

# DRAWING COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES PRACTICED IN KANDYAN AND SOUTHERN SCHOOL ART MURALS, SRI LANKA

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## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of art in Sri Lanka shows the pattern of cultural development throughout the history. Sri Lankan art styles belong to different time periods such as Classical school art style, Late Classical school art style, Gampola and Kotte period art style, Central Kandyan school art style, Provincial Kandyan school art style, Southern school art style and Modern transition school art style (Bandaranayke, 2006). These arts are treasured in temple murals in Sri Lanka. In comparison to other art styles, Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles preserve more evidences and remain in good condition and are accessible for studies.

Mural paintings belonging to Central Kandyan school art style were widely developed during the kingship of Kirithi Sri Rajashimha (1747-1782 AD) of the Kingdom of Kandy (Karunaratne, 1999). Central Kandyan school art style was initially adopted in temple murals around the city of Kandy and later they became popular in the other areas of Sri Lanka as well. Central Kandyan school art style shows the continuation of traditional art practices in Sri Lanka. Southern school art style was gradually coming out in temple murals belonging to Southern coastal areas of Sri Lanka during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It shows a clear relationship with Central Kandyan school art style. Southern school art style shows more tendencies to practices of contemporary western art (Bandaranayke, 2006).

Mural painting was used in Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles to visually communicate Buddhist Philosophy. These drawing styles are focussed on communicating ideas or messages through murals. Buddhist *Jathaka* stories and Buddha's life stories were mainly the subjects of drawings in both art styles. The total appearance of the art looks like a decoration. Figure graphics were artistically and symbolically developed based on natural figure forms and it was composed in drawing panel to make communication (Chutiwongs, *et al*, 1993<sup>A</sup>, Chutiwongs, *et al*, 1993<sup>B</sup>).

Composition of the drawing is one of the main areas that need to be consciously practiced for creating visual communication through murals. Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles were commonly composed figures into narrow horizontal bands. Those bands were set inside the temple shrine room walls. Miniature figures, tiny decorative motifs, repeated standard size figures and motifs were made attractive to read the paintings (Charles, 1993). This study is undertaken to determine whether in the Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles which communicate ideas through mural paintings, drawing composition techniques have been consciously practiced to build up visual communication. For this purpose the paper examines the different composition techniques which were practiced in Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles and analyses the effectiveness of the those drawing composition techniques to build up the visual communication.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research based on the style of drawing techniques that are found in traditional Sri Lankan murals. The research is based on the hypothesis that the way of practicing drawing composition techniques can be used to develop visual communication. Studies of evolution of Sri Lankan art styles, Central Kandyan art and Southern art styles were conducted through literature reviews and visual examination of the primary data by

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visiting temple murals located in Central, Southern and Western Provinces of Sri Lanka. Two case studies were undertaken to perform in-depth studies on Central Kandyan art and Southern art styles. Mural paintings belonging to the Central Kandyan art style were analysed through mural paintings belonging to Gangaramaya temple, Lewalla, Kandy. Mural paintings belonging to the Southern School art style were analysed in-depth by studying the Subodharamaya temple murals, Karagampitiya, Dehiwella.

Analysis of the study was conducted through deriving different drawing composition techniques that were used to compose figures into drawing panels and the methods that used to make separation in-between drawings without disturbing the smooth continuation in the drawing style. Line drawings of selected mural paintings were developed to perform a detailed analysis on the drawing techniques practiced in Central Kandyan and Southern art styles.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The whole appearance of the drawing panels belonging to Central Kandyan and Southern School art styles look like a systematic, detailed decoration. Figures and graphics were used in miniature form to compose drawings into narrow horizontal bands. Figures look two dimensional, short, rigid and deviate from the natural figure proportions. Limited and selective colours are practiced. Line is used as a main highlighting feature in the drawings. Main highlighting incidents of the story were continuously drawn on horizontal drawing panels from one end to another.

Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles were used in different composition techniques to compose figures to create incidence of the story as well as to make separation between incidence without disturbing the story narration techniques.

