

Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena  
DPhil  
President - Chandi J. Associates Inc.  
Consulting, Canada  
chandij@sympatico.ca

#### Profile

Iromie has painted for over five decades. She has represented Sri Lanka at numerous international exhibitions, with her work displayed in prestigious galleries in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Iromie was the first Sri Lankan artist to have a painting depicted on a foreign postage stamp ("The Royal Procession", Yugoslavia). Two of her paintings are in the Presidential Collection in Sri Lanka. In 2006, "Iromie Wijewardena Paintings" book was published, and she was elected Chairperson of the jury panel of the prestigious Asian Art Biennale in Bangladesh. In 2021, she was awarded the Kala Vibashana Award by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

**After 40 years, first chat in 2023**  
I saw Iromie at an art exhibition in Colombo in the early 1980s. I knew of her as a young visual artist with great potential for a promising career. I did not get an opportunity to speak with her then, but from a distance I followed her career over the next four decades.

In the middle of the pandemic, my elder son, Marlon, called me on a Sunday from Vietnam. He was working there as the General Manager of Vihara Addition of a large fashion garment company "Thaththi", after six years in Vietnam, I decided to move back to Sri Lanka and look for a new job. Marlon surprised me. Having visited him in Vietnam a year ago, I was impressed with his work in leading a team of 600 associates. I was also very happy to note his popularity in his latest adopted home, after Sri Lanka, The United Kingdom, Iraq, Guyana, Jamaica, and Canada. Mainly owing to his charming personality and his ability to speak Vietnamese, Marlon was very popular among his superiors, peers, and subordinates.

"Putha, as you clearly know, the whole world is in an uncertain crisis management mode owing to the global pandemic. It is not a good time for you to change countries and jobs," I advised him. During that chat, I realised that Marlon had fallen in love again, and wished to be close to his new girlfriend, who had recently returned to Sri Lanka from England after completing her studies. Worrying that I might post something prematurely on social media, Marlon was reluctant to provide me with any other information!

During our next telephone chat, Marlon provided me with carefully selected limited information about his girlfriend. She had recently qualified as a barrister. She is the only child of a Wijewardena family from Colombo, and her mother is a well-known visual artist. Soon after that chat, I checked Iromie Wijewardena's Facebook page and



Iromie explaining me the concept of one her favourite paintings in March 2023



Iromie at her studio in Colombo five

### PLACES, PEOPLE & PASSIONS (3Ps)

## Iromie Wijewardena Award-winning Visual Artist



Iromie Wijewardena

I learnt that her daughter had recently returned from England and her name is Natalie. Marlon was shocked when I sent him a text with one word: NATALIE? He called me back immediately, and said, "How did you find out in five-minutes? You are correct, Thaththi. Please keep it to yourself for the time being. Please, no posts about this on social media!"



"The Mission," Sri Lankan artist Iromie Wijewardena depicts a harmonious meeting of the three main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka - Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. A figurative expressionist artist, Wijewardena uses rich colours and layered perspective to create a sense of rhythm and unity among the three women.



Iromie featured in the back cover of an issue of Reader's Digest Magazine - which has the largest circulation of any periodical in the world.

A few months later, Marlon moved back to Sri Lanka. He then introduced Natalie to me as his fiancée, over a zoom video. "I just proposed to Natalie, and our two mothers are already planning a grand wedding in Colombo, when the pandemic ends and the 'Aragalaya' situation improves", Marlon told me. I was thrilled that a great artist would be Marlon's mother-in-law.

Soon after I arrived in Colombo a week before Natalie and Marlon's wedding, in March 2023, I was invited to Natalie's parents' house for dinner. I was excited to meet them and Natalie and talk with Iromie for the first time. "My favourite paintings and paintings which won awards are in my private collection. I had many offers, but we decided not to sell these," Iromie told me, while taking me around the house. I felt privileged, to experience a private tour of an amazing private gallery, which they call, home.

I was most impressed. Iromie was also a charming hostess. We then agreed to meet for an interview after the busy period for both families during the wedding, homecoming etc. We met at their house again, just before my return to Canada in late April 2023. I posed 10 questions to Iromie.

**Q: Out of all the places you have visited in Sri Lanka and overseas, what is your favourite and most interesting place?**

**A:** That is a hard question to answer as almost all the countries I have visited have their own uniqueness about them! However, when not in Sri Lanka, I always find myself gravitating to Paris, especially the area of Montmartre, as it is full of life and art!

