



LIFESTYLE

‘Art is everywhere...

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You just have to look and you will see’

By Dimithri Wijesinghe

The eighth edition of the Collector’s Desk courtesy of the Embassy of Italy in Colombo and Saskia Fernando Gallery hosted an evening of art and art conversation curated by renowned Italian gallerist Susanna Orlando, specialising in contemporary Italian art since 1976, at Sapphire Residencies, Colombo 1.

The event featured honoured guest Ambassador of Italy to Sri Lanka and Maldives Rita Giuliana Mannella, who was responsible for extending the official invitation to Susanna to visit Sri Lanka and share her 40-plus years of art expertise.

The Ambassador quite passionately shared her love for art which in turn led to her extending an invitation to her long-time friend Susanna: “We Italians breathe art. Since the day we are born, we live in artistic surroundings.” She added that when she first visited the Embassy in Sri Lanka, the bare walls were most off-putting and she called her trusted companion to bring a piece of home to remedy the situation. Of Susanna’s visit, the Ambassador said: “Our intention is to bring to modern art the idea of contemporary art.”



We caught up with Susanna at the Ambassador’s residence to hear more about what she hopes to achieve here in the island during her visit and most importantly, to take a look at the curated 12-15 pieces of Italian art she brought with her and arranged at the Ambassador’s residence.



Susanna, being her spritely self, jumped straight into giving us a crash course on contemporary art, sharing with us that the art pieces she chose for the Ambassador’s residence were not a matter of just having art in her space; they are specifically curated to best suit Her Excellency’s sensibilities and space.

For example, the living room included art that makes you feel relaxed and helps you wind down. In the conference room, the pieces were arranged in a specific way so that the conversation will continue to flow, sharing energy that helps the room best achieve its purpose. Susanna said that she

chose important Italian artists representative of current Italy.

As for contemporary art, Susanna in detail described how contemporary is entirely different to being modern. She said that contemporary artists must always be conscious of their surroundings and the feelings of man.

“Contemporary is a language,” said Susanna, adding that it’s how one views things through your peripheral.

Therefore, contemporary is something that is relevant regardless of when it was done. A prime example being the great Leonardo da Vinci, a contemporary artist.

“Art is a magician,” said Susanna. It should make you feel as though you’ve entered another dimension, and this is where it differs from design. Susanna is a firm believer that designers are not artists. “For me at least, they are not.”

She is of the opinion that, while designers believe themselves to be artists, as they do of course create things that are beautiful, what a designer creates is always useful, it makes your life easier maybe, but a piece of art – you cannot use it.

“You look at a piece of art, and without doing anything, it gives some sensation to you. It touches your heart, it touches your mind,” said Susanna, a designer is creative but an artist is of fantasy.

Most importantly, according to Susanna, what truly sets the two apart is the Italian term “pathos”; that is an artist has inside him, always, a little bit of suffering. When an artist creates something, it’s a part of him that is being taken out of him and being inserted into his work. It’s not easy for an artist to create something. Susanna says a successful artist is never truly happy. “You must suffer a little bit like fine wine, much like the grapes in Tuscany which are so good because they are able to grow better after suffering the cold nights of Tuscany; and so, they taste better.”

Susanna shared with us her earliest memory of falling in love with art, how when she was only 15, she accompanied her father into an artist’s studio. She fondly recalled the memory of having smelled the oils used on the canvases and how that smell stuck with her to this day. She said her first impression was an odd one as the artist, when she first saw him, was in a secluded corner. He had had long hair, a long beard, and he pointed at her and said: “Susanna, you are a witch.” Susanna shared that she had a frightful reaction and ran to her “papa”, telling him how the man had called her witch. But her father had taken her to a beautiful masterpiece by the artist that was named “The Witch”; it was a beautiful woman, and so, to him “witch” was a complement.

According to Susanna, it is simply common sense to have art in your vicinity and during her visit here, in addition to her lecture for the Collector’s Desk, she conducted a programme at the Academy of Visual and Performing Arts. She said it was an emotional experience for her to visit the academy. Susanna shared that while being rich in history and in culture, she was most surprised to see that there were only a couple of art galleries in Colombo. The island is a location that is of utmost geographical importance and Susanna proposes that the city could really benefit from events such as an art fair which would attract artists, art collectors, and dealers to the country from all over the world.

Susanna, drawing from her 45 years of experience provided that every man has the duty, instrument, and tools to understand that the most important thing is to look around, to look for art: “Art is everywhere, it’s very close to you.

You just have to look and you will see.”

