

TALKING ART

Creations that go beyond gender



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ANOTHER Women's Day has been done and dusted. The years have ensured a sense of fairness in the celebrations. No longer are the super achievers the only ones who are feted. In the run up to the big day, women from all walks of life are hunted down and lured onto temporarily erected podiums to narrate their inspiring stories, awards are handed over by self proclaimed male luminaries of society while audiences applaud her grit and determination. All seems well until the pink flowers wilt to melancholic browns in the aftermath, and you slowly begin to wonder what the noise was all about!

Art, although a tool to question injustices, has never been able to free itself of gender disparities and sexism. A recent incident that says it all is a marketing strategy employed by the reputed British Museum to advertise its show on Roman military history. The caption asked single women to visit the show, walk around looking confused and thus, attract male company on the pretext of seeking to understand the exhibition. The museum has since apologised but it only goes to reaf-

firm age-old stereotypes, despite all the progress we think we have made.

The issues that women artists face are manifold. Not many female artists are taken as seriously by art galleries and buyers, as their male counterparts, who still reign supreme. Most times, the work of a female artist is looked on as a craft. Due recognition is a long road and barely a woman artist ever matches up to the prices commanded by a male artist. Historically, women were not allowed to study art and when they finally could, they were not permitted to use nude models to study anatomy. The opportunities that male artists enjoyed for centuries allowed them to become successful and establish higher

values for their creations. It is this unfairness that was addressed by an anonymous group of female artists who called themselves the Guerilla Girls. Formed in 1985 to expose the rampant gender discrimination in famed museums, they donned gorilla masks and staged protests outside these institutions with statistics to prove the gross injustices and continue doing so till date.

In the India of the 1940s, there were barely any women artists and until the 1970s, Indian art was dominated by men. In the years that followed, although many more women artists graduated from the country's art schools, the inequalities continue to exist. Strangely, most of India's art galleries

are owned and run by women and yet, the unconscious bias refuses to fade away. A man's practice is considered earnestly right from the start, while a woman's is often observed with scepticism. Would she lose interest and settle down when marriage ropes her in? Would domesticity relegate her practice of art? Would the pressures of a family life dissolve her purpose? The distrust takes time and patience to dissipate until she proves with her perseverance that her art is truly worth investing in.

It may be hard to change perceptions overnight but nothing is impossible if the change starts from each of us. May the future witness the colours of equality!

