



Primary

COLOURS

Though children learn to draw before they can write, parents rarely encourage them to continue. Now, gallery owner Shivani Virani wants to help young talent bloom

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THE MARKETING hoopla around Mother's Day, is in full swing, but that's not the reason Shivani Virani is recalling how her mother nurtured her artistic talent. Virani, now a mother of two, and the owner of Artistree, a cosy art gallery tucked away in a small bylane in Prabhadevi, remembers, "My mother spotted my painting talent early. But 20 years ago, there were hardly any art schools in Srinagar where I and my three sisters grew up. However, my mother managed to find a British artist who was living on a shikara and got her to teach me about art, its history and its new trends."

Thanks to that training, Virani pursued a career in art and then, six years ago, set up Artistree. Two months ago she started what has been her dream project — showcasing the art of talented children.

"A child learns to draw with a crayon before she learns to write but most of us tend to push her towards the pen rather than the crayon. And very often we look at what a child has drawn or painted, utter a few words of encouragement and then brush the work away. But some of these children are very creative and, given the right encouragement and guid-

ance, can bloom into artists," says Virani.

Though Virani buys and sells art through Artistree, she is against reducing art to a mere commercial commodity. "Children should get into it not for the money but for the love of painting," she says, and so has kept the price of children's works between Rs 500 and Rs 2,500.

Children's paintings are put up on the website of the Artistree gallery www.artistreeindia.com. "Children these days are very net savvy. It gives them great confidence to see their works on a website," says Virani.

DIFFERENT STROKES: Owner of Artistree art gallery Shivani Virani (left) with some of the paintings she has received from children — a crayon on paper by Karan, 7, (top), and Shapes, an oil on canvas by nine-year-old Tisha (above).

The decision on what price tag to put on a painting, says Virani, is hers and based on the child's age and materials used and "is not a reflection on the talent or capability of the child." Hence, a 11" x 8" crayon on paper by seven-year-old Karan of an eagle carrying a big fish is priced at Rs 600. Another 12" x 12" oil on canvas of blocks and titled Shapes by nine-year-old Tisha bears a tag of Rs 1200.

As a mother, Virani is all too aware of parents' pride in whatever their children draw. "But cartoon characters or copies of other works are a strict no-no. I'm looking for creativity and originality in children and that they have in plenty," she remarks.

And to inculcate the habit of giving and sharing in children, one half of the proceeds from sales goes to the child artist and the other half to a charity, The Foundation, run by actor Rahul Bose.

Though the figures may seem paltry in comparison to contemporary Indian art prices, Prachi Mittal, one of the directors of The Foundation notes, "Every rupee goes into supporting The Foundation's works — like the education of six tsunami-affected children from the Andaman Nicobar Islands in the prestigious Rishi Valley school in Andhra Pradesh." Virani zeroed in on The Foundation after other children's charities dragged their feet about partnering in the project.

Besides, each child who sends his painting to be sold gets a certificate and each buyer a certificate for income tax exemption. Virani makes it a point to frame the children's works before she couriers them to the buyers.

Though she started the Children's Corner, as she calls the section of children's art in her gallery website, just two months ago, children or more aptly their parents have been sending in their works from all parts of the country like Delhi, Lucknow, Bangalore and Chennai. And going by the works that Virani has already on hand, the future of Indian art seems promising.

So what does Virani gain from it all? That she can spot talent in children that may go unnoticed, she says. "Maybe, one day, one of these children will grow up to be a great artist," she says, "and remember that it was Artistree that gave them the platform."

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