

Pics: Johan Sathyadas

STELLA MARIS IS WHERE IT ALL STARTED FOR ME: LEKHA WASHINGTON



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Lekha interacts with her teachers



Students take a picture with Lekha

“ I THINK MY COLLEGE HAS BEEN THE STAGE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE BECAUSE I CONTINUE TO BE DOING THE SAME WORK THAT I STARTED HERE, IN THE SAME PATTERN

Coming back to her alma mater, Stella Maris, had Lekha Washington all excited and somewhat overwhelmed too. “I promise not to be boring,” she told the students when she took the stage, last week, to speak at the national seminar on art and design titled, Looking Beyond Confluence of Art & Design, organised by the department of Fine Arts that’s celebrating its 70th year anniversary.

“As you guys know, I ended up becoming a Tamil actress but I gave up acting long back, and I will tell you all of that gossip later. I then started my own company that combines design and art,” said Lekha, who loves to be more recognised as an artist and designer rather than the actress she was in her short film career in Kollywood and Bollywood. When a student asked her if her career in acting helped her in some way to be what she is today, she said, “Honestly, I don’t think so. If you Google search me, please don’t do it now (laughs!), you will find hot, sexy etc. pages but nowhere will you see Lekha Washington, the artist and designer. Quite frankly, in the design world if I go and tell people that I have worked in Tamil movies, no one would care much

and they wouldn’t take me seriously. It’s a very niche market and I like the compliments I get for my design and art.”

While showing a few of her masterworks that she has exhibited on various platforms, Lekha also displayed a still of her very first artwork that she exhibited in Stella Maris College as a student, and famously declared, “So, this is where it all started.”

While showing her latest much-talked-about work that she displayed at the recently held Burning Man, where she was also the only Indian artiste to exhibit her installation, Lekha explained about the 11-foot moon that she calls, ‘Moondancer’. “It was hoisted about 150 feet in the air and designed in a way that it would go from full-moon to half and to no-moon. It was fun to confuse people because there were two moons in the sky and some were running behind to chase

this one!”

Lekha said she was visiting Chennai after almost three years. “I took a picture of myself when I reached college and sent it to my college friends and told them how my life had changed dramatically in the last 15 years. I have quite a few college memories: some bad and some good ones. I always remember being the odd one out. When I came back today, I feel like everything has come a full circle; it’s like I am back to the place where I started once. I was always a backbencher. It feels really nice to come back, to be accepted and to be validated,” she said.

While she was entering through the college gates there were quite a few nostalgic memories. “I can’t tell which memory came first and which came second. Fifteen years ago when I walked through the main gate of Stella, I was trying to decide whether to study here or not. All those feelings I had back then, came rushing back to me all over again, and it was quite interesting to be revisiting those memory lanes,” she smiled.

Speaking about art, poetry and other cultural activities that she was part of when she was in college, Lekha said that she participated in many plays and her first art exhibition was mounted here. “In that sense, I think my college has been the stage for the rest of my life because I continue to be doing things in the same pattern. Everything that we do shapes us into the artiste that we are, and I think every incident we go through plays a major role in our lives.”

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