



Ishara JAYAWARDANE

Anura Saparamadu stood before his posters at the Barefoot Gallery. There was something romantic and sentimental about them. Maybe that is because that epoch will never be seen again.



Anura Saparamadu. Pictures by Sarath Peiris



Some of Anura's works

There is a certain connection between Anura and his exhibition and the rest of us who look at these posters. Anura who had this exhibition displayed his sensitivity towards antiquity. And the posters evoke a sense of nostalgia within all of us. So in short we all get to know the canvasser and his work in a very intimate way. Each poster evoking memories of a time and place. They were classic posters of Ceylon. This exhibition featured posters of Ceylon dating back to a bygone era from the late 1890's to 1972. Among his posters were some movie posters such as 'Bridge on the River Kwai'.

Anura's interest began on the internet when he saw his first Ceylon poster. After that with much research he discovered that there were hundreds and hundreds of posters about Ceylon. All this happened "it is like works of art that was why I started collecting them and then I got carried away and collected every poster related to Ceylon even if it is not very nice artistically. Still if it related to Ceylon I will collect them. My favorite is picking Tea Plucker Picking Empire Grown Tea. (1929) I wrote a coffee table book about posters that was launched at the Galle Lit Festival two years ago. This is the second exhibition. I did this one at Barefoot because Dominic gave me the idea," said Anura. For Anura, if it is something to do with Ceylon he connects with it. "If it is Sri Lanka before 1972, I would be

interested in that.

But primarily I like the really old ones from an artistic point of view. When you think about some of the best known designers, artists/ poster designers from that time in the 1930's onwards until about the 1970's tourist board and all the government officials and departments would have poster design competitions and you get money and recognition if your poster is the winner. There were some artists like G.S. Fernando and C.K.L. Samarasinghe who were amazing posters artists. In the 1930's and 1940's they had these poster competitions till the 1970's.



The tourist board in 1948: the winning poster was Ceylon the Land of Song and Dance. Incidentally I have got in touch with the families of the artists. "A relentless gold digger when it comes to finding posters, Anura mainly finds them through his dealers. "So when there is a new poster available they get back to me. Sometimes I discover them on internet and E Bay. Occasionally you find them in corners no one is interested in them. And in America and England they have these specialized poster dealers. I have received the most number of posters from England. Among my most valuable posters is Land of Song and Dance which is 3000 dollars. Some posters I buy for two three dollars. Some of them are couple of hundred dollars. The most I've spent on is 1000 dollars. You always keep on finding new things that you never knew existed.

There are so many posters out there. The World War II posters that I got were from the Imperial War Museum in England they have a huge collection like hundred posters. So I got the rights to publish them in the book. When doing the book it took me one year to do the research and find out who the artists are. I only collect posters before 1972. So basically everything is over 40 years old. You can also see how the styles have changed over the years. The best posters in my opinion are before the 1950's, a lot of people don't know these posters exist. When they see them they are astounded. 80 - 90 percent of the posters are no more because they are thrown out. All the time I get people telling me : 'oh I remember this poster!,'

'I went to a rest house and remember this poster!', 'I remember all those war posters!', 'I had no idea there were such beautiful pictures of ceylon'. And unfortunately the movie theatres have thrown out all their posters. Some People have no idea that some of these attractive posters were done by Sri Lankans.

Anura earns his bread and butter, where he does his own business teaching English on the internet.