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Design elements in art courses draw students

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Chennai: Popular fiction's portrayal of the talented artist struggling to make ends meet may not be too far from the truth as students with a pure art degree find. While relatively few city colleges offer fine arts courses, artists say it is important to include a design element in the curriculum to improve career prospects.

Stella Maris College revamped its fine arts course in 2008, introducing a specialization in design and changing the name of the degree from BA Fine Arts to Bachelor of Visual Arts. Sister Jasintha Quadras, principal, says, "Students study art in general in the first year before specialising. We also offer them opportunities to gain exposure through international visits."

Not many students stay in the city to study fine arts. Despite being the oldest art institution in the country, Government College of Fine Arts on Poonamallee High Road is not the first choice. "MS University in Baroda, Sir JJ Institute of Applied Art in Mumbai and Kala Bhavana (Institute of Fine Arts) in Santiniketan are better known. So, students choose these colleges," says C Krishnaswamy, and alumnus of Government College of Fine Arts.

While some organizations like British Council's Association of British Scholars (ABS) offer grants to artists, opportunities are few. "Living on art is difficult. Many students become architects or designers and practice art on the side or become art educators," says A V Ilango, artist and president of ABS.

Former art teacher at American International School-Chennai Sandhya Gopinath says, "Artists are at a disadvantage if they don't have design experience. Fine arts education is not



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dying; it is just evolving with the industry."

Art historian and critic Ashrafi S Bhagat cautions that the core idea of the course must not be sidelined. "Art education is incomplete without some form of digital training. However, the student needs to be trained thoroughly in painting and drawing before beginning digital training," she says.

A Vigram, regional manager of Image Infotainment, which offers courses in digital design and animation, says, "You need talent and creativity for drawing but to present it to people, you need to be well versed in technology."

Some artists say training in just art is not a stumbling block to making it big. Art educator Srivi Kalyan, says, "While it doesn't hurt to study design alongside art, there is no compulsion to do so if you have a career goal that does not involve design."

Ashvin Rajagopalan who owns Ashvita art gallery also believes digital design should not be mandatory for someone keen on painting. "It can be handy but to truly succeed in art world, your focus must be on your skill," he says.

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