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Aesthetics of awareness

Brushstrokes of love and life filled the 70 paintings and eight photographs by children with intellectual and cognitive disabilities at the Spastics Society in Taramani.

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The paintings graced an exhibition, titled TATTVA 2023 organised by V-Excel Educational Trust. (Photo | Express)

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CHENNAI: From a painting with red tulips fluttering across starry skies, mountains standing solidly in a pink-hued landscape, and an intricate smiling fish reminiscent of the Pattachitra style — each canvas unearths a universe of unknown stories. A powerful tool, art has always been a mode of communication and freedom for all.

Brushstrokes of love and life filled the 70 paintings and eight photographs — by children with intellectual and cognitive disabilities — at the Spastics Society, Taramani. These paintings graced an exhibition, titled TATTVA 2023 organised by V-Excel Educational Trust, which aimed to set up a platform to empower these students and create awareness about art as a medium to communicate.

A colourful intricate kolam, depicting a figure and a boat in calm waters, ushers visitors into the hall. As classical music fills the rooms, elated parents, curious onlookers, and trainees linger at each painting, priced at a starting range of Rs 999. “For people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities, their biggest challenge is communication. So art is one form of communication for them, when they are playing with colours, it is like meditation for them. Art is a therapy for all of us. For these children it’s magic. This shows the general public they have so much potential,” explains Gayathri Suryanarayanan.

The head of vocational studies at V-Excel adds that the first edition of TATTVA, held at the Museum of Possibilities in 2022, had merely 50 artworks. This year, they have scaled up and roped in trainees from eight other schools including Jayam Special School, Aanandam Learning Centre and School, and three branches of Spastn.

Strokes of stories

For Pollachi-based Somasekaran, the night before TATTVA 2023, was filled with jitters, and anxiety. Armed with a paintbrush dipped in orange hues, these fearful and anxious feelings spilled onto the canvas. “He didn’t sleep because he was anxious and had to get on the dias, get the award and move back. It is a positive thing but it has a colour to it,” says Lavanya Ashok, coordinator of Early Intervention, at V-Excel Educational Trust.

For students who are on the autism spectrum, art is a crucial tool for communicating their feelings, thoughts, and emotions. For Krishna Kumar, Somasekarn’s parent, watching his son’s artwork was a revelation, it gave a peek into what his child feels and thinks, as art reflects emotions. “These exercises bring a lot of inborn talent out. it feels like there are artists here and the concept should grow and this would bring awareness to a lot of people,” he says.

During the inauguration of the event, artist Shyam holds up an empty canvas and scribbles on it. He invites three trainers atop the stage and watches on as each transforms it into art — the side profile of a face, a rat, a depiction of a beating heart paired with a smile. Later, Shyam mentions he feels he has a trove of lessons to return with. “Their art isn’t ordinary, they have another world and for us to go into that world it’s hard and when we enter it is, that understanding is hard,” adds Shyam.

According to V-Excel Educational Trust’s founder and director, Vasudha Prakash, “The colours emerge from within them, rather than very concrete art. We want to give an artistic avenue.” As the event comes to a close, few parents linger on gazing at the artworks. Lavanya’s line comes to mind: “Here nobody judges you, nobody has any differences of caste or religion. They understand one language, love. There comes the art, through love.”