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Lead the way



Special Arrangement 'Lead'ing the way: Young entrepreneur Snehalatha Prithviraj.

An undergrad student Snehalatha Prithviraj has carved a niche for herself in her pencil-carvings.

MADHUVANTI S. KRISHNAN

Her head is bent low as she scrapes away feverishly at the lead. Her forehead is furrowed in concentration as she squints at the lead pencil in one hand, and a surgical knife in the other. Fingers move in a rhythmic frenzy, first carving the pencil's lead with the sharp instrument, removing specs of shavings, and then, back to carving. This goes on until what was once a mere pencil is now a veritable piece of art.

How does one separate the art from the artist? This is the question one might ask after viewing the work of **19-year-old Snehalatha Prithviraj, a second-year undergraduate student of Fine Arts from Stella Maris College** who has been into pencil-carving for over a year-and-a-half now. The art and the artist seem almost concomitant; such is the passion that Snehalatha nurtures for her art.

“The first time I got interested in pencil carving was after watching the movie *Naan Ee*. There is a scene where the female protagonist is carving away at a pencil. I was fascinated by what I saw. My curiosity was aroused, and I decided to try my hand. It has been a year-and-a-half since my first attempt, and I have come a quite a bit since then,” she smiles.

Humble beginnings

What started as a hobby has now developed into a passion. What's more, Snehalatha has joined the elite group of youngsters who choose to earn their living even as they are in college.

“Initially, I used to merely dabble with shapes and designs for the sheer fun of it. But as time progressed, people on campus got to know of my art. Classmates, their friends, and even teachers admired my work. Gradually, I had people requesting me for a few samples of my work,” says Snehalatha.

Snehalatha's first opportunity to display her skill came during the Christmas Fete on campus last year, and since then, there has been no looking back. “Pencil carving was something new on campus. Naturally, when I displayed my designs, people were intrigued, and I sold quite a few samples. From then on, I have been receiving a lot of orders. People tell me what kind of designs they want, and I carve it for them,” she beams.

When Snehalatha first began selling her designs, she used to sell them at Rs.30 apiece. Now, she plans to increase the rates as she realised that her goods were underpriced. “On interacting with a friend in Hyderabad who is into pencil-carving on a full-time basis, I learnt that one piece was worth up to Rs.150 or even Rs.200. The time taken to make one piece ranges from 20 minutes to three hours depending on the intricacy of the design, and clearly, pricing them at Rs.30 was not right,” she explains. “Now, I customise them based on specifications from my customers and fix the price accordingly.”

A roaring success

Snehalatha's work has been displayed in an exhibition at Anna University and has been well-received. She has also been asked to address youngsters on the art of pencil carving, in colleges across the city. Not only this, it is to Snehalatha's credit that her works have also been displayed in one of city's top art galleries — Lalit Kala Akademi. “I have also received bulk orders from a company and will be starting work shortly,” she adds excitedly.