

ARTISTIC PRACTICE AS SELF-HEALING: A READING OF THREE ARTISTS IN POST-WAR NORTHERN SRI LANKA

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This paper argues that for professional visual artists working in sustained engagement with traumatic personal and collective experience, the process of art-making itself functions as a mode of self-healing; not as clinical intervention or administered therapy, but as an intrinsic psychological dimension emerging from within committed creative practice. Examining three contemporary visual artists from Sri Lanka's Northern Province: Krishnapriya Thabendran, Vinson Chanthiradas Vimal, and Suntharam Anojan, the study explores how artists whose practice is deeply connected to personal trauma, loss, and violence discover that the act of making simultaneously constitutes an act of psychological processing and healing. The study investigates how traumatic experience is translated into visual form, how memory operates within the creative process, and in what ways artistic practice functions as a self-healing mechanism for the artist. The research adopts a qualitative interpretive case study methodology grounded in art historical and visual culture frameworks, generating data through iconographic analysis of selected artworks, semi-structured interviews conducted with each artist, and close readings of exhibition texts and artists' statements. The theoretical framework draws on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and Dominick LaCapra's notion of working through. The analysis reveals that each artist develops a distinctively personal practice in response to post-war experience. Krishnapriya's micro-drawings and trace-based works construct intimate visual spaces for mourning and remembrance. Vimal's metal sculpture, realised through processes of melting, bending, and hammering, transforms experiences of violence into reflective form through the physical act of making. Anojan's landscape paintings function as sustained witness to collective loss rooted in his lived experience of the 2009 conflict in *Mullaitivu*. These findings suggest that artistic and psychological processes are not parallel but inseparable — the making is the healing. This study concludes that professional creative engagement with traumatic experience constitutes a culturally embedded, self-directed pathway to psychological wellbeing, positioning art not as supplementary to post-conflict recovery but as a primary site where trauma is encountered, processed, and transformed.

Keywords: Self-healing, Trauma, Postmemory, Post-war, Artistic practice