

# **Engraved Encounters: Envisioning the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka as a Space of Performing Memories and Trauma**

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Museums have evolved into a space of providing interactive educational experiences to their visitors, by attempting to “perform” the history and the memories related to the displayed artifacts. Scholars such as Kidd (2007) and Wilson (1999) explore how museum spaces in England and the United States act as sites of performance, by hosting live performances and storytelling events alongside the artifacts. The present study aims to contribute to the ongoing research on Performing in the Museum, by analyzing the way in which the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka (MMCA), a Sri Lankan museum with the vision of blurring the line between artifacts and visitors, utilizes its space and artifacts to perform memories and trauma. This study specifically focuses on the exhibition “Encounters” organized by the MMCA, as it allows the visitors to view the displayed artworks as “encounters” of memories and trauma, rather than a passive display of art. The theoretical concepts for the study are drawn from Performance Studies, and are based on Site Specificity and Visuality: the former focuses on how space can be utilized in a performance, whereas the latter dwells upon how performances are “seen” by the audience. Positing two research questions that explore how the MMCA has used its space as a site of performance and how the artworks of the exhibition create a visual performance of memory and trauma, this study gathered data through field visits, the museum website and scholarly literature. The analysis reveals that in the carefully curated space of the MMCA, the artifacts and the visitors are enmeshed in a performance, as the visitors encounter the memories and the trauma expressed by the artworks. Furthermore, this study encourages further research on transforming Sri Lankan museums into sites of preserving and performing history for future generations.

**Keywords:** Memory, Museum, Performance, Space, Trauma, Visuality