

IN ITS 10TH YEAR, CHRYSALIS OPENS
A NEW STAGE FOR

WOMEN'S STORIES

with the Third Act Short Film Festival

For ten years, Chrysalis has worked to put women and youth at the center of Sri Lanka's social and economic change. This year, that work took a new form: cinema. The inaugural Third Act Short Film Festival, held 26-27 June at Alliance Française de Colombo under the theme "Reframe HER Narrative," gave more than 250 audience members and 28 filmmakers a shared space to sit with stories about women's lives that Sri Lankan screens rarely make room for: forced marriage, grief, disappearance, gender based violence, motherhood; and to talk about them afterward, together.

The festival grew out of Chrysalis' International Women's Day initiative, which invited short films reframing narratives around women. More than 65 submissions came in from across the country; a two-stage jury process narrowed them to over 28 official selections, screened alongside two special showcases from India. But the films were only half the programme. Every screening was followed by open conversation between filmmakers and audiences, discussions that moved past craft and technique into important questions: why these stories stay hidden, what stigma does to the women living them, and what it would take to tell them differently.

"We do not have many spaces like this where people can watch locally made films," one audience member reflected, "and having a shared purpose like this to celebrate women and create change is important in ensuring

women are given a voice." The conversation, several said, didn't end when the credits rolled - it followed people home.

"Third Act was never just a festival - it was an invitation for Sri Lanka to look at women's lives without flinching," said Ashika Gunasena, CEO of Chrysalis. "We started Chrysalis ten years ago because we believed that when women lead, communities and economies grow stronger. Storytelling is part of that same belief: before a norm can change, someone has to name it out loud, in a room full of people willing to listen. That's what this festival was - not a competition first, but a space. That's the platform we set out to build, and we intend to keep building it."

The festival's official jury - Vimukthi Jayasundara, Ilango Ram and Vinosha Kiriwandeniya, echoed that purpose in a joint statement: "What struck us most was the courage in these films. These are not easy stories; but they were told with extraordinary restraint and craft. Watching them alongside an audience willing to sit with that discomfort reminded us why platforms like Third Act matter: craft alone doesn't change a culture, but craft given an audience might."

Among the films recognized, the jury's top honour went to *The Unwritten Verses*, Fathima Shanaz's short about a young mother navigating the Quazi Court system after being forced into marriage at sixteen, alongside a Rs. 300,000 Chrysalis production

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grant toward her next film. Special Jury awards went to *The Last Endless Night* (Jacob Luke Jeroshan) and *Is Snow White?* (Sureni Ranawaka); Special Mentions to *It's a Fairy Tale* (Damith Aluthgama) and *The World on Amma* (Jeyaratnam Jenoshan). What mattered most was having a space where women could tell their own stories, in their own voices," Shanaz said. "That opportunity meant far more to me than winning an award."



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