### **Figures are composed, creating a line**

Figures are composed forming a line in a drawing panel. Repetition, alternation and gradation techniques were used to add interest to the drawing through changing the figure type, clothing and distance among the figures. Figure 1 illustrates the way of using these techniques to compose figures into a painting.

### **Figures are composed, creating a focal point**

Figure forms and graphics are used to create a focal point in a drawing. Three types of techniques were used to create a focal point. These are changing the size of figures, changing the figure proportions and setting separate backdrops. Figure 2 shows the way of setting focal point as considering the figures in the line. Figure 3 illustrates the focal point arrangement with different levels in drawing.

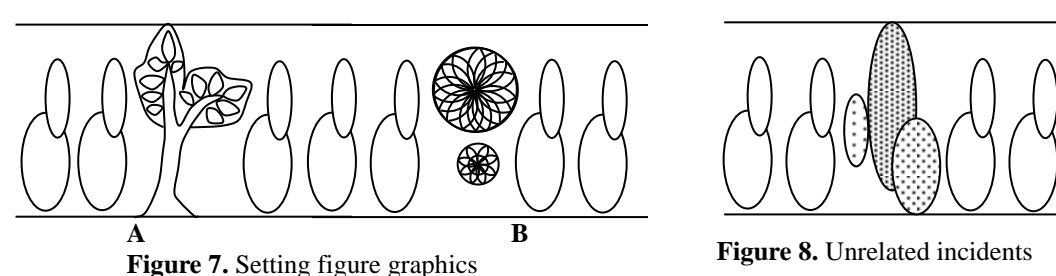
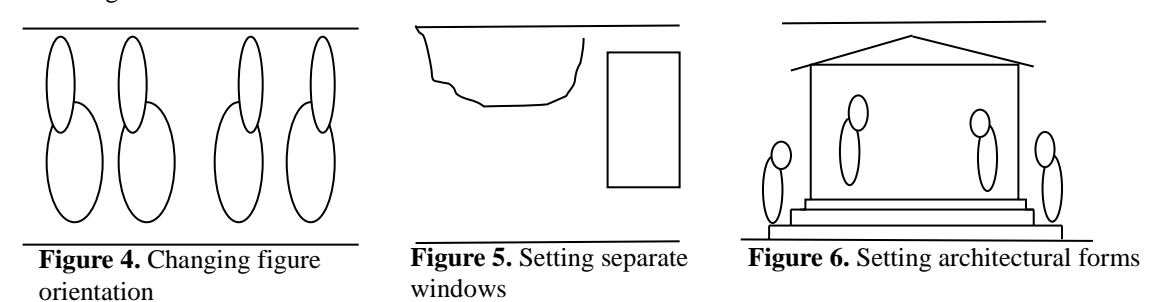
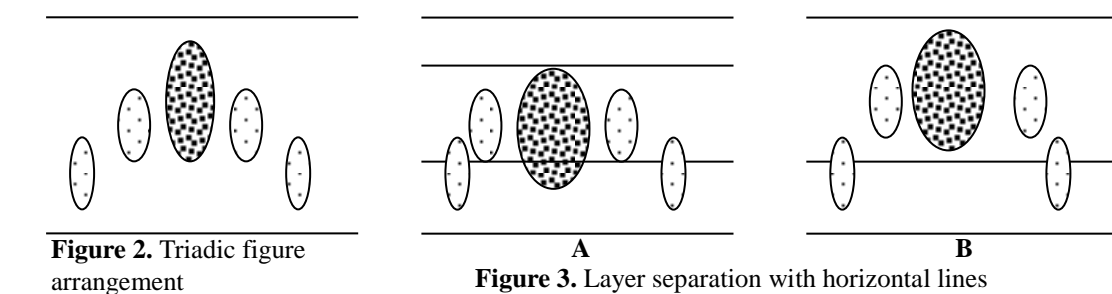
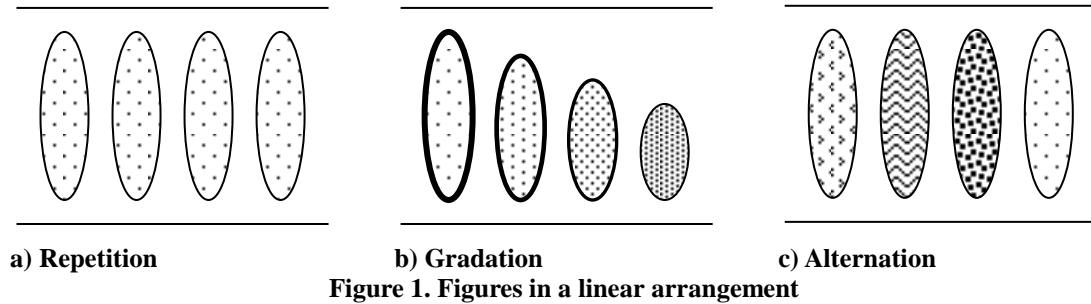
### **Figures are composed, creating levels**

