

## Grey Noise, Dubai

Press Release

Nightscares 2019 - 2021  
Muhanned Cader  
September 15 – November 1, 2021

We are pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Galle based Sri Lankan artist Muhanned Cader at Grey Noise, Dubai.

I.

Darkness. Why is it so chilling, yet so alluring. We fear it yet escape into it. As he has done before, Muhanned Cader turns to the subject of darkness, in a new body of 12 paintings called *Nightscares 2019-2021*. Rather than look at the night in these works, Muhanned looks into it. It's a subtle difference that reminds me of a conversation I had years back with American artist James Turrell who said 'night does not fall, it rises'. Between sunset to sunrise every 24 hours, when the sun moves below the horizon, a period of ambient darkness ascends. Night of course is defined in relation to the rotational position of the day. In the absence of daylight, nothing can be seen, at least not for humans. Our sense of sight is blighted. What we can't see we fear. For Muhanned however, the obstruction of our sensory system to see in the night should not prevent us from looking into its velvety darkness. Painted from the vantage point of his 8th storey apartment, his new series of paintings look into the nighttime surroundings of his neighbourhood, Nugaduwa.

II.

Nugaduwa is situated on the outskirts of the southern city of Galle in Sri Lanka. It does not share the bright lights of the big city at night. Instead, it twinkles and shimmers as a result of the blazing street lamps that line the Southern Expressway. The Nugaduwa interchange which serves as the access point into the city of Galle, is also a stone's throw from the artist's apartment. In one of Muhanned's twelve paintings, the highway appears as an abrupt arc of narrow, orange light. It darts across the lower part of the canvas before being extinguished by the dark. Other paintings in this series look out across vast vistas of night. Human habitation is suggested by clusters or strings of light; some areas appear more populated than others. From afar, the lights chart the proximity of buildings to one another amidst the rising topography of the landscape. A dense cluster indicates the city of Galle in the far distance, while smaller clusters locate dwellings in what seems like the middle of nowhere. When seen up close, however, these lights transform into nothing more than muddy crusts or dabs of raw paint. Dandelion, bumblebee, flaxen, oyster, cotton and parchment are just some of the colours that lie on the surface of the canvas. They join an otherwise dominant spectrum of black, blues and dawn grey swatches of paint. Looking into the night Muhanned unveils a kaleidoscope of hues lurking within an otherwise monochrome series of works.

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### III.

In the 1990s Muhanned Cader rented a studio on the edge of Bolgoda River, situated in a quiet suburb south of the capital Colombo. During this period he made a series of 40 paintings called 'Nightscapes'(1999), which captured the views from his studio across the river after sunset. The paintings featured curved edges, a trait that has gone on to become a distinguishing characteristic of his drawings and paintings. Rather than paint the picturesque views of the river during the daytime, the artist opted to capture the view from his studio during nightfall. "I was not very into the daytime...there was something about those Koralawella nights that was perfect and mysterious, which made me want to paint it. And it worked perfectly with the politics of the time."<sup>1</sup> Muhanned's return to painting nightscapes comes not only with a change in location but a change in format. The curvilinear form of his initial series has been left behind and replaced with rectangular canvases. They are oriented in the format of traditional landscapes or turned vertically like stone tablets. Set within these rectangles however, the irregular edges of the painted surface continue. As in the previous series, they suggest that part of the night has been edited out. What is there to be seen has been concealed by the cover of night. We cannot see the full picture. We are not supposed to.

### IV.

The new series of paintings are shown alongside an accordion book, in which collaged photographic fragments have been arranged to form a unfolding landscape at night. The double-sided accordion book gives form to the night from the front and the back. It mimics the feeling of being surrounded by the darkness. Compared to the paintings, the photographs help us observe the light pollution of the city. They depict the misty indeterminacy of night into day as a ritual that invites the next revolution of a living planet. The images that make up the book are made by cutting out parts of the night. These cutouts correspond to the sections of night that have been removed from the edges of the paintings. In the book, Muhanned appears to present us with an archive of night's remnants, filed for safekeeping. Titled, *Let Sleeping Villages Sleep* (2021), Muhanned suggests that we read past the contents of the book and instead, remain vigilant of what lurks beneath the surface, should the sleeping villages awaken. While the cover of night induces a state of slumber and quiet, it's darkness also conceals all evils. Darkness. It is so chilling yet so alluring, for a reason. Such are the politics of our times.

Sharmini Pereira  
Chief Curator  
Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka  
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<sup>1</sup> <https://mmca-srilanka.org/ohst-artwork/muhanned-cader-45-59>

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### About the artist

Muhanned Cader

b. 1966, Colombo, Sri Lanka / lives and works in Galle, Sri Lanka

Muhanned Cader was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka and currently lives and works in Galle, Sri Lanka. He earned his Bachelor's in Fine Arts from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1994. Since then, he has participated in several international projects. His work has been featured at the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia; 1st Singapore Biennale; Burger Collection, Hong Kong; 1st Lahore Biennale, Pakistan; Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh; Devi Art Foundation, India; 2nd Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India; Herbert Johnson Museum at Cornell University, New York and Nasher Museum at Duke University, North Carolina.

In 2005 he received the Kalasuri, Sri Lanka President's title of honour for excellence in visual arts.