Jane Dyer – Building Bridges through Art

BY ROCHIELLE PALIWA-GUNAWANAYA

Meeting the famed Artist Jane Dyer was like a breath of fresh air as she opened my eyes to a world of wonderful possibilities; a world in which unity is a possibility through the breaking of prejudices through peaceful endeavours. Here was someone who breaks the norm of art and elevates it to a higher realm.

The pictures portrayed were of a young girl and young man with the words they themselves had uttered during a brief conversation with Jane a few days ago.

Australian Artist Jane Dyer’s interdisciplinary practice spans Australia and Asia, with an increasing focus on east and west Europe. Her recent collaboration with British Artist Wayne Warren has expanded the parameters of her practice, evidenced this year in London, the Bury Art Museum in England and during time for gardens of the west for the 56th Venice Biennale in 2021. She is recognized for her direct and social engaged projects such as ‘Ger to Ger: Mongol National Gallery, Ulaanbatar; the protest that never ends, ARTIST ROOMS 2: Tobias and the Butterfly Effect, ARTLOKetarts. In 2013 Dyer received the inaugural Individual Artist Award from the Australian Federal Government for arts achievements in Asia and in 2006 a Commonwealth of Australia Public Service medal for contributions to arts and education.

Her work titled ‘Tell Me Something’ was showcased at the JIA Perera Gallery for the fourth edition of the Colombo Art Biennale (CAB) this year.

This year, the CAB includes up to 73 artists from 31 countries across 20 venues. 80% of the lineup featured local artists from Jaffna, Puttalam, Batticaloa, Gampaha and Colombo and the focus was on young and emerging artists of Sri Lanka. The rest were international artists. The local and international participants displayed a variety of media, including installation, mixed media, painting, drawing, sculpture, sound and performance.

Her project per se was developed in partnership with Unity Mission Trust (UMT) in Sri Lanka. The text and image based video and wall work, generated from workshops with Sri Lankan youth from diverse backgrounds, responds to the UMT mission to foster unity and reconciliation between teenagers and young adults across Sri Lanka. ‘Tell Me Something’ is supported by the Unity Mission Trust, Sri Lanka, the J. Peiris Art Foundation and the Australian High Commission, Sri Lanka.

‘Two years ago Amoshiki Jampali, the Founding Artistic Director of CAB requested me to portray my work at this year’s CAB. Since I had been to SL once before, I had an idea of what to expect and since I am drawn to words, I wanted to do something unique and make my piece de resistance in SL, and not in a studio per se. Amoshiki put me in touch with the Unity Mission Trust (UMT) which set up a situation at a center by inviting 41 youngsters ranging from 13 to 20 years of age from various parts of the island. Each day I spoke to 13 of them from all walks of life and questioned them about every aspect of life. Although they were a bit reticent at first, the ice was broken by talking, participating in photography shoots and various activities which enabled me to gain their trust and confidence. They allowed me into their world and in time they started to express their true feelings and ideas about what they really felt about the future, their awareness, their apprehensions etc.

I was truly inspired by this programme which is organized by UMT on a regular basis and allows dialog between youth from different ethnic groups and social classes. This promotes a spirit of camaraderie and tolerance. I never expected such a strong response to my request and felt that it was their work that has been showcased.’

The experience was so touching and I was moved beyond words. The UMT is philanthropic effort by benevolent individuals, whose sole motive is to bridge the gap between youth and break the social angst which has caused years of emotional and physical trauma. One could call it Bridges of Friendship. I have been here for more than two weeks and five of us were spent with my 41 friends who welcomed me into their universe. I feel my exhibit vividly expresses a global story about tolerance and a quest for breaking the shackles that bind us and continuing to forge friendships.’ were her thought provoking words.