

Beauty in Change

Posted on

The Artistic Dialog of Hapuwatte and Harasgama

At the hands of artists Preethi Hapuwatte and Nelun Harasgama, flowers and leaves are more than just pretty motifs. They are a powerful form of expression.

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Photography Barefoot Gallery.



Preethi Hapuwatte.



Nelun Harasgama.

There is an exquisite beauty in the flower and leaf paintings of Preethi Hapuwatte and Nelun Harasgama, whose brushwork captures the wonder and poetry of the natural world. Their work captures the delicacy and fragility through graceful tones - Preethi's flowers bloom in gentle pastels, and Nelun's leaves unfold in warm, earthy tones. Yet, their art transcends the mere depiction of nature's physical forms. The flowers and leaves become symbols of transience and renewal,

reflecting the passage of time and the cycles of life. Thus, their joint exhibition “Impermanence” captures the “fleeting beauty of a moment, the loss embedded in transformation, and the resilience that emerges from change.” While both artists interpret impermanence through nature, each brings a distinct focus: Nelun focuses on leaves, and Preethi focuses on flowers. Together, their works celebrate the quiet truth that all things fade and are reborn in a continuous rhythm of becoming.

Their collaboration emerged at an unexpected moment. Preethi had decided to step away from exhibiting, feeling that her time as an artist had come to a close. She even declined invitations to show her work, convinced she was “too old to paint to fill a gallery.” Meanwhile, fate intervened when Nelun, who had reserved the Barefoot Gallery for a solo exhibition, realized that she did not have enough pieces to present on her own. This realization brought the two artists together. Choosing to share the creative load, they joined forces to create “Impermanence” – a poignant exhibition that contemplates life, death, and regeneration.

For two artists who had previously pursued distinctly different artistic paths – Preethi focusing on abstract human figures and faces, Nelun exploring the more introspective, often more melancholic aspects of the human form – turning to flowers and leaves marked a significant departure.

Yet, both found joy in this shift: in observing and reimagining the natural world through their inner vision. They bend and sculpt nature’s forms just beyond reality, infusing them with a quiet subtlety that transforms each flower and leaf into a visual metaphor for the theme that they explore – impermanence, renewal, and the beauty of change.

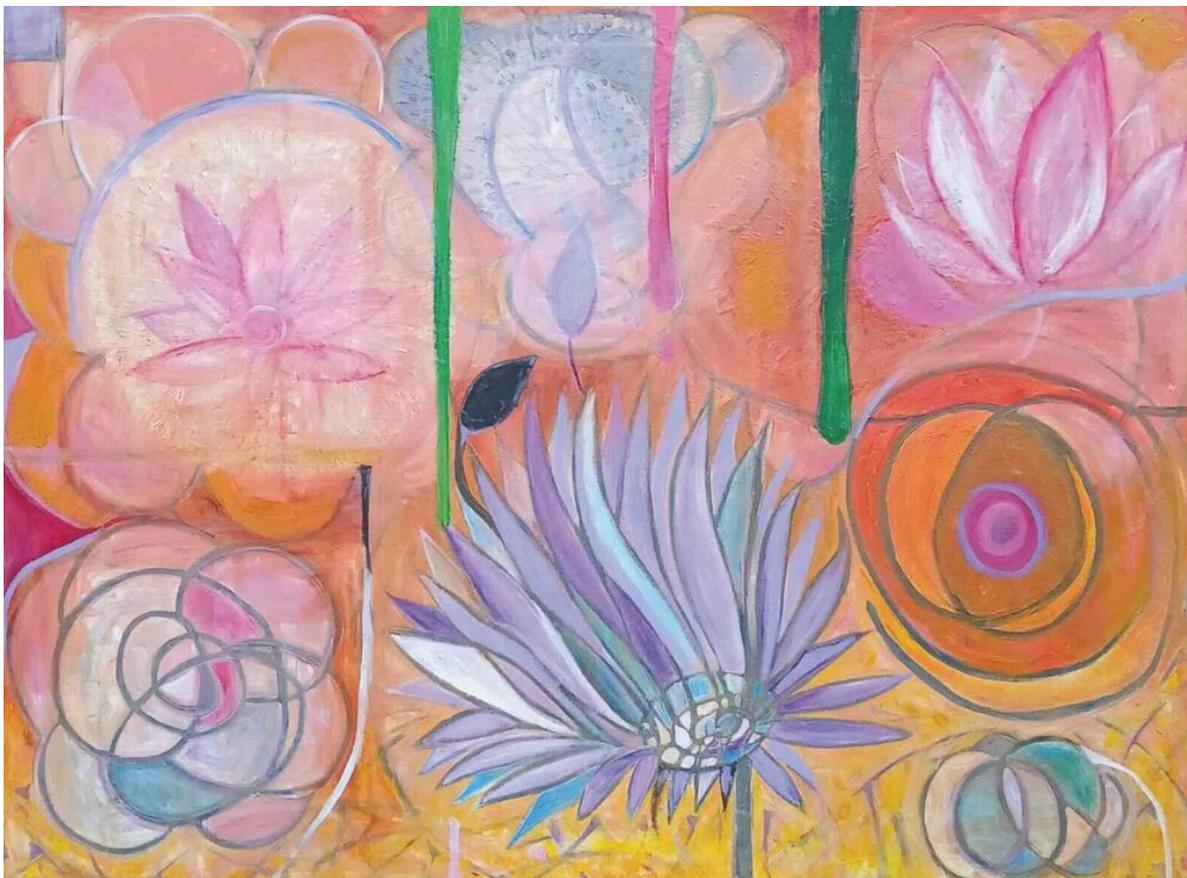
What’s striking about this collaboration is that while focusing on nature and its lessons on impermanence, the artists choose not to view transience as something sorrowful. Instead, they reveal the quiet beauty in life’s fleeting journey through their chosen subjects. Each artist brings a distinct sensibility to the theme, adopting her own visual language to narrate the story of impermanence on canvas.

