

BY SHAILENDREE WICKRAMA ADITTIVA

**Ruwan Prasanga is an artist whose work explores human emotions. This has been a core theme of his work over the years. His fifth solo exhibition, opening at Siam Nivasa Gallery, Colombo 7 at 5 p.m. today (4), is titled 'Human Shadows with Emotions'.**

Describing the theme, the artist said that commanding though humans are, they are shadows of nature, merging into its natural majesty. The collection comprises acrylic paintings and sculptures, and with the former, Ruwan explores the range and depth of human emotions by combing empty space with layers of colour applied with rapid strokes from the paintbrush and palette knife.

With his sculpturing, Ruwan works with stone, preferring to allow the natural form of the stone to lead him towards creating human emotions. The collection, exploring human emotion through acrylics and stone, will be open to the public until 30 April. The viewing times are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Ahead of the opening, the artist spoke to *The Daily Morning* about the collection on display and how he approached the theme of human shadows with emotions through two vastly different artforms.

*Following are excerpts from the interview:*

**What can you tell us about the exhibition opening today?**

This is my fifth solo exhibition. It's titled 'Human Shadows with Emotions'. There are 23 paintings and 17 sculptures in this collection. All paintings are acrylics on canvas. And the sculptures are stone carvings. The theme across these pieces is human emotions.

All my exhibitions have been about humans and what, during different times, their issues have been and what we see in society; these have been the themes I've explored in my work.

In terms of the human figures in this exhibition, there are solitary figures, pairs, as well as three or more figures. These figures are drawn within a landscape. Thus, even though the figures are in an abstract style, they are within a landscape or an environment. All the figures have been drawn as proportionally bigger than the landscape.



This is a standout feature of this collection and what I want to convey through this is that the emotions humans live with are greater than their environments. This is all presented through human shadows.

**How do you approach such a theme using two different forms of art?**

I studied sculpture in university. However, an individual who studies sculpture first studies painting, and I'm able to create art using both these forms. In most of my previous exhibitions, I have presented both paintings and sculptures. This is another feature of my shows.

In navigating a theme like human emotion through sculpture, I must say that I use stone carvings. Stone is one of the hardest media of sculpture. These stone carvings also use natural stone slabs of different sizes. I used slabs that have broken off naturally, making sure to carve them without changing their form.

Most of the stone carvings are abstracts of human faces. Just as these emotional humans are great, big figures, stone too, is a sturdy, heavy media that is difficult to work with. Through the stone carvings, what is conveyed is that human emotions are great, unique, and powerful.

Many of the stone carvings in this exhibition display a different emotion on either side. Some carvings are of faces, others are of figures.

In terms of the paintings, which are done using acrylics, I use a slightly different technique. These paintings don't have a lot of detail. They are mainly human shadows. But they have been created using paint that is allowed to drip naturally. Even though the brush is used, the paint is allowed to drip freely from top to bottom. Using these freely dripping

colours in the painting gives it a different effect.

**Is this a technique you've used before in your work? Do you see yourself experimenting with it in future as well?**

The collection of my first exhibition was entirely stone carvings, while those that followed were a mix of paintings and sculptures. In these, this technique was used at its different stages of development. And I see myself taking this further.

If you look at the first paintings in which I used this technique, it's different from my work now. And so, I see it as a technique that I can keep developing.



Artist Ruwan Prasanga



# 'Artists need to evolve'



## Ruwan Prasanga on experimenting with techniques and his exhibition 'Human Shadows with Emotions'

and using in new and different ways in my future work. I also hope to keep this as a part of my artistic identity, where I may change the theme of my work or the colours I use, but I will keep this technique, of dripping paints, as a constant in my work.

**How does this exhibition differ from your previous shows?**

Last time, I mainly displayed mixed media works. I used newspapers and such material. But this time, I've stuck to acrylics, using both the palette knife and paintbrush to create my paintings. As for why I move from mixed media to acrylics is that I make some changes to each of my exhibitions, making sure one is different to the other.

With this exhibition, I'm working with two artforms, painting and sculpture, but depicting the same theme of human emotions through them both.

**If we are to talk about your journey as an artist, can you tell us about studying sculpture and your work so far?**

It is within the university system that I first studied sculpture. There, we had course work and various lessons. What we learn there, whether through books or the internet, is taken forward through further studying and experimentation. However, what we learn at the university, that opportunity we get is truly valuable in commencing this journey.

**What kind of challenges does the Sri Lankan artist face, especially when exhibiting their work?**

There is an increase in the number of artists, and there is also an increase in galleries and exhibition spaces. This is good, as when there are only a few galleries, artists and art enthusiasts and collectors are limited to these spaces.

However, with more galleries in the city, a lot of new artists can now display their work, which I see as a good thing. This increases the opportunities for artists to showcase their work and also for art enthusiasts to see the work of artists.

**We see the use of digital tools in the creation of art, especially among young artists. In such a context, can traditional art forms survive?**

In my view, we need to evolve. There is no hard and fast rule that we must use media like acrylic or oil paints, but while protecting these traditional media and working within them, we can also experiment with new media and material. It is then that we can offer something fresh and go forward. Otherwise, we will limit ourselves to certain media.

My first exhibition was entirely stone, then I tried all the different media I had studied, then I returned to sculptures as well as acrylics, then I moved back to mixed media. This time, I wanted to

convey my ideas through sculpture and acrylics, the latter used in a technique where the paint is allowed to drip.

Experimenting with techniques and styles and adding to them is more beneficial, I feel.

**What is it about acrylics that draws you to it?**

Acrylic paint is a very free media. You can work very quickly with it, and compared to a medium like oil, it dries quickly. I create art while teaching and so, have a limited period of time to work on a painting. With acrylics, I can work fast, as the paint dries quickly.

Unlike oil, acrylics can be used in any way and on anything. This is why I personally like working with acrylic paints. It's a quick medium and is very flexible. This is why I see it as a very free media, especially for artists like me.

**How do you navigate an artform like stone as an artist with time constraints?**

Stone carvings take more time. There is also a higher risk attached to it. It's also hard work. But I mainly work on stone carvings during school holidays, having a separate collection of stone carvings in addition to my paintings.

In a country like Sri Lanka, we don't use a lot of the proper tools and technology for stone carvings. Most of us use basic tools and our hands – I use tools that I made myself. There weren't many tools in the country when we first started working on this artform, so we had to make our own tools.

The artist's sculptures are carved on stone



On the other hand, there are health and environmental concerns about the dust, as well as the noise since we live in the suburbs. We need to balance these factors when working with an artform like this.

Stone is not a commonly practiced artform in Sri Lanka. I held one of the first stone-only solo exhibitions in the country. Very few artists work on stone carvings, and people mainly do it as an industry and not art.

