

Art Odyssey: Geetha Senewiratne's artistic journey

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By Pavani Premarathne

Geetha Senewiratne, a renowned artist who has been in the field of art for more than 50 years, winning prestigious awards such as the Presidential Award and the 'Kalabushana' State Award is back with her latest art exhibition 'Art Odyssey'. The exhibition is ongoing at Siam Nivasa, 43, Dr CWW Kannangara Mawatha, Colombo 7 from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., which will be held until 8 December 2024. *Ceylon Today* asked Geetha about her illustrious journey and specifically about her 13th art exhibition 'Art Odyssey' showcasing her 50 years plus expertise and accomplishments as an artist.

Stepping into the world of art

"Art was a generational gift." Geetha Senewiratne talked about her initial inspiration for becoming an artist following in the footsteps of her aesthetically inspired grandmother, mother, and elder brother. To polish up the skills gifted to her by her family, she then became a student under Mudaliyar A.C.G.S. Amarasekara, the celebrated Sri Lankan painter, from whom she learned the skill of sketching the human body along with its subtleties.

This was the basis of her artistic journey and through a lot of experimenting, practice and self-study, she discovered a style for herself which is clearly portrayed in her every artistic effort. Starting from winning competitions and prizes at the school level, 1983 marked a milestone in her artistic journey when she was honoured with the Presidential Award for her sculpture 'Dushkarakriya' out of 270 art exhibits at the 79th Annual Exhibition of the Ceylon Society of Arts. Being the only woman awarded a Presidential Award for sculpture, she was then awarded the prestigious 'Kalabushana' State Award from the Department of Cultural Affairs celebrating her outstanding contribution and immense dedication to the field of art.

A total of 13 exhibitions

Since starting as a professional artist in her early 20s, she has frequently held exhibitions locally, commencing her exhibition streak with the first one at the Samudra Gallery in 1973. Further, her paintings have been displayed at exhibitions held internationally in countries such as Bulgaria, India, Japan, etc. In 2022, she celebrated her 50 years of experience as an artist through an exhibition titled 'Strokes of Serenity' held at Lionel Wendt.

The ongoing exhibition is her 13th, presenting 60 paintings in diverse mediums, such as oil, and acrylic, and over eight sculptures. The exhibits are a mix of styles varying from abstract, realism, modern art, etc., showcasing Geetha's immense adoration to experiment with different styles of art. "I prefer moving from one style to another, unless I get bored," she shared showing her versatility as an artist. She also has a unique bold way of painting, which embeds rich compositions and striking colour contrasts, capable of communicating a lot of emotions with the spectator.

A life and a routine inseparable from art

As a professional artist, her whole life has been dedicated to and largely involved in art. "I used to paint for hotels and I have done a lot of their interiors," she mentioned talking about her art career also as an interior designer expanding beyond single paintings and sculptures. Moreover, she conducts art classes for kids and she talked about her engagement with children and art as one of the most interesting and heartwarming activities in her current routine.

Throughout her career she has attempted different styles, when asked about her favourite style of art, she shared it as line drawings. "I like line drawings because they involve a lot of details and most importantly the style will not give zero chance for any mistake," she elaborated.

The satisfaction and independence received from her artwork are the reasons why she has chosen to be with art for such a long time. "The artist is the owner of the painting, the whole set-up, and concept belong to the artist," she talked about the independent and less competitive lifestyle she is blessed with due to her adored bond with art. "If you are honest with yourself, if you have 'meththa' in your mind and have good feelings, it comes out as a good art with a pleasant experience", she added about the utmost satisfaction she has earned through being close to aesthetics. She also shared her views about present-day society which is extremely competitive taking away people's peace of mind and highlighted the importance of aesthetics as an addition that could improve one's lifestyle.

A piece of advice for emerging artists

With her 50 years of experience in the field, she added comments on behalf of Sri Lankan artists on the drawbacks relating to the promotion of art in Sri Lanka. Specifically, the issues related to facilities and galleries to display the talents of emerging artists have negatively affected Sri Lankan art, she elaborated while showing the unfortunate situation of unrecognised talents of Sri Lankan artists.

"If you are a genuine artist you can survive, you can do a lot of things", she shared advice to emerging artists in Sri Lanka. "Everybody has a talent that may be hidden for the moment. But discovering it before late is important. Also, everything does not need qualifications to prove oneself, if you are passionate about finding the hidden talents you should always give it a try," she added as her concluding remarks.

The exhibition 'Art Odessey' is currently ongoing and will be held for a week's time till 8 December 2024. If you still haven't checked out the masterpieces by Geetha Senewiratne at Siam Nivasa, 43, Dr CWW Kannangara Mawatha, Colombo 7 drop by to be moved into a world of art with 'Art Odessey'.