

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

T Venkanna, a bold and scathing Hyderabad artist explores a world of fantasy



Ketchup in Kitchen

GEORGINA MADDOX

A PREGNANT man with a distended belly, a nightgown fraught with caricatures of animals mating, dismembered hands and objects of pain and pleasure and a soup kitchen that has more on the frying pan than food—here is a forbidden world of suppressed desire, curiosity and drama. Watch it unfold on gallery walls.

One guesses the artist T Venkanna was surely punished as a youngster for scribbling 'rude' graffiti on classroom walls. However his 'socially unacceptable behaviour' has led the artist to explore many avenues in the land of forbidden imagery, as the gallery going crowd dubs him one of the more radical voices in today's Indian contemporary art scene.

A solo show that confronts boundaries through frank and powerful imagery opens at Abhay Maskara's gallery this January 14. It includes pen and ink drawings, charcoal on hand-made paper and canvas along with installations that are currently being set up as this article goes to print.

Question: Does an artist become radical through merely daring to express profanities? The answer is obviously in the negative since we all know that merely making lurid images does not an artist make. Clearly there is a difference between the images made by Venkanna and those we see scribbled in the ladies first-class coupe, which are frankly misogynistic.

The artist who hails from Gajwel, a small town near Hyderabad, has a very strong subtext behind each image where the enquiry into sexual images is born of an interest in socio-cultural politics. "The sexual behaviour of human beings is habituated by the societal norms and conditions. I believe it is due to this, that the sexual fantasy gains importance in a human being's life and an individual achieves extreme pleasure out of this simple act of day-dreaming. Thus she/he escapes from the harsh realities of society via an undisturbed and uninterrupted flight of imagination," says the 28-year-old artist who studied art in JNTU in Hyderabad and then at Maharaja Sayaji Rao University in Baroda.

"Venkanna unabashedly confronts and questions the stereo-



Naughty Nighty at Night



typical ways in which sexuality is understood and defined. This attracts me to his work," says Maskara who talent-spotted the artist for his first solo in the financial capital.

"Too big too small is the artist's gigantic installation, which puns on power, rendered useless. A large paper crown suspended from the ceiling is far too big to be worn and has no material value, while the golden one seated on a velvet cushion is too small for anyone to wear despite its monetary value." "I also investigate political realities in my work. I do believe that these are the power struggles that make the world a violent place, while sexual fantasy and image provide an alternative to this violence."

The show continues at The Warehouse till February 22. Parental guidance is suggested.