

## Portraiture in Sri Lankan art from mid-eighteenth century to mid-twentieth century

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Stone inscriptions and donor inscriptions on copper and palm leaf (*Sannas* and *Tudapath* ) show an unbroken tradition from the early years of Buddhism in Sri Lanka how kings and queen were responsible for the erection of temples and monasteries. Figures of laymen on the walls of the Caves and Image House have been useful to identify donors of that particular temple. They usually stand closest to the entrance of the sanctum and sometimes are shown carrying offerings to the Buddha or worshipping him. Also the tradition of depicting monks who mentored the building of a particular Image House can be traced back to the mid eighteenth century in the Kandyan Region. This presentation will trace the possibilities of discovering a tradition of portrait painting, which in the twentieth century can be noticed in the *Meddepola Rajamahā Vihāraya* by Solius Mendis and in the *Thimibirigasyaya Isipathanaramaya* by Maligawe Sarlis, which may have used photographs as the source instead of live models. Most *Tampita Viharas* visited by us, too have revealed portraits of kings and other donors. The later murals of the *Kelaniya Rajamahā Vihāraya* by Solias Mendis showing the family of the donors Helena Wijewardane will open the discussion, to what extent these murals can be seen as the earliest representation of portraits in the Buddhist image House of the twentieth century. Which images in the Buddhist Image House can actually be regarded as “portraits”? This leads us to a further very pertinent question, under what criteria, images can be regarded as portraits in the Sri Lankan context? What is the value given in such representations of human beings in the sanctum of the image house which generally depicts the Buddha, Bōdhisattvas, Gods and Arhats?

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