

Time Out

Mumbai

Art

Two in hand

Warehouse at 3rd Pasta turns two this fortnight.

When Warehouse at 3rd Pasta opened two years ago, it was particularly difficult to spot because gallerist Abhay Maskara decided to make the gallery's front door look like a collapsible, metallic shutter. Then in 2008, Brazilian graffiti artist Nina Pandolfo spray-painted one of her creations on the outer wall next to the shutter-door: a wide-eyed girl, hanging upside down from a branch, holding her dress demurely so that no one's sensibilities are offended. Since then, Warehouse at 3rd Pasta has been one of the easier galleries to find. However, its reputation rests upon much more than a coy cartoon girl. Over the past two years, the gallery has steadfastly refused to give in to commercial favourites even during the peak of the economic slowdown, when the gallery's air-conditioning bill was bigger than its earnings.

Maskara began the gallery with the intention of promoting new talent and two years down the line, he must be a very satisfied man. Aside from fun shows like Pandolfo's, Warehouse has showcased some bizarre, thought-provoking and intelligent exhibitions like *Mathesis Dub dub dub* by Avantika Bawa, *Sperm Weaver* by Shine Shivan, *In Determination II* by Monali Meher and Max Streicher's *Breathe*. To celebrate Warehouse turning two years old, it will exhibit paintings by T Venkanna, one of the artists Maskara discovered. Venkanna made his debut with an elaborate show of installations and drawings in 2009, titled *For Identity*. Clever as the works were, they seemed crowded with too many ideas.

The new works, which come on display this fortnight, show how Venkanna's style has changed in the past year. The paintings are much more graphic than what he had exhibited in *For Identity* and there are more references to various periods of art history and famous names like Pablo Picasso and Gustave Courbet. It's obvious from Venkanna's paintings that he loves using the human body to



Man Playing with Two Pipes

shock his audience. Instead of his face, "The Real Self Portrait" shows a man's genitals up close. In contrast to the outsized penis, the artist's face is tiny and placed in one corner of the painting. The style in which "The Real Self Portrait" is painted recalls mosaics from classical European art as well as the pixels of contemporary digital art. In "Man Playing with Two Pipes", the background is a collage made up of pin-up photos and one of the pipes in question is, unsurprisingly, a phallus. "Surviving" turns the female nude as painted by Courbet in his "The Origin of the World" into something grotesque.

Venkanna's new show is a rather vigorous celebration of masculinity. He's not the only one in Maskara's stable of artists to show an almost violent backlash against the idea of feminine power (Shine Shivan's show was all about phallic worship). In this anniversary show, Venkanna's tendency to demonise the feminine and glorify the masculine isn't heartening, particularly for women viewers. We'd feel less critical of his sexual imagination if he depicted the feminine as something other than a lurid pin-up or a monstrous man-shriveller. Being accompanied by children or parents at this exhibition is inadvisable. However, one thing is for certain. There will be no shortage of dinner-table conversation after seeing this show. *Deepanjana Pal*