

Waiting. Why not?

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The watch.

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Nelun Harasgama titled her latest exhibition of paintings at the Barefoot Gallery 'is waiting for part of the journey?', a theoretical question like her conjectures on canvas, leaving interpretational liberty to the viewer, to be viewed as joy or sadness, oscillating between nothing important to crippling anguish. In leaving her canvas to subjective conclusions and story-weaving, Nelun paints her personal and renders it the character of being able to evoke many emotions. She makes it personal for everyone.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

Placid figures with blurred countenances. Vacant expressions waiting in hope, staring into blank spaces. There is a solitary figure lounging at the doorstep. The head slanted to rest on the palm of the hand expresses the act of 'waiting'. Maybe it is someone lost in thought. A wandering mind, transported to somewhere unimaginably sparkling. Or perhaps it's a person waiting for the kettle to boil. A man and a woman are standing in front of a closed door, unable to open it. They have lost the key and are waiting. An expectation is evident in that portrait. There is uninterrupted sanguinity in every painting. There is something immersive in the women, men, and children painted by Nelun Harasgama. The graceful use of colors, soothing and earthy, and evocatively gentle are characteristics of Nelun's style, which conveys quiet expression.

Sparse and minimal, they are stripped of artifacts and objects to express an idea. Nelun's minimalism is defined in a degree of abstraction. However, what distinguishes her work are the distinct figures and details magnified against a monochromic palette's clear background. In an undisturbed landscape of hyped human figures, the interruption is a lone tree or a household object.

Nelun sees value in her protagonist's 'waiting' for something or someone, waiting for an outcome, an act that elicits hope and optimism amid an internal battle. She points out that some of her characters are 'waiting' in a positive manner, not necessarily expressing unhappiness. The act of 'waiting' is aptly described in the vernacular as 'just waiting,' which Nelun cheerfully said she enjoys doing. In a world where every second counts, Nelun claims that doing nothing is sometimes not meaningless. Waiting is an integral part of life's journey. She points out that those waiting moments may spur ideas.

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Sentinel.

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Memories of Home.

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Waiting.



Nelun Harasgama.

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Memories of Home.

Nelun paints from a happy place about human emotions. Tension and torment are central to the solitary figures on canvas. However, her paintings have nothing to do with her personal experiences, nor is she an activist. Her paintings express feelings, observed sights, passing landscapes, or a spin on something she stumbles upon during the day or travel. Nelun confesses her immersion in loss and disappearance, like disappearing persons and landscapes. To her, some of her solitary figures are mourning a loss, a woman waiting for her child to return and the uncertainty of that expectation. She connects that setting to part of Sri Lanka's troubled history of human disappearances and the last stages of the war, which dig deep into the human heart, of stories of immeasurable pain and loss, of unceasing hope of parents for their children, even decades after the events. Then there are some tender moments as well, of a mother and her child. The mother is the child's heroine, looking and 'waiting' upon the mother to protect them or give them something. In Nelun's paintings, one finds an open canvas for myriad interpretations and visions that a viewer can dabble with. She is not forcing anyone to follow her storyline that inspired a painting but leaves it to provoke personal narratives.

Nelun is a designer by profession. The Barefoot Gallery has been her staple studio for displaying her paintings for three decades. Her latest exhibition, 'is waiting part of the journey?' has twenty-one paintings; those soulful solitary figures have been her muse in those three decades. Although the artist insists that her work doesn't intentionally create a platform for debate and politicking, there is a sense of melancholy in the vacuity of loss, which she has explored in her earlier works. Events in the external environment impact humans. Nelun is affected by environmental degradation, the loss of tradition, culture, race, people, and jobs, a way of life, connecting it with Samsara, and the eternal cycle of wounding, death, and mourning. There is regret, sadness, and mourning at such losses, but like Samsara, they don't cease in a world that forgets, refuses to learn, and not do it again.

In 'is waiting part of the journey?' Nelun is inviting us to pause in a life that is in constant motion. We must stop and reset our pace and learn that waiting, resting, and relaxing are part of our life's journey. To wait for something to happen in our lives, patiently, over our desire for quick answers. The profoundness of her paintings is unmistakable, but Nelun wants us to weave our own story.

Till April 6. Barefoot Art Gallery. Time: Monday to Saturday 10am-6.30pm