
CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN THOMAS

Christopher Kulendran Thomas' family is from a place that no longer exists. For three decades during the Sri Lankan civil war, the Tamil homeland of Eelam was self-governed as an autonomous state led by a neo-Marxist revolution. But this uprising was brutally crushed in 2009 by an authoritarian Sri Lankan president who had come to power by appealing to neglected rural voters and inflaming racial hatred to get elected. In the immediate aftermath of that violence, and the consequent economic liberalisation that followed, a new local market for contemporary art emerged. Thomas' exhibition at New Galerie features original sculptures, paintings and works on paper by some of Sri Lanka's foremost young contemporary artists, purchased recently in that 'peacetime' economic boom and then reconfigured by Thomas for international circulation within his own compositions. This ongoing operation translates what counts as contemporary across the global contours of power by which the 'contemporary' itself is conditioned, drawing on the outward performance of democracy by which nations evade international accountability. In Sri Lanka, this projection of the 'contemporary' continues economically the process by which the revolutionary vision of 'Eelam' was defeated. But what could a *new* 'Eelam' be if that idea - of a self-governed state based on equality for all its citizens - was imagined as a distributed network rather than a territorially bounded nation?

New Eelam, presented in collaboration with curator Annika Kuhlmann, is a long term artwork in the form of a startup - a real estate technology company being founded by the artist, with colleagues, to develop a new form of housing based on a flexible global subscription. This venture brings together specialists from the fields of technology, real estate, finance, architecture, data science and art. It originates from contemporary art's role in prototyping new lifestyle formats and new forms of labour as part of the processes by which cities around the world are shaped. *New Eelam's* business model is based on re-engineering some of these structural operations of art - and some of the property relations at the very heart of the present economic system - through collective access rather than individual ownership. Rather than opposing incumbent systems by force, this post-capitalist venture speculates on how a new economic system could evolve without friction out of the present one. It envisions the future of citizenship in an age of technologically accelerated dislocation, asking how a corporation could be constituted as a state and how a brand might communicate as an artist.

For information on *New Eelam's* global housing subscription, register for updates at: new-eelam.com

Christopher Kulendran Thomas' work has been included in the 11th Gwangju Biennale (2016), the 9th Berlin Biennale (2016), "Bread and Roses" at Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2016), "Co-Workers: Network As Artist" at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2015) and "Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making" at Tate Liverpool (2013). A major new installation of his work can currently be seen as part of "moving is in every direction. Environments - Installation - Narrative Spaces" at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart (Berlin) and a solo exhibition of his work will open in October at Tensta Konsthall (Stockholm).

Curated by Annika Kuhlmann