Through the Looking Glass of Saskia Pintelon

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CARTE BLANCHE
CARE

Saskia Pintelon – expressing the complexities of human existence through her work.

Saskia Pintelon held her first exhibition in Sri Lanka at the renowned The Gallery Café in 1999. Twenty-seven years later, she returns to the same venue with her latest collection, Carte Blanche, which will be on display from December 18, 2026 to January 13, 2027.

Words: Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

Saskia Pintelon’s artistic expressions can be unconventional, uncanny and, at times, downright eccentric. Her paintings often feature human faces in unnatural, sometimes grotesque, contortions.

Yet, beneath these striking portrayals lies a deeper engagement with the world around her, as she explores the complexities of human existence through the multitude of events unfolding both locally and globally. Through image manipulation, collage, and appropriation, she constructs visually compelling narratives that probe a wide range of themes, including identity, beauty, gender, loneliness, politics, environmental concerns, and the cyclical nature of existence. Subtle humor is also a recurring feature of her work, offering an engaging way to communicate ideas and inviting viewers to look beyond the immediate image.



Complete freedom of expression in Saskia Pintelon’s terms.



Belgian-born Saskia Pintelon moved to Sri Lanka in 1982 and settled in the southern coastal village of Mirissa, from where she has continued to paint and exhibit her work in galleries across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Her artistic journey, however, began much earlier in Belgium. In 1967, she enrolled at St Lucas in Ghent to study art, later going on to teach at the same institution. It was during this formative period that she began establishing her presence in the art world, exhibiting her work in Belgium between 1967 and 1969 before taking her distinctive visual language beyond her home country. Her universe of faces, which would become a defining feature of her artistic practice, traveled with her to other parts of Europe and eventually to Sri Lanka.

She also paid tribute to her longstanding connection with Sri Lanka and its people through her acclaimed Faces series, created between 2004 and 2007. The collection featured character studies drawn from the diverse fabric of Sri Lankan society, each rendered on recycled tea bags, an unconventional choice of surface that added another dimension to the works.



Faces are what convey the artist’s narrative of her themes.

Over nearly six decades of artistic exploration and practice, Sri Lanka has remained an important influence and platform for Pintelon’s work. Her association with Shanth Fernando, founder of The Gallery Café and Paradise Road Galleries, has been particularly significant. Sharing a deep appreciation of contemporary art, Fernando has been a longstanding admirer of her artistic sensibilities and is also a collector of her paintings. Their association has played an important role in bringing her work to Sri Lankan audiences and establishing a continuing presence for her art in the country’s contemporary art scene.

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Pintelon’s fascination with the human face continues into her latest exhibition, Carte Blanche, a repertoire of faces, each offering a distinctive glimpse into the complexities of contemporary humanity. Far from conventional portraiture, these figures form an eclectic cast of characters, brought to life through earthy hues and delicate tonal contrasts. Their compelling gazes and individual expressions draw the viewer into a visual world where humor, vulnerability, defiance, and introspection intersect. Accompanied by Pintelon’s characteristically witty, and at times provocative, captions, the works invite interpretation, often leaving as much unsaid as they reveal.



Unconventional and uncanny, in the artist’s portrayal of faces lie a deeper engagement with the world.

Working with acrylic, emulsion, Chinese ink, charcoal and oil sticks, alongside painted and embroidered lettering on cotton canvas, Pintelon creates a compelling reflection of the complexities and contradictions inherent in human nature. Her work looks beyond the carefully curated public personas that have become characteristic of our times, exposing the vulnerabilities, ambiguities, and less visible dimensions of the human condition. Through her keen observation of contemporary

social nuances and shifting cultural trends, she examines themes that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. The resulting body of work offers a distinctly personal yet universal perspective on humanity, revealing its many contradictions through a diverse range of subjects and visual narratives.

The exhibition preview will also mark the launch of two books showcasing Saskia Pintelon’s recent work, No One Can Silence Me and Goodbye to Flirting, with the occasion further complemented by a piano recital by Jean-Marc Pont Marchesi.

Like her previous exhibitions, Carte Blanche invites viewers to immerse themselves in Pintelon’s compelling exploration of humanity through one of its most expressive features: the face. Her artistic language defies straightforward interpretation, drawing the viewer beyond the immediate image into the intricate, often bewildering depths of human thought and emotion. It is an invitation to contemplate, to imagine and, ultimately, to dream – to venture into the boundless universe of the artist’s own imagination.

Carte Blanche

December 18, 2026 to January 13, 2027

Venue: The Gallery Café

2, Alfred House Road, Colombo 3.

Time: 10am to 12pm daily

art@paradiseroad.lk