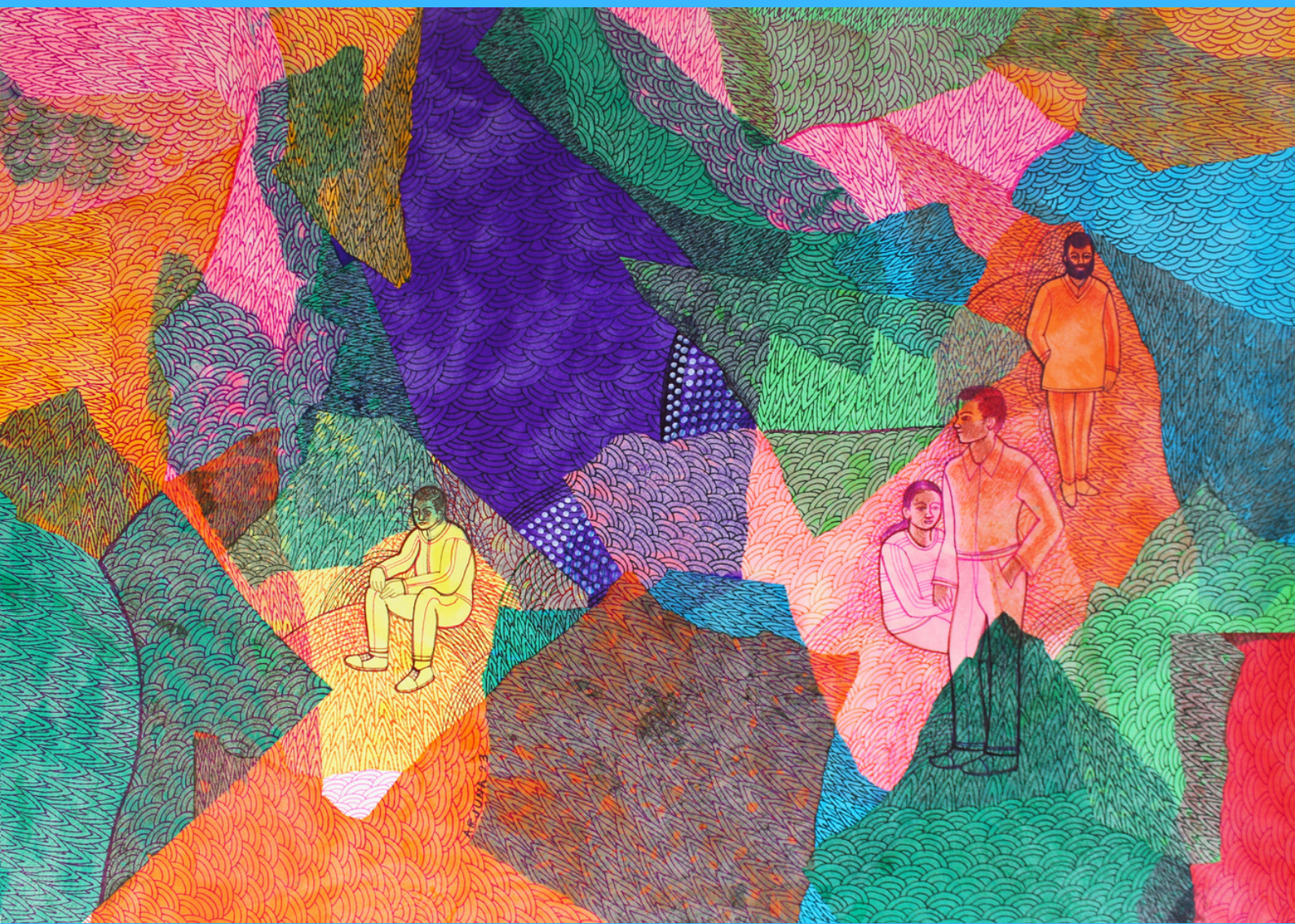


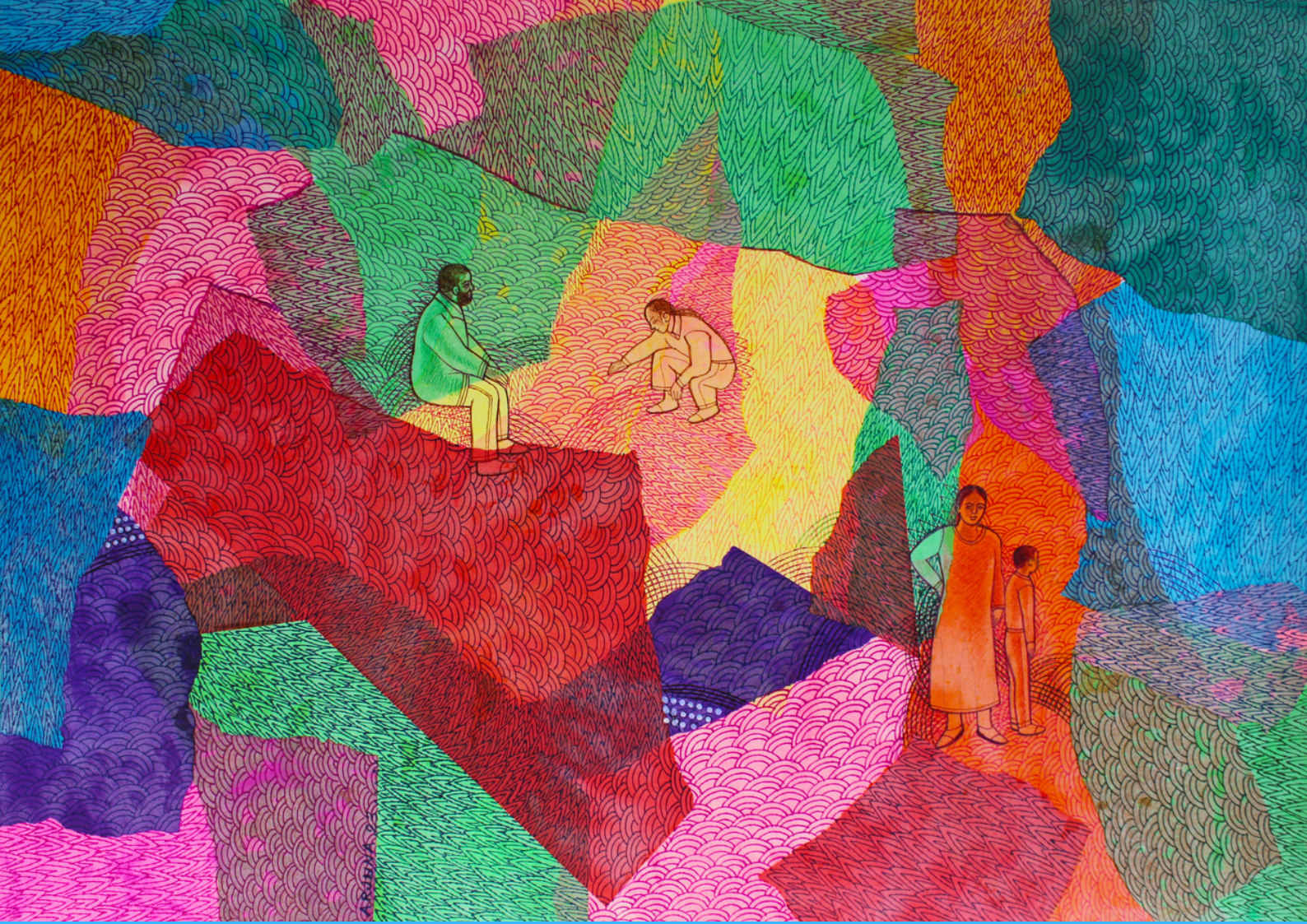
Pass the Time II 2008, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 42cm x 30cm



Outsider 2023, Ink and Pigment Pen on Paper, 36cm x 26cm

Hang in There II 2023, Mixed Media on Paper, 42cm x 58cm





Hang in There I, 2023, Mixed Media on Paper, 42cm x 58cm



Just Arrived III 2023, Watercolour and Crayon on Paper, 26cm x 36cm



Just Arrived II 2023, Watercolour and Crayon on Paper, 26cm x 36cm



Just Arrived I 2023, Watercolour and Crayon on Paper, 26cm x 36cm



Outline II 2023, Oil on Canvas, 24cm x 30cm



Outline I 2023 , Oil on Canvas, 24cm x 30cm

ARJUNA GUNARATHNE b. 1976

Education

- 2018 The Drawing Year Postgraduate Programme, Royal Drawing School, London, UK
- 2004 Miniature Painting Programme, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan
- 2002 Four-year course in Fine Art Programme, VIBAVI Academy of Fine Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Solo Exhibitions

- 2022 Within Boundaries | Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2010 Me, Myself & I - Exhibition of drawings | Barefoot Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2004 Exhibition of Paintings | ROHTAS 2 Gallery, Lahore, Pakistan
- 2000 Exhibition of Paintings | VAFA Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1995 Exhibition of Paintings | City Council Hall, Matale, Sri Lanka

Group Exhibitions (selected)

- 2023 The Royal Drawing School: Celebrating the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III & Queen Camilla | Christie's, London
- 2023 'The Foreigners' | Curated by Sandev Handy & Sharmini Pereira, The Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 2021 Missing You | Windsor Castle, England, UK
- 2021 Highly Commended works -The Self-portrait Prize 2021 | Ruth Borchard Collection, UK
- 2020 Royal Drawing School | Summer Show 2020, London, UK
- 2018 Best of the Drawing Year | Christie's, London, UK
- 2018 Royal Drawing School | Shoreditch, London, UK
- 2018 Space Studio, London, UK
- 2018 One Hundred Thousand Small Tales | Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 2008 Artful Resistance | Crisis & Creativity in Sri Lanka | Museum of Ethnology, Vienna, Italy

Collections

- Contemporary British Art Collections, UK
- The Royal Art Collection, UK
- Contemporary Art Collection, India
- Art Collections, Sri Lanka

Publications

- 2019 The A-Z of Conflict | Published by Raking Leaves, Colombo, Sri Lanka

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