

Time Out

Mumbai

Review

Sacred and Profane

Warehouse at 3rd Pasta, Colaba

From the moment one enters the gallery, the profane part of Venkanna's exhibition is obvious. "Man Playing With Two Pipes" shows a decidedly naked man with a musical pipe and a second one that is predictably anatomical. Next to it is the back of the double-sided painting titled "Surviving", which shows a pronounced and protruding neck of a rooster (yes, you are supposed to think of the synonym). Tucked behind "Man Playing With Two Pipes" is Venkanna's "The Real Self-Portrait," a collage of an outsized male crotch made up of tiny photographs of the artist's head.

Perhaps the sacred elements referred to in the title are the famous art works and styles to which Venkanna refers in a number of his pieces. The front of "Surviving" shows a replica of Gustave Courbet's "The Origin of the World"



Hope for Love

but with the shrivelled body of the rooster stuffed into the vagina (his neck rigidly sticks out of the other side). *Sacred and Profane* also has Venkanna's version of Henri Rousseau's "The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope". This painting is accompanied by a set of sculptures that show a man in a lion's mask mounting different

animals, including a rather tragic turtle. Marcel Duchamp's infamous urinal also makes an appearance and in "Untitled Beauty", references are made to a host of Western artists like Andy Warhol, Wassily Kandinsky and Damien Hirst. The sacred also makes an appearance in "Hope for Love", in which he has created an Eden that shelters a

copulating human couple from a dysfunctional world of inter-species sex and a urinal that spits out blood and soldiers.

Venkanna displays his artistic range ably in this show. He is a talented painter and gifted sculptor, judging from the toy-like wooden sculptures. However, despite the technical finesse in Venkanna's art, there is a hint of immaturity in his approach. "Surviving" is an excellent example of this, as is the idea of incorporating Duchamp's urinal in "Hope for Love", which is one of the most overexposed and overused pieces of contemporary art. Copying a famous painting runs the risk of seeming like an art student's experiment unless it dramatically reinvents the subject. There's no doubting Venkanna has the talent but instead of using older works as crutches, we hope he will find (and show) his own distinctive style and create original works in future shows. *Deepanjana Pal*