

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FESTIVAL



The long weekend (January 15 to January 17) was a time of celebration for all bibliophiles at the Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Hall, venue for *The Hindu* Lit for Life 2016. Writers, historians, journalists, artists, musicians, filmmakers, poets and professors engaged in dynamic discussions in front of packed audiences filled with aspiring authors, book lovers and students. A photo booth, a chalkboard where people wrote down one book they would keep forever, and food stalls kept visitors entertained.



The Hindu Young World Goodbook Awardees (from left) Sujatha Padmanabhan, Prabha Malliyil, Venita Coelho and Vishakha Chanchani



Your next weekend getaway — a studio

Traffic snarls or a bad day at work... de-stress with classes around the city that offer more than just a turn at the potter's wheel. NAVEENA VIJAYAN has the details

“You need to try it to know it,” says artist, sculptor and photographer Dewakar Chandran as he drags a low stool and places it in front of a clay wheel. There are three of those at his plush Life and Art studio in Adyar (started in 2013) — two imported and one made in India. A blob of clay is pinched out from the stock, and slapped onto the centre of the wheel, which looks like a steel pan placed upside down. With minimal instructions, he switches on the machine. The clay slides smoothly on the inside of our palms — a cool ticklish sensation. “It’s soothing, almost relaxing. IT and business professionals, foreigners, housewives and engineering students come over during the weekends, and spend hours just playing with the clay,” he laughs.

Traffic snarls, a bad day at work, or an ugly fight — all of it, apparently, can be swept away by getting a little messy. There is proof.

Art seems to “reduce stress and anxiety; increase positive emotions; and improve flow and spontaneity, positive identity, and social networks”, according to research (published in the *American Journal of Public Health*). “It is therapeutic. It helps you forget all other problems, and concentrate on the clay,” he says.

It’s time to learn the basics. We are asked to cup our palms around the clay, then make a hole in the centre with our fingers and simultaneously exert pressure from the inside. A miracle of physics — we have a fairly well-shaped



CREATIVE ZONE A participant tries her hand at sculpting at the Life and Art Studio PHOTO. M. MOORTHY

Dewakar Chandran realised that there were a number of drawing classes for children, but not many for adults to unwind

pot in front of us.

This goes to a massive electric kiln (probably the only one in the city, he claims) in the other room, or is left to dry in the open — joining the array of clay pen stands, pots, tiny barrels and candle stands. Another shelf includes ones with a fancier finish — glazed pots with patterns on the outside. Probably, by students who are in the fourth level of the studio’s

structured programme (there are four levels; a total of 10, two-hour sessions in batches of four or five, on both weekdays and weekends).

Dewakar studied pottery at a few studios in Puducherry, and practised for a while at Bangalore’s popular Clay Station, before setting up his own.

He realised that there were a number of drawing classes for children, art colleges with

studios for professionals (like at Lalit Kala Akademi), but not many for adults to unwind, or learn a skill — unlike in the West.

“When I opened the studio, there was quite a response; it was almost like people were waiting for a place like this,” he says, slicing the pot off the wheel with a knife and handing it over to us.

So, is pottery the in thing now? The answer comes from

a little far away. Nestled in the greenery of DakshinaChitra, Muttukadu, and surrounded by heritage houses, is the recently renovated (2014) Ceramic Centre. “Most certainly yes,” says artist and potter S. Potrarasan, who manages the studio, complete with a wood kiln and gas kiln, besides clay body, glaze and other resources required for pottery.

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Pics: A Prathap



IN BETWEEN THE LINES: Alphonso Doss (below) in his painting 'Anthropometry' draws parallels between the Vitruvian man and Nataraja to focus on symmetry in human forms

Religious motifs on a secular canvas

Artist Alphonso Doss, Draws Upon Symbols From Sacred Texts To Convey Human Emotions

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Tradition and modernity, secularity and religion, precision and colour — the canvases of artist Alphonso Arul Doss blends contrasts in uncommon ways, lending it deeper meaning and a striking visual dimension. So the Nataraja and the Vitruvian man share space and Christ is replaced with Gandhi, as long as lines and proportion are in perfect harmony with his concept of art without boundaries.

Inspired by varied visual elements, the national award-winning painter incorporates everything in the pantheon of artistic medium. "For me, art is the medium connecting the universe, and I try to retrace the missing link between history, iconography and human proportions," says Doss. His initiation into art began with the murals and stained glass in churches. The Christian themes led him to explore the work of Michelangelo and Cezanne, but while he was in awe of the West, his training at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Chennai made him look towards his country.

"During my college years I began studying the art in Ajanta and Ellora and

changed from 3D paintings to linear, 2D sketches, joining the ranks of young artists who were part of the Madras Movement of Art in the late 1950s," he says. Doss credits the college for opening up his creative world where he juxtaposed western and eastern symbols, creating an idiom of his own under the guidance of D P Roy Chowdhury and S Dhanapal and KCS Paniker.

The museum of art of the south Indian masters, which he established as a principal in his alma mater, was a career high. While he adopted the Chinese style of transparent application of oil colours during his student days, his signature 'gem-stone' style was developed later in the 1980s. Stressing on the importance of light, Doss' paintings leave out blank spaces to create a play of shadow and colour.

With Biblical scenes, Nataraja and Buddha dominating his work, the artist may seem religious but the message behind the pieces is far from didactic. "When I paint Jesus washing the feet of his disciple, it's not just because it is a holy image but I want to convey the emotion behind the action," says Doss.

At 76, age and illness may have slowed him down, but Doss is a well-spring of ideas and eager to

get back to his easel for a retrospective show later this year. "My body may have given up but my hunger to create keeps me going," says the artist, who took a break because of ill health, sitting in a roomful of unfinished canvases.

