

A vibrant painting of two hummingbirds in flight over colorful tropical flowers. The central hummingbird is green with brown wings, hovering over red and yellow flowers. To its right, another hummingbird with yellowish-green plumage is also in flight. The background is a collage of large, stylized flowers in shades of pink, orange, and red, with green foliage. The overall style is bold and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a rich color palette.

RECENT WORKS BY
SENAKA SENANAYAKE

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4 – 9 DECEMBER 2018

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The Art Miami Pavilion
One Miami Herald Plaza @ NE 14th Street
Downtown Miami



SENAKA SEANAYAKE

Beyond the Rainforests.

'We don't create the world. It's God's world, he made it. We depict it, we try to understand it. And a longing like that doesn't disappear in one generation. Art is about correspondences-making connections with the world and each other. It's about love in that sense. That is the origin of the erotic quality of art.' (David Hockney).

Making the distant intimate has been Senaka Senanayake's forte over the last many decades he has been painting. Having grown up on the beautiful island of Sri Lanka he was drawn to the wilderness and wild life even as a boy, often travelling with his family to distant parts of the island to see the magnificent animals and birds that made the depths of the woods their habitat. No wonder, then, that creatures mighty and meek made their way to his canvas from the time he first started painting.

Over the decades, it was especially the idea of the rainforest that began to concern him more and more. So much had changed since he first visited the forests, so much was destroyed thanks to natural and man made causes and his worst fears about the impending destruction of these forests were proven to be correct when environmentalists concurred and agreed that unless awareness was raised urgently it would soon be an ecological disaster. The once verdant and lush rainforests were slowly disappearing. If the country did not address

the crisis it would be too late. To create awareness and educate the younger generations, Senaka began his series on the country's rainforests but as years passed it became his personal mission, his one magnificent obsession.

Looking at Senaka's canvases, typically very vivid and pure, you get the impression that you're standing at the edge of the tangled wilderness, with tall trees reaching up to the skies. There is no mist anywhere, no haze blurring the sharp contours of the plants, trees, flora and fauna. Was the artist concerned about the geology or even the precise topography of the region? Not really, Senaka is quick to point out. The artistic perspective was more focused on atmosphere, the virtual experience of space. The abstracted shapes and forms in the depths of the rainforest evoke memories of his boyhood, since this was, after all, a space he had frequented and claimed as his own ever since he first visited the woods. In his painterly narrative, Senaka prefers a large format canvas, painting his much-loved forestscapes from memory, the branches of the ancient trees stand tall, their leaves and twigs forming origami patterns in the infinite skies.

There is seemingly a constant interplay between canvas and vista in his art and if you are at his studio, it is fascinating to watch this unfold. The morning could begin with a composition of butterflies but by the noon, the arched wings would take on resplendent hues and out of nowhere a grasshopper would make an appearance, perched delicately on the leaf of a plant. You step out into the garden and it is almost like you are in one of Senaka's paintings, surrounded by flowering trees, birds and fishes. A marvelous surprise awaits you when you step back into the studio, translucent light has changed the

scene and the artist is busy with a canopy of leaves that weigh the branches down!

For a moment there is a silence in the painted garden. Then, gradually, household noises filter in and Senaka is surrounded by laughing grandchildren and on cue, as it were, his dogs run in, all demanding his attention at once. The canvas against the wall waits in anticipation, and amongst the violet shadows, yellowing leaves gather. In the summer afternoon, the interrupted painting is forgotten momentarily and the artist listens patiently to his babbling grandchildren while the painted butterfly on his canvas waits without the slightest motion.

On vacation with his family, many miles away from home, Senaka had his first tryst with the rainforests. The adolescent Senaka Senanayake was already a well-known artist by then and had already had his first exhibitions receiving praise from critics and art lovers everywhere.

It is already well known that Senaka was a child prodigy who started painting very young. He was only six years of age when his confident brushstrokes and compositions caught the attention of an astute art teacher who encouraged him to paint and participate in children's art shows. At home, his mother recognizing his gift made sure that he was given all the support he required with art materials etc. Senaka despite all this encouragement was himself unsure about where his own heart lay. He was a meritorious student and a promising cricketer who dreamt of making it to the national team someday. Torn between different pursuits the young adolescent realized that that he had to make a choice when it came to building a career and it was after many a sleepless night that he chose to devote all his time to art.

It was a wise decision, in retrospect. Senaka, over the years, became a household name and earned a reputation as one of Sri Lanka's top artists. Each show in the country and abroad were critically acclaimed and his paintings were acquired by important collectors. The early figurative works made way for abstractions and erotic series that were sensuous and somehow more realistically engaging. His success manifest itself with invitations to the UN, The White House, and prestigious galleries in London, Moscow and Paris. This was a period when the young boy was at school and could paint mostly over the weekends! While commissions came from distant corners of the world, Senaka was still intermittently dreaming of quitting art and taking up studies to be a plastic surgeon. Senaka laughs when he recalls those days of dilemma when for some reason he was quite determined to try his hand at becoming a doctor, a plastic surgeon, in fact! Ultimately, he stuck to painting. This may have also been because he had by then met his beautiful bride-to-be Jenny who simply loved his art.

Important critics wrote: *'We are without courage, without freedom, without passion and joy if we fail to follow the lyricism and brilliance of his brush. Colours were never so pure, so positive, so pleasing.'* L P Goonetillake.

