

# Artistic and Soulful: The Beauty of Slow Art

Posted on

Picture-perfect describes Dennis Candy's drawings. He doesn't just use a pencil; he breathes life into paper.

*Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.*



The artist at work: Dennis Candy in his creative space.

Soulful eyes blink back at you. Young men in loincloths. Nude anatomy. Flexed biceps. The crouched man – evocative and sexy. Faces staring into the distance. Waves. Boats. Dennis Candy is unmistakably a master of hyper-realism. His pencil and charcoal portraits rival high-resolution photography. He captures every nuance, eyelash, pore, hair, wrinkle, and contour with astonishing clarity. He preserves emotion, personality, and the story within each face, anatomy, and scene. His drawings show remarkable sensitivity and control.

“The human figure intrigues me,” says Dennis. Even the beauty of an atom appears through his skill. He draws from the Western tradition of hyper-realistic pencil work, which truly captures what the artist sees through pencil or charcoal. Artists like Dennis dispel the illusion that in an era of technology and smartphones, slow art is reduced to embers. His art is a painstaking process, capturing the smallest details, six days a week, nine to five.

For Dennis, who has been residing in Sri Lanka since 2000 and living with an adopted Sri Lankan family in Kandy, his artistic work is both a technical challenge and a form of celebration. It is not the tortured artistic expression often associated with younger artists. At 80 years old and in good health, Dennis considers his current work a celebration of human life and beauty.

Dennis emerged quietly from the shadows, sustained by a patient, almost

meditative devotion to his craft until the moment he was discovered. That moment came through Udayshanth Fernando of Paradise Road and The Gallery Café – an acclaimed art connoisseur renowned for identifying future prodigies and giving them their true first platform. Introduced through a mutual contact, Fernando was immediately struck by the power and precision of Dennis’s work.

Despite Dennis having never sold his paintings, Fernando has made the bold decision to exhibit him as a guest resident artist in Sri Lanka. In a remarkable show of confidence, Fernando purchased eleven of Dennis’s sketches immediately after their first meeting and personally curated fifty of his works for exhibition. The exhibition represents a significant milestone. It will be Dennis’s first solo exhibition, featuring 50 drawings that span a 15-year retrospective of his work in Sri Lanka. All artwork depicts Sri Lankan subjects, including catamarans on beaches, tree roots, craftsmen’s tools, flora and fauna, and portraits of Sri Lankan youth.

The exhibition is scheduled to run from January 8th to February 5th at The Gallery Cafe. Dennis draws with graphite, carbon, and charcoal pencils. He is fascinated with human perception and the challenge of translating three-dimensional reality onto two-dimensional paper using only shades of gray. A particularly noteworthy aspect of this exhibition is Dennis’s decision to donate all proceeds from sales to the “Rebuilding Sri Lanka” fund. He will keep only enough to cover material costs.



A young man looking at a seashell.



Standing man posing with a bird, dog and a cobra.

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Sky, sea, boat and surf.



Ropes, knots and spars.



Where does reality end and the imaginary begin.

Being a recent discovery, there's much to find out about Dennis the artist in addition to the art. Dennis was born to draw. He has been painting, drawing, and scribbling since childhood. Throughout his teenage years, he dreamed of being a freelance fine artist, driven by a desire to explore artistic freedom. However, in the 1960s, when a career in art was not the most promising choice, Dennis was not supported in settling as an artist. The era was not yet fertile enough to provide him with a stable career in art. Instead, he chose to study the social sciences at university and pursue a career in personnel management. But the artist in him was constantly battling a desire for expression. His inherent talent would never leave him. He followed art lessons in the UK, which were primarily focused on figure drawing. This explains his emphasis on the human body. He loved photography. Throughout his working life, he'd go out on weekends to parks and walk alongside rivers. He would capture ordinary things, people being themselves, and whatever fascinated him.



Oruwa



An impossibly ethereal physique.

Retiring early in his 50s marked the beginning of a new chapter in his life. It was a time of searching and rediscovery, a time for renewal and rebirth. That brought him to Sri Lanka more than forty years ago in search of peace. He walked the beaches and discovered the island's ancient kingdoms, temples, and monasteries. The Gal

Vihara in Polonnaruwa was where he had a profound spiritual experience. In the UK, Dennis had been practicing meditation for 35 to 40 years. He did so through books, television programs, and group sessions. However, his true quest began after retirement. He then started visiting Sri Lanka annually during the British winter, staying at meditation centers and visiting monasteries. He eventually settled at the Nilambe Meditation Centre near Kandy for five years. There, he worked through personal anger and cravings while practicing his photography skills. Once the healing began, so did Dennis's growth as an artist. He began to paint scenes in watercolor. He also connected with the Kandy Arts Association, traveling to surrounding villages to document craftsmen and women in a bid to preserve their skills. He wanted to capture them in a milieu of decline brought about by development. Following that, Dennis created a Flickr website featuring 3,600 photographs. It received 14 million views over 15 years, potentially making it the most widely viewed Sri Lankan cultural website globally.



Young man looking at a clay pot.

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It's great that Dennis is finally showing his exceptional talent to audiences who will surely appreciate art drawn at a different pace, where effort and skill speak louder than anything. Today, opportunity is knocking at Dennis' door. For a man whose talent seemed to have taken a back seat but has been rejuvenated and brought forth in full force, this is a new beginning. For a twelve-year-old in the UK who discovered a place after his name on a small island and was determined to visit someday, the journey is coming full circle.



Man with a coconut frond.



What is the meaning of this?

He did not just visit but made Kandy in Sri Lanka his new home. As Dennis captures the real world, he instills a deeper appreciation for the things we see every day but often overlook, and to look at them with gratitude.

*January 8 – February 5*

*Paradise Road Galleries*