The space of the drawing plane was horizontally divided into two or three parts and figures were composed considering the levels in drawing. Horizontal lines and figure placement of considering different levels in drawing create the illusion of depth in the drawing. However, the size of figures and figure proportions show deviation to show depth. Figure 3 shows the different practices of figure placement, creating foreground, midground and background in drawings.

Different artistic applications were practiced at drawing to make interchanges between the incidents of the story. It is highly affected to make smooth continuation among drawings and make whole appearance as a decoration. Five types of drawing interchanging techniques are discussed below which were derived through the analysis.

### **Changing figure orientation**

Repeating figure forms were set in different directions to show the separation between incidence. Separation was highlighted through the repetition of the figures. Figure 4 illustrates the sense of that technique practiced in drawing.



### Border arrangements to create the window space

Clear decorative lines and shapes were used as border or windows to highlight the incidents in the drawing. Borders make a clear separation between the incidents. Shapes like window spaces were used to show parallel worlds or coincident to the main story events. Figure 5 illustrates the inorganic and organic forms of window spaces created in drawings.

### Setting architectural forms

Architectural forms were used to compose figures into drawing effect to highlight the incidents. It makes a clear separation among other incidence. Figure 6 illustrates the sectional view of the house and the way of composing figures to create a focal point. Likewise sectional view of the palaces, preaching halls, caves were commonly practiced in Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles.

### Setting figure graphics

Artistic figure graphics were used in both art styles to make separation among the incidents as

well as to add interest in art. Figure graphics were used to create symbolic communication and to add pleasing effect to the drawing. Natural forms of flowers, trees, rivers, rocks and animals were commonly used to develop these graphical forms. Southern school art style was used to create natural figure forms as well as imaginations to create figure graphics as flower lines, hell, etc.:. Figure 7 illustrates the way of applying symbolic forms in drawings to make separation among incidents.

### **Setting unrelated incidents to the main story**

Incidents that are unrelated to the main story events were inserted in between drawings to make the separation. This practice is commonly visible in Southern school art style. These types of incidents represent the events of day-to-day life style contemporaries to that period. Figure 8 illustrates this.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Composition of the drawing techniques related to the Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles were examined and analysed in this work to find possibilities to make effective communication. Nine different techniques of composition were identified in drawings related to figures composed in the drawing panels to create an incident and to separate the incidents. Three types of composing techniques, creation of lines, focal points and levels, were identified as the means that have been used to create incidents. five types of interchanging techniques, namely, change of figure orientation, border arrangement to setting separate window in the picture plane, using architectural forms, using figure graphics and unfamiliar incidents to the main story were identified as that have been used in the drawings.

These techniques are effected to make clear understanding of the story narration and visually communicate the ideas. Central Kandyan and Southern school art styles consciously practiced drawing composition techniques to develop visual communication through mural paintings. The outcomes of this research, identification of drawing techniques used in Kandyan and Souther art styles, can be used to develop visual communication systems that can be practised in different fields with the aid of new technological advancements.

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