

Tharanga Herath's natural history art exhibition

CALL OF THE WILD



SACHITRA MAHENDRA

A genre, of all those paintings, exists to demand more than just skill. It demands not just technical prowess, but the soul of a keen observer. It compels you to use your brush with the focus of a tracker, your eye trained to decipher the language of the wild. In essence, you need to translate the untamed beauty of the natural world onto canvas.

For Tharanga Herath, it means dedication and commitment to authenticity, which, in fact, sets it apart from other forms of artistic expression. Herath's upcoming Natural History Art Exhibition promises to be a journey into the heart of biodiversity, showcasing the challenges and triumphs of wildlife art.

Tharanga's upcoming Natural History Art exhibition will be held from March 1 to 4, 2024, at the Lionel Wendt Art Centre in Colombo.

With a career of over 25 years, Tharanga Herath is passionate about Sri Lanka's unique bio-diversity and ecosystems. The exhibition will feature approximately 50 original paintings and illustrations, each crafted to bring the island nation's flora and fauna to life.

Tharanga's artistic endeavour is deeply rooted in field observation. He is committed to portraying the resplendence of Sri Lankan bio-diversity, which is evident in every stroke of his brush. The fruits of that exercise are evident beyond the canvas, as he has contributed illustrations to publications on endemic birds, common wetland birds, and common butterflies of Sri Lanka for organisations such as the Wildlife Trust and the Sri Lanka Turtle Conservation Project.

Tharanga Herath's paintings have found a home in private collections overseas. He represented Asia as the sole participant from the continent at the Art & Vielfalt wildlife art exhibition held at the Museum of Natural History in Magdeburg, Germany, in 2018. This exhibition featured 130 artworks from 29 acclaimed artists worldwide. Tharanga's five original paintings stood out among them.

In 2019, Tharanga made it to the finalist stage and represented Sri Lanka at Russia's Golden Turtle International Art Contest & Wildlife Festival. Out of the 1,261 artists worldwide who entered the competition, Tharanga became among the top 30.

Tharanga's work cannot be called just wildlife art. It is a labour of love in the natural world and a call to appreciate and conserve the biodiversity that surrounds us. Each stroke on the canvas, every blend of colour, is a unique expression of the artist's connection with nature. Tharanga's insistence on the integration of zoology, artistry, and dedication serves as a guiding principle for aspiring wildlife artists.

"Art is not just about putting images on paper; it's about understanding the subject, its behaviour, and its place in the ecosystem. Without this fundamental knowledge, a piece lacks authenticity," Tharanga stresses why true wildlife art is connected to scientific understanding and artistic skill.

The idea that a bear cannot be drawn into Horton Plains without understanding its habitat reminds us just how species and their environments are interconnected. Tharanga believes in absorbing the sights, sounds, and energy of the wilderness that artists must immerse themselves in the landscapes they depict. This commitment to fieldwork is not just a choice. It is a compulsory necessity for anyone striving to capture the essence of wildlife on canvas.

"Photography is a valuable tool, but it should never replace the experience of being in the field," Tharanga insists. A photograph can capture a real-time moment, yet it lacks the depth and emotional connection of



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Tusker Thilak, Asian Elephant



Cotton pygmy geese in Anuradhapura



Marsh Sandpiper

direct observation. No photography can ever be compared to direct observation, which is irreplaceably human. Tharanga's insistence on field visits is, therefore, a 'human' call to all aspiring artists to go beyond the confines of their studios. This human call is what guides anyone who seeks inspiration from the beauty of nature. Plagiarism is another facet that is

not an option in the wildlife art genre. No artwork can be similar or identical. On the other hand, what is drawn at home cannot replicate the authenticity of fieldwork, which challenges the notion that wildlife art can be manufactured or copied. Each stroke should be an interpretation. The very stroke could be an expression of the artist's unique perspective. Tharanga believes that this approach honours.

The exhibition, an entrance-free event, opens its doors to all from March 1 to March 4. On the inaugural day, March 1, the exhibition welcomes visitors from 6 pm to 8 pm, offering an opportunity to experience the artwork at the Lionel Wendt premises. For the subsequent days, from March 2 to 4, the exhibition will be accessible from 9 am to 8 pm.