

The roving artist inspires



FOR THE last six months, State-based artist Sathyapal has been traversing the length and breadth of Central India; from living in the jungles of Bastar to experience a first hand account of tribal life before he can incorporate the captivating nuances of ethnic art into his own pictorial idiom, to putting up remote Bilaspur's first exhibition in abstract art, he's done it all.



In the capital city Raipur, Sathyapal strode into the Central Jail armed with his canvases to "fill colour in the lives of prisoners." The assembly of indolent inmates were stirred and when Sathyapal distributed sheets of art paper and paints, encouraging them to paint and give concrete expression to their thoughts. They were enthusiastic, to say the least. The topic of the workshop was 'Azadi' or Freedom, and Sathyapal unearthed a lot of talent in the confines of the prison. The entire episode evoked a sense of déjà vu. Some years ago, celebrated police personality Kiran Bedi had started meditation and yoga classes in Tihar Jail in a bid to reform, or at least, refresh the lives of prisoners there.

Sathyapal's works are a passionate articulation of the common man's woes, especially women, and he essays to make a representation of the marginal groups. This demonstration of social activism touched a chord amongst all his viewers ranging from Bhilai to Durg.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between the people and the artist, he spoke to them about art and its relevance in society. His role, he believed, was to understand the existing social maladies and unmask them. Art is a language, he told his enthused audience that is far more expressive than words.



Fascinated by the lifestyles of tribes in Bastar, he started to paint them in a series he called 'Colours of Bastar'. His earlier works that are marked by a sense of pathos and mysticism, give way to delicate works of art where he freely adopts shapes and designs of an ancient style. Tribal art is truly abstract where the artist is able to condense his subject matter to a mere symbol, one that wholly presents its essence. It's an almanac of a clan that's to be preserved for posterity; there's no emphasis on refinement. Instead it carries a raw look, and therein lays its charm.



The recurring theme of parallel lines that carried grim connotations of railway tracks, which women normally used to end their god forsaken lives, is more or less absent in the new series. Here, he is drawn to the ancient beliefs and rituals that inspire the arts of tribes; animals, gods and ritualistic offerings people his canvas. The choice of colours suggests his influences in the forest where every shade of green is evident. The artist has used black to fill in the figures and outlined them with a variety of hues. The contrast that this generates has an alluring effect and adds vibrancy to his art.

Sathyapal has been commissioned to make a work of art for the Vidhan Sabha in Chattisgarh. Probably, it is the ultimate laurel to be bestowed on this unassuming painter from the State.

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