Deeply spiritual, Senaka is a practicing Buddhist who is equally respectful of other faiths. He quotes a saying of Buddha when you ask him about the vagaries of life and fame, *'Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.'*

The present suite of work represents in all likelihood Senanayake's best works in recent years. The artist

has been working in single-minded isolation for a while now, taking short respites to Galle or the rainforests to meditate and relax. He doesn't like to wander too far away from his beloved island country and prefers to spend his days in his studio-home with his family. The rambling rooms spilling over with art, bric-a-brac, potted plants, silver statuettes and antiquities bustles with life as the household go about their many chores. Songbirds nest in the trees outside and their raucous trilling often has the dogs in a tizzy. Yet, as you step away from this warm space into Senaka's studio, it is quiet and cool. The outside world recedes and on the canvases the painted humming birds, hornbills and cockatoos stand alert, as if poised to take sudden flight. Distilled from the natural world it is the essence of the forests and it's creatures that make Senaka's painterly narrative so mystical. He is familiar with the flora and fauna and flight of the fireflies that cast their solitary trail of light in the dark wilderness. His nightscape with the black lotus bear testimony to those times. The palette usually so vivid and radiant is bleached of colour then and is mysteriously dark. Senanayake is engaged with an idyllic world that is slowly disappearing. His art captures the contours of a dream, the recurring theme he seems to convey time and again is that there is still hope and cause for optimism no matter how trying the circumstances.

It is fitting to conclude with the words of Colin Wilson, *'Whether civilization improves or declines, the simple, intuitive artist will go his way, recording that basic harmony as naturally as a bird sings.'*

Ina Puri, December 2017

1
BUTTERFLIES
2018
Oil on canvas
121.9 x 152.4 cm
48 x 60 in



2
HUMMINGBIRDS
2018
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 213.4 cm
60 x 84 in



3
ELEPHANTS
2018
Oil on canvas
60.9 x 60.9 cm
24 x 24 in



4
MACAWS
2018
Oil on canvas
60.9 x 60.9 cm
24 x 24 in



5
TOUCANS
2018
Oil on canvas
60.9 x 60.9 cm
24 x 24 in



6
BUTTERFLIES
2018
Oil on canvas
60.9 x 60.9 cm
24 x 24 in



7
GOLDEN LOTUS
2018
Oil on canvas
91.4 x 60.9 cm
36 x 24 in



8
HELICONIAS
2018
Oil on canvas
119.4 x 152.4 cm
47 x 60 in





SENAKA SEANAYAKE

Born

1951, Sri Lanka

Education

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Yale University, 1968
Received a scholarship to pursue his studies

Select Exhibitions

- 1959** Solo exhibition, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1961** *Yonkers*, New York, Sponsored by UNESCO
- 1965** Asia House, New York and Washington Gallery of Art

Upper Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 1966** One Man Show, Paris, on invitation by the French Cultural Ministry
- 1967** West Berlin, on invitation of the Berlin Senate
- 1969** Canada
- 1970** *Ceylon Through The Ages*, National Geographic Society, Washington DC
- 1974** *8 Foremost Artists in the British Commonwealth*, Commonwealth Institute of London, UK
- 1978** Travelling exhibition organized by the Smithsonian, Washington DC
- 1982** Inaugural exhibition, Sharika Art Gallery, Sri Lanka
- 1989** National Art Gallery, Beijing, on invitation by the Chinese Government
- 1996** 100th Solo Exhibition at National Convention Centre, Colombo
- 2002** Habitat Centre, New Delhi
- 2003** Seoul, South Korea

- 2004** Yeosu City, South Korea
- 2005** Museum Gallery, Mumbai
- 2006** Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Fashion and Art Show with Satya Paul, Singapore
- 2007** 1x1 Art Gallery, Dubai
- 2009** *Paradise Lost*, Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi
- 2011** *Lost Horizons*, Patrimonio Art Gallery and Art Alive Gallery, Mumbai
- 2013** India Art Fair, New Delhi

In An Iridescent Land, Patrimonio Art Gallery and Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2014** Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2015** Arts House, Singapore, organised by Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2016** India Art Fair Solo Booth, New Delhi. Represented by Grosvenor Gallery
- 2017** India Art Fair, New Delhi. Represented by Grosvenor Gallery

Dharmachakra, Grosvenor Gallery, London
- 2018** Saffron Art New Delhi in association with Grosvenor Gallery, Mystical Moments

Other Exhibitions between 1961 and 1990 include those held in:

USA

New York, San Diego, Washington DC, Los Angeles

Europe

Rotterdam, Holland

Brussels, Belgium

London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester, UK

Prague, Czechoslovakia

Moscow, Russia

Paris, France

Bremen, Cologne, Stuttgart, Berlin and Hamburg, Germany

Rome, Italy

Asia

Tokyo, Osaka, Yokkaichi, Japan

Paintings are part of collections in:

- The White House, Washington, USA
- United Nations Building, New York, USA
- National Geographic Headquarters, Washington, USA
- Berlin State Museum, Germany
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian, USA
- Virginia State Museum, USA
- President, Parliament and major buildings, Sri Lanka
- International Post Office, Berne, Switzerland
- National Panasonic Headquarters, Osaka, Japan

