

February 10, 2014

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Branching out



The Hindu Out of art Photo: K.V. Srinivasan

Artists and students come together for a public wall art in the city, as part of Art Chennai

Buckets and brushes are being passed around in a flurry. Paint cans are opened. It's nearing midday, and the sun is at its peak while students wearing caps and artists are busy painting leaves on one of the 26 panels on the outer walls of Stella Maris College on Cathedral Road. Slowly, a large tree emerges. 'The Trees and The Skies', a collaborative wall art project by the Fine Arts students of the College, three mural artists and six artists from Ability Foundation marks the start of Art Chennai, a week long art festival in the city.

Inaugurated by singer-designer Tanvi Shah, the project will evolve over the next week, where more than 150 students, artists Jacob Jebaraj, Seema Kohli and Tanujaa Rane and those from

Ability Foundation will create murals based on the theme ‘Environment, Heritage and Conservation’.

A telling metaphor

“We are taking different styles of art from around the country and juxtaposing it with contemporary styles to present different techniques. The panels will be different, but represent the theme. The artists will be working with miniatures, warli and other styles,” says Jacob Jebaraj, while Tanujaa adds, “The concept of trees and skies is a metaphor to signify art that represents the earth (our roots) and the abstract imagery and the imagination of the skies (the crown, the creative elements).”

Sanjay Tulsyan, the convenor of Art Chennai, believes that the collaborative project will help foster an inclusive society. “Art is not exclusive. The idea is to bring people from different streams and make them work together. This project is also aimed at recognising public art and spreading its importance. Earlier, art used to be about being beautiful, but over the years, it has become an expression that talks about a city, society or heritage,” he explains.

Among the artists from Ability Foundation is Shakthivel, who is happy about being part of the effort and the opportunity to work with major artists. “I have been painting since I was 10, and my muse is a banyan. Each tree has a character, and I like to explore that side of it,” he says.

The six artists will be working on six panels. “While making the society inclusive is one of our aims,” says Janaki Pillai of Ability Foundation, “We must not forget that these people are a talented bunch; they must not be segregated. This event is about bringing artists from every walk to life together to create something.”

The Fine Arts department of Stella Maris has been conceptualising its panels with the other artists for over two months. “The students came up with ideas about how technology has taken over society and how we can revive it. We have developed an imagery and tweaked it,” says Razia Tony, professor of the department. “This is a great opportunity for the students to work with artists and learn from them. It is also a great way to spread awareness about sustainability and conservation,” says Jesintha Quadras, the principal of Stella Maris.