A Penchant For Art

Posted on
A traditional dance performance

A beautiful image of a village girl holding a bunch of Araliya flowers, caught my eye as I glanced through the exhibits of artist Ranjtih Perera while he recalled the story of how he rediscovered his passion for art at a latter stage in life.

Words Archna Balakumar **Photographs** Indika De Silva

Ranjith Perera's fascination with art could be traced all the way back to his childhood days spent at Trinity College, Kandy. It was here where the artist encountered his biggest inspiration, David Paynter—a famed Sri Lankan artist, widely known for his paintings of the Trinity College Chapel. Further, the school and his friends played an integral role in discovering his passion and talent for art as well. "The only prizes that I ever won in school were for art," he joked.

Having had a hectic career as a Director of Forbes and Walkers, he rarely found time to paint. However his partiality towards art found expression in many ways such as doodles and scribbles on work catalogues—because of which he was fondly called "The Doodler" at office. Nevertheless it is his early retirement that paved the way for Perera to plunge head first into art."I keep painting, because it is like a meditation for me. The feeling you experience when painting for hours engrossed on a single thought watching colours blend to take an almost life like form is inexplicable." Though Perera never formally learnt Art, he spent five years working with Nadine David in order to learn the nuances of painting and fine tune his skills. He considers this as an enriching experience, especially because Nadine David is one of the best pupils of David Paynter. "She was a great mentor and support," he says. She urged him to host five successful exhibitions.

Painting life forms is Perera's forte. When speaking about this approach he said, "I find beauty in the streets. Everyday people like farmers, snake charmers and those who walk on the streets have a lot of colour and character. These things fascinate me." However, bringing out the rustic beauty of such scenery is a challenge. Perera conjures the image that he sees onto canvas, meticulously with each stroke, while

breathing life into the caricatures. His paintings are lively and unique, probably because of his interesting pick of subjects; it seems as if each of them has an unravelled story that transports the spectator to a world of its own. Though most of his works are in oil colours, life painting in charcoal medium is his personal favourite. These works of art can be purchased at his residence.

As a student of history, Perera has always been amused by the charm of old world Ceylon and some of his works, like the one of the old Kandy Perehera, stand as a testimony to that. The spectacular painting depicts a part of the perahera during the colonial period. It is the finer attention to details such as the costumes of the common people and the British soldiers in full uniform as spectators, which provides a lifelike vibrancy to a by-gone era. It is so convincingly original, making one feel that it was painted by someone who had lived and witnessed such an intriguing episode.” I love painting yesterday’s world, the one in which we grew up, in which there were more people and less machines,” he reveals.

Throughout his journey he has kept himself in the company of masters like Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Rembrandt. Books of these veteran artists and their paintings lie stacked in his studio as he draws constant inspiration from them. An ardent fan of Rembrandt in particular, he feels nothing but awe when thinking about how passionately these legends had pursued their love for art.

Perera’s life is an inspiration to many, especially to people who are involved in the creative profession. In a world in which there is a compelling need to be different and extraordinary, he dares to be himself and does not let anything else except his own interests, set the pace for his life. “Art has helped me look at life with more humanity,” he mused. He leads a contended life with his family whose encouragement has helped him to reach great heights in his endeavour. As a lover of people and art, he continues to do what he enjoys the most, simply and passionately.

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