

ART IN THE CITY

Being an emerging artist is never easy. Rejections and criticism can, all too often, ruin careers before they even begin. Read more about Malvika Venkat and her friends who decided there is strength in numbers. *By Anjali Alappat*



Sitting down to chat with Malvika Venkat feels like meeting an old friend. She is happy, vibrant and ready to talk about her work and that of her friends. FaQ or 'Fine art Quotient' is Malvika's brainchild. An emerging artist herself, she vividly remembers the jitters that she had before her first show. So this time around, when she had to showcase her work, she decided that she would like to do so in a group.

COMING TOGETHER

"I noticed that the biggest problem artists have nowadays, coming out with their work, is that they do not have the confidence to display their works or approach galleries. I had that problem when I had my show in July last year." She laughs and is quick to tell me that it was her only solo show. She continues, "I realised that a lot of other people also had the same inhibitions as me. So I decided I would contact a whole load of my college mates who had wanted to have shows but never did. I suggested we all do a show together."

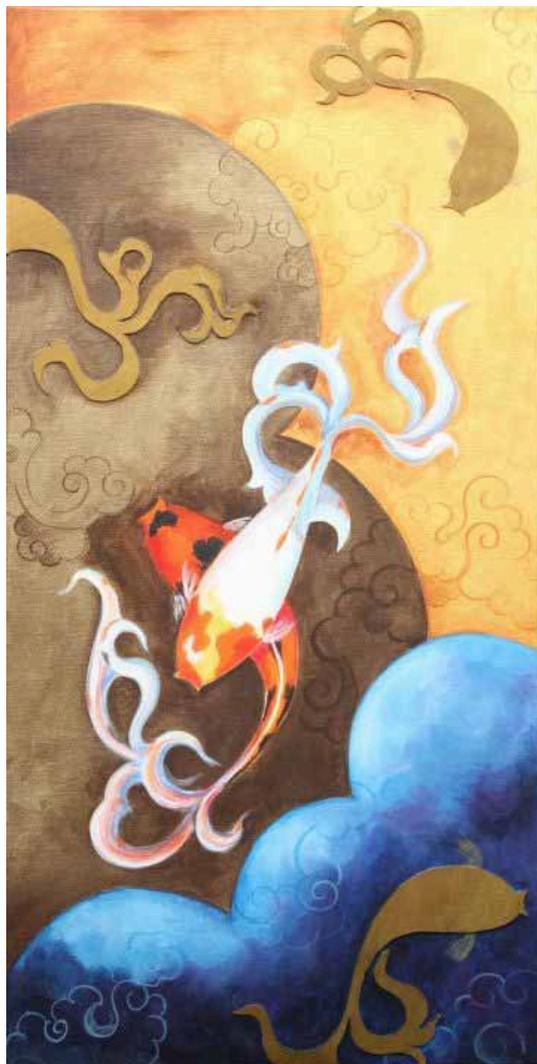
Malvika used facebook to contact all her former classmates. The social network made it easy for her to get in touch and stay in touch, making what started out as a small idea, blossom into a show that earned the group (especially Malvika) a great deal of praise from the Chennai art community.



Above: Malvika besides Krsna; Opposite: Tessa Pottamkulam, Contemplations, Oil on Stretched canvas

TIME OF THEIR LIVES

Right: Niveditha Sivaprakash, Tengoku No Koi, Acrylic and metal work on Canvas;
Extreme Right: Thota Tharrani drawing Ganesha



WHY NOT GALLERIES?

Galleries need profits; that much is undeniable and according to Malvika, this puts artists at a disadvantage. “Galleries usually want to make a sale so they keep the profit criterion in mind while choosing the kind of artists they want to display.” She is quick to say that it is all subjective and based on personal opinion. “What the gallery owner likes may not be what the buyer likes.”

Rejection is never nice and to avoid it, many artists don’t try too hard to display their work. After realizing this, Malvika was determined to make her show different from the run of the mill gallery showings. Malvika made the final decisions regarding the paintings exhibited but all the other artists gave valuable inputs. It is clear that this was very much a group effort.

They decided to display all their art alphabetically, rather than collection-wise. This was partly to ensure that all the art got equal viewing and partly so that there would be diversity. Malvika encouraged each of the artists to experiment and produce pieces that were different, even from the artists’ own previous offerings. From photographs to mixed media art – diversity was the word of the day.

Sixteen female artists showcased their work in FaQ 2012 at Lalit Kala Akademi from 1st to 5th February. Despite their common connection through their Fine Arts degrees from Stella Maris, they were all in different stages of their lives. Some of them, like Shreya Dasgupta worked abroad in the art field and others like Hemavathi were artists only during their personal time. Each of them had their own doubts about displaying their work.

According to Malvika, “Things have changed big time from college. We have a Stella third year art exhibition, every batch has it, and even if there has been no contact with painting as such, all the experience that we have been getting over the years has been showcased in our art.”

Not all in the group have kept up with their art. Malvika says that professionally, they range from graphic artists to an archaeologist with a few homemakers thrown in for good measure. Two of the artists were pregnant when they worked on their exhibits and one had a baby a week before the show. It illustrates clearly how different their lives are. FaQ was not just a fusion of art forms, it was a fusion of lives and experiences.

Malvika is eager to discuss the art that was on display at the show. “One of the artists, Hemavathi, does a lot of work with French chalk, plaster of Paris and gum. All her works are very relief kind of work – almost in the range of sculpture. She uses a lot of materials which are very set design oriented.”

Clockwise from right:
Bindhu Malini Narayanaswamy,
Jewels, Acrylic on stretched canvas
Ayesha Rizwan, Summer, Miniature
painting with cut paper work



A HELPING HAND

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Another special aspect of the exhibition is that 10 percent of the proceeds went towards the Jayanthi Foundation, an organization that educates the underprivileged. The foundation has a personal connection to the group, having been started by Shreya Dasgupta's mother-in-law. Like FaQ, the Jayanthi foundation is also taking its baby steps. "They are only going to start this June and we thought starting money is a good thing to give. And it is reliable, we know her well."

The charity represents a noble cause and when asked about it, Malvika says, "Most of these girls were not actually willing to come forward, despite it being a group event because they have not been in touch with art. I had to tell them that even if they are not going to be doing any great art, it is ok; it would be worthwhile for someone. So they got into it with that frame of mind. At the end of it, most of the girls who came in with that mentality, saw their works get sold first."

The show is collaboration between artists and as such, they are each entitled to their own profits. But Malvika proudly states that 8 of the artists, to date, have contacted the foundation of their own volition and made a donation.

FaQ 2012 was inaugurated by renowned art director and visual artist, Thota Tharani. In addition to formally cutting the ribbon, Tharani also graced the occasion by doing an impromptu sketch for the audience. The sketch was auctioned off and the proceeds were donated to the Jayanthi Foundation. The event was a resounding success and Malvika received much kudos for organizing it. She is already planning next year's exhibition and has several new ideas. The initiative has been well and truly taken and it is sure to have a real impact on the art scene in Chennai.