

The Murals of the Karagampitiya Subodharama Temple:

An Investigation of the Pictorial Language of these
murals of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This research study investigates the pictorial language of Karagampitiya Subodharama Temple Murals in relation to Southern tradition of temple painting in Sri Lanka. In this study, among painting surfaces available at Karagampitiya Subodharama temple, the main focus is given to the ambulatory murals of the Image House. This research establishes that all the murals and decorations could be positioned within the broad spectrum of the Southern school. The research also attempts to understand parallel schools such as the Kandyan School and possible foreign influences on the Southern school of painting.

The study concentrates on the visual language of the Temple paintings. It makes an artistic analysis of structure, composition and canon of the paintings from the point of view of a practicing artist. It thereby hopes to complement as well as supplement studies done in this field which are historical, archeological and socio-political in nature. The objective of the present study is to position the Karagampitiya Temple murals within the broad stylistic spectrum of the Southern School. It also seeks to present a visual documentation of the pictorial spaces of the Karagampitiya Temple through a specific study of the ambulatory spaces of the Image House with reference to the ceiling, inner wall and outer wall and a study of the pictorial language of the east, south and west of the inner walls of the ambulatory space. The inner walls of the ambulatory spaces are studied in depth since these contain the earliest paintings in the temple. The visual language of the Southern School of murals is best depicted in these paintings. In going through the images of the Ambulatory, the study will also look at the stylistic features as well as compositional features of the paintings. It will finally identify areas of potential study for the future in the context of the Southern school and the Karagampitiya Temple mural paintings and decorations.