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Creating dialogue through art

Students from Stella Maris College speak up on various issues through their art

•• PREETI ZACHARIAH

A large squirrel is splayed across the floor: its mouth gapes in a rictus of startled alarm; its eyes are glassy and staring; its entrails spill out, a congealed mass of blood-soaked gut studded with tiny human skulls. Titled *Roadkill*, the 4.3 ft X 3 ft papier-mâché installation stemmed from artist Ananya R's experience of seeing a squirrel being hit by a car last year. "What was a few minutes ago, an agile vibrant squirrel gambolling with its playmates up a tree, was reduced to an immobile, mute, incapacitated body," she writes in her statement. "The insensitivity of it all really bothered me," she says.

Tessellate, presented by Stella Maris College's Department of Fine Arts, is indeed – as the name suggests – a jigsaw-like coming together of various sorts of artwork. Block-printed dresses and packaging material meets concepts like body shaming, Freud, consumerism and dreamscapes at the exhibition put together by final year students of Fine Art and Design at Chennai's Lalit Kala Regional Centre till April 17.

Female torsos of varying shapes and sizes are swathed with red pageant sashes: both the bodies and the sashes carry underlying messages in fine print, literally. The skin of these figures is composed of newspapers on which little messages are sutured: all carry stories related to weight, eating disorders, the body and its



Showcasing artistic talent for a cause A student explaining the essence of the piece to a visitor

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

beautification while on the sash are printed certain words: Plastic surgery, Assault, Anorexia. "All my life, I have been asked why I am so thin while my sister is asked why she is so fat," says Aemani Zimren, the artist behind the installation titled *Shamed Bodies*. The constant pressure to look a certain way, especially prevalent among women, has resulted in this somewhat one-dimensional approach to beauty. The installation, on the other hand, almost appears to be a subversion of this ideal. "It is a very feminist idea

I am trying to portray," she says.

Harshita Singhvi's is yet another comment on physical appearance. Her *Appearances are deceptive*, a long line of self-portraits sheathed in different materials – bubble-wrap, cling film, wire and wrapping paper – indicate that, "first impressions may not always be the real impressions," as she writes.

A number of eyes of varying colours, reflecting diverse landscapes: think seascapes, sky-grazing mountains, verdant forests and more, follow us as we walk down the gallery. Titled *Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder*, the paintings are inspired by nature because it, "gives my soul ultimate peace and calmness," says its creator Deepti Solanki. A large patchwork chameleon is, "a mirage of a chameleonic society," says its creator Carolyn Sussana, while Rhea Fabian's decidedly Dadaistic *Museum of Leftovers*, composed of discarded objects, is a mausoleum of fossilised memory.

Then there is Bianca's (she goes by one name) *Viewing Sublimare*, inspired by the defence mechanism derived from Freud, a sense-assaulting collage of sound and many-layered visuals with horrific origins. "I lost my brother in a swimming pool accident when I was younger," she says.

Equally diverse – mind-bogglingly so, in fact – are the range of products and packaging created by the design students. DIY gardening sets, purses inspired by iconic buildings in Chennai, crocheted dresses for children, embroidered jackets, illustrated cookbooks and more, fill the walls and corners of the gallery.

Despite the diversity of the offerings, everything is bound together by one thing, says Lakshmi Priya Daniel, faculty at the department. "Much of what is out here comes out of deeply personal experiences. Both art and design benefit from this personal narrative: whether it is painting, installation or design, there is an emotional connect."

