

The Impact of Postmodern Performance Practices on Post-Conflict Cultural Landscapes in Sri Lanka

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The prolonged civil war in Sri Lanka, concluding in 2009, left complex post-conflict legacies impacting economic, social, and cultural realms, as well as individual mindsets. This study examined the outcomes of a creative performance initiative implemented within these challenging social contexts, probing the efficacy of performance activities in addressing post-war issues. In 2022, the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Peradeniya and La Communauté Inavouable from France introduced the postmodern performance 'Museum (Theatre)' in Kandy. The following year, with the collaboration of the Kalam Cultural Institute of Jaffna, the performance was staged in Jaffna. These productions incorporated diverse creative interventions including drama, photography, installation art, and interactive audience participation. This paper analyzed Hyman Müller's postmodern play 'Hamlet Machine,' as performed during these events, focusing on participant-selected portrait photographs and conducting participant observation to analyze audience engagement. Specifically, the study explored how, in post-war Sri Lanka, approximately 13-14 years after the conflict, the socio-cultural landscapes of the northern and central regions were perceived and how effectively performance practices and installations intervened to capture these nuances. This practice-led research demonstrated the transformative potential of postmodern performance art in fostering dialogue and understanding in post-conflict societies, highlighting its relevance and impact in the specific context of Sri Lanka's post-war recovery and cultural revitalization.

Key Words: Performance Practice, Post-conflict time, Sri Lankan Civil War, Hamlet-Machine.