**Q: Out of all the inspiring people you have met, who inspired you most to paint for five decades?**

**A:** At the start of my career, it was my university professors who really encouraged me to keep painting and persevere. However, it has been my own love and passion of creating art that has kept me painting for such a long time!

**Q: At the present time, what is your key passion in life, other than visual art?**

**A:** While art takes up most of my time, when I am not painting, I gravitate towards the performing arts - music, dance, and theatre. I find the rhythm, movements, and choreography to be very inspiring.

**Q: Can you talk more about the foundation you laid for your career when you were a student at the Institute of Aesthetic Studies of the University of Kelaniya and Wilson College in USA?**

**A:** While at university, I made a concerted effort to immerse myself into multiple disciplines of art, including sculpture, textile designing, leather work, graphic art, and art history. All these different areas of

art helped and influenced my style of painting to become what it is today.

**Q: You had the honour of representing Sri Lanka at numerous international exhibitions in the USA, UK, France, Germany, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, India, Bangladesh, U.S., and Cuba. Which exhibition resulted in your most memorable experience?**

**A:** My most memorable exhibition was at the Joseph Broz Tito Gallery in former Yugoslavia. My painting, "Royal Procession," which was done in the Sri Lankan temple mural style, was selected by the Sri Lankan Cultural Ministry as Sri Lanka's choice for the Non-Aligned Countries Gallery in Titograd. This then led to the opportunity for me to be invited to hold a solo exhibition at the same gallery, which was a truly unforgettable experience.

**Q: Can you talk more about the opportunity of becoming the first Sri Lankan artist to have a painting depicted on a foreign postage stamp?**

**A:** In 1985, the Yugoslavian government selected five paintings, from 50 galleries, to be made into postage stamps. The "Royal Procession" was one of the five selected, which was an immense honour and a great highlight of my career.

**Q: How was the experience as the Chairperson of the jury panel of the prestigious Asian Art Biennale in Dhaka, Bangladesh?**

**A:** Being a part of the Asian Art Biennale has always been a very fulfilling experience and being made the

Chairperson and working alongside the artists in the panel, all celebrated and talented artists from across Asia, was a great privilege. The Biennale itself comprises artists and paintings from 34 countries, and it is very interesting to see



On Iromie's graduation day at the University of Kelaniya in 1982



Iromie at home

the different styles and methods used, as every artist's process is unique and often influenced by their own culture. As part of the jury panel, I found it quite a challenging task to pick one artist to win from each category as the talent at the Biennale is immense.

**Q: The beauty of the female form is predominant in your recent works. What are the main themes for your work over five decades?**

**A:** The themes of my work have evolved through the years. Initially I concentrated mostly on landscapes and seascapes, and then moved on to figure compositions, my paintings have revolved around the female form, mostly depicted in village life. I have chosen to paint art that highlights not only the beauty and elegance of women but also the pivotal role played by women in society.

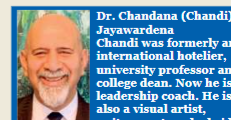
**Q: Can you explain your process and the average duration in creating a commissioned painting?**

**A:** My process varies with each painting and is rarely ever the same. It often depends on the medium used, as working with oils and acrylics can be different. As for duration, it tends to be very unpredictable - once I had a buyer who wanted a painting done in a week!

**Q: What is your main advice to young visual artists dreaming of a career like yours?**

**A:** Expose yourself to different forms of art and don't be afraid to experiment with different styles and media. Develop your own unique and individual style and keep in mind that it is perfectly fine for your style of painting to change and evolve!

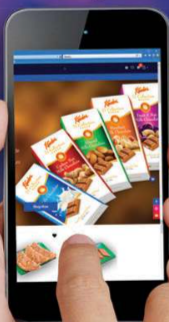
Next week, 3Ps will feature an entrepreneur focusing on sustainable development of community tourism to showcase authentic cuisine of Sri Lanka...



**Dr. Chandana (Chandi) Jayawardena** was formerly an international hotelier, university professor and college dean. Now he is a leadership coach. He is also a visual artist, writer, poet, and a bridge enthusiast. Chandi had a diverse life while living in four continents and travelling to 100 countries. He has done assignments in 45 countries and published 24 books and over 125 academic journal articles. He is a keynote speaker on Hospitality, Tourism, and Innovative Leadership.

Express your love  
with just one click

Kandos



Now with just one click get the full range of exquisite KANDOS chocolates delivered right to your door step or have a pack of your selection delivered to your bestie, sweet heart or any other.



Go to - [www.kandos.lk](http://www.kandos.lk)

Islandwide Delivery

Cash on delivery

VISA

MasterCard