

Shilpa Abhimani by the National Crafts Council



Intricate lacquer designs. Photo credit: National Crafts Council

A visit to the Craft Museum in Battaramulla is the perfect way to discover the artistic spirit of Sri Lankans. We were amazed by the carved coconut-shell jewelry, woven reed mats, traditional Sri Lankan crafts, and beautiful paintings, discovering the ways in which these craftsmen have continued a fine legacy of creativity.

Words Gayathri Kothalawala.

Photographs Anuradha Perera.

The Craft Museum is a pleasing building with a thatch-roof lobby area extending to two wings on either side. It is a treasure trove of intricate items from different regions of the island, all in one place.

The museum displays various award-winning craftworks created by Sri Lankan artists at the Shilpa Abhimani exhibition organized by the National Crafts Council each year. Passing a creative display of masks in the lobby, we entered the museum. Regional flags hung from the walls and a beautiful replica of a woodcarver at his work created out of leather drew our attention. We also discovered intricate jewelry carved out of empty coconut shells, elegant clay products, sesath, colorful masks, and laaksha work.

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Moving across the lobby, we found more beautiful crafts. A striking wooden sculpture depicted the famous Sri Lankan novelist Martin Wickramasinghe playing checkers with Maxim Gorky. The arrival of Sangamitta Theri was portrayed in a stunning work of embroidery, an ornate tray created out of brass, beeralu lacework, and yet an ebony wood statue of Queen Mahamaya were only some of the wonders that we saw.

Awed by the breathtaking products displayed in the museum, we spoke to Heshani Sathiesh Bogollagama, Chairperson, National Crafts Council about the Shilpa Abhimani program. "Shilpa Abhimani is a competition where we facilitate these traditional craftsmen as well as showcase their talent to the outside world," she said.

The presidential award competition themed '*Sampradāyē Abhimanāya*' (pride of tradition) will be held from October 3-6 at the BMICH under 21 categories. Shilpa Abhimani is organized in four segments - a display from the Shilpa Navoda inter-school competition, trade stalls, an international craft display from seven countries and cultural performances.

As artisans are spread around the island, the Craft Museum is ideal for anyone interested in traditional handicrafts of Sri Lanka. With easy access from Colombo, the museum has a wide range of products across different categories including clay, cane, and bamboo, metal, batiks, lace, wood, leather, and textiles, and

visitors can experience the talents of the islanders under one roof.

Craft Museum, Folk Art Center, Rohina Mawatha, Pelawatta, Battaramulla; (+94 112) 784 425; Opening hours: 8.30am - 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

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