Preethi’s flower paintings mirror the many moods she has experienced throughout her life. At the heart of her creative process is the realization that as one matures, life’s unexpected events can offer opportunities to begin anew – not by reclaiming the past, but by embracing a different way of being.

In her distinctive style, Preethi captures the beauty of flowers without intending to

depict any particular species. She allows each bloom to emerge intuitively, and only once the painting is complete does she give it an identity, naming each piece not after the flower itself, but after the emotional state it embodies —a reflection of what she feels within.

While both artists interpret impermanence through nature, each brings a distinct focus: Nelun focuses on leaves, and Preethi focuses on flowers.



Artist Preethi's blooming flowers and soft hues intertwine in a dance of nature and abstraction.



Minimalist elegance — a soft palm frond in muted tones on textured white, evoking a sense of calm and balance by artist Nelun.

Nelun, on the other hand, collected fallen leaves during her trips to the jungle, finding inspiration in their quiet beauty. She draws them as they are - withered, dry, and found on the ground, detached from the tree, capturing their natural state with reverence. Each artwork is titled with the scientific name of the plant, underscoring her belief that a leaf, whether alive or dead, still bears the same name. Likewise, she reflects, human beings— whether young or old—carry the same identity.

Through this lens, Nelun reveals the enduring beauty in people and places, even as they age and transform. Her work suggests that impermanence, though inevitable, does not erase beauty; instead, it reshapes it. In the withered and the weathered, she invites us to not see the decay, but transformation and the quiet promise of

regeneration that follows.

The artists also reflected on their philosophical understanding of impermanence. Preethi believes that nothing in life should be taken too seriously, as our time is brief, and advocates for making the most of each moment. Nelun, meanwhile, finds meaning in the phrase “this too shall pass,” suggesting that no situation, however difficult, is permanent and no one must feel permanently defined by difficult circumstances. Both artists find beauty in the cycle of life, death, and renewal, cherishing the memories of those who have passed as enduring threads in the fabric of existence.



Soft gradients and bold contrasts create a striking image of a single blossom rising through muted tones – Preethi.



A single leaf, elegant and serene against the darkness — a tranquil moment in nature - Nelun.



Earthy textures blend with serene minimalism - Nelun.



A single flower blossoms, showcasing strength and grace amidst warm tones - Preethi.

The journey to connecting their individual works for “Impermanence” had been a unique one, involving working independently in different locations - Nelun in Colombo and Preethi partly in Australia. Despite not seeing most of each other’s creations during the process, their works ultimately came together with remarkable harmony. They attribute this synchronicity to shared life experiences, being of a similar age, and their long-standing connection through the Barefoot Gallery, where both have worked since the time of Barbara Sansoni. Though their artistic styles and techniques differ significantly, they find that these differences complement one another, resulting in a body of work that feels effortlessly cohesive.

In terms of technique, “Impermanence” marks a departure for both artists. Nelun, who typically works with oils, turned to acrylics for the first time to capture the fine precision and texture of her leaf paintings. Meanwhile, Preethi employed a delicate layering technique to build depth and subtle emotion into her floral compositions.

And so, in “Impermanence”, the artists aim to create a celebration of life and the natural world’s cycle of life, where things die and regenerate, disappear and reappear, forming an evolving cycle that depicts the reality of every living being in this world. In a subtle reflection of their exhibition’s theme, Preethi and Nelun express surprise at the new artistic direction their work has taken. Yet, they see this shift as a testament to the endless nature of artistic growth – an affirmation that, like life itself, “we are always becoming.”

Till November 15, 2025
10am-6.30pm Monday to Saturday
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