

ZAIRA ARSLAN

IN more than 30 shows held over the past five years, Gallery Maskara has exhibited works made from some of the most unconventional materials seen in the city's art galleries. There have been installations made from plastic bags, orange scaffolding, cow dung, taxidermy work, dust and giant, inflatable dolls and horses. Some have been as high as the 45 ft height of the Colaba gallery, some have hung from the ceiling and reached the floor, and some have taken up nearly all the 3,300 sq ft of space on offer. And nearly all have, even in a small way, challenged preconceived notions of what art should be and, in doing so, have startled, amused, thrilled and shocked viewers.

This March marks the fifth anniversary of the gallery, and on the occasion, curatorial director Abhay Maskara opens a new show titled "Pancha Mahabhuta" (Five Great Elements) by one of the gallery's most exhibited artists, T Venkanna. In 2009, Venkanna's first solo exhibition was held at Gallery Maskara.

"There are five works, each of which represents one major element — earth, sky, air, fire and water," says Maskara.

Suspended from the ceiling by string in the centre of the gallery are five circular wooden sculptures, one for each element, which, Maskara says, could also be thought of as line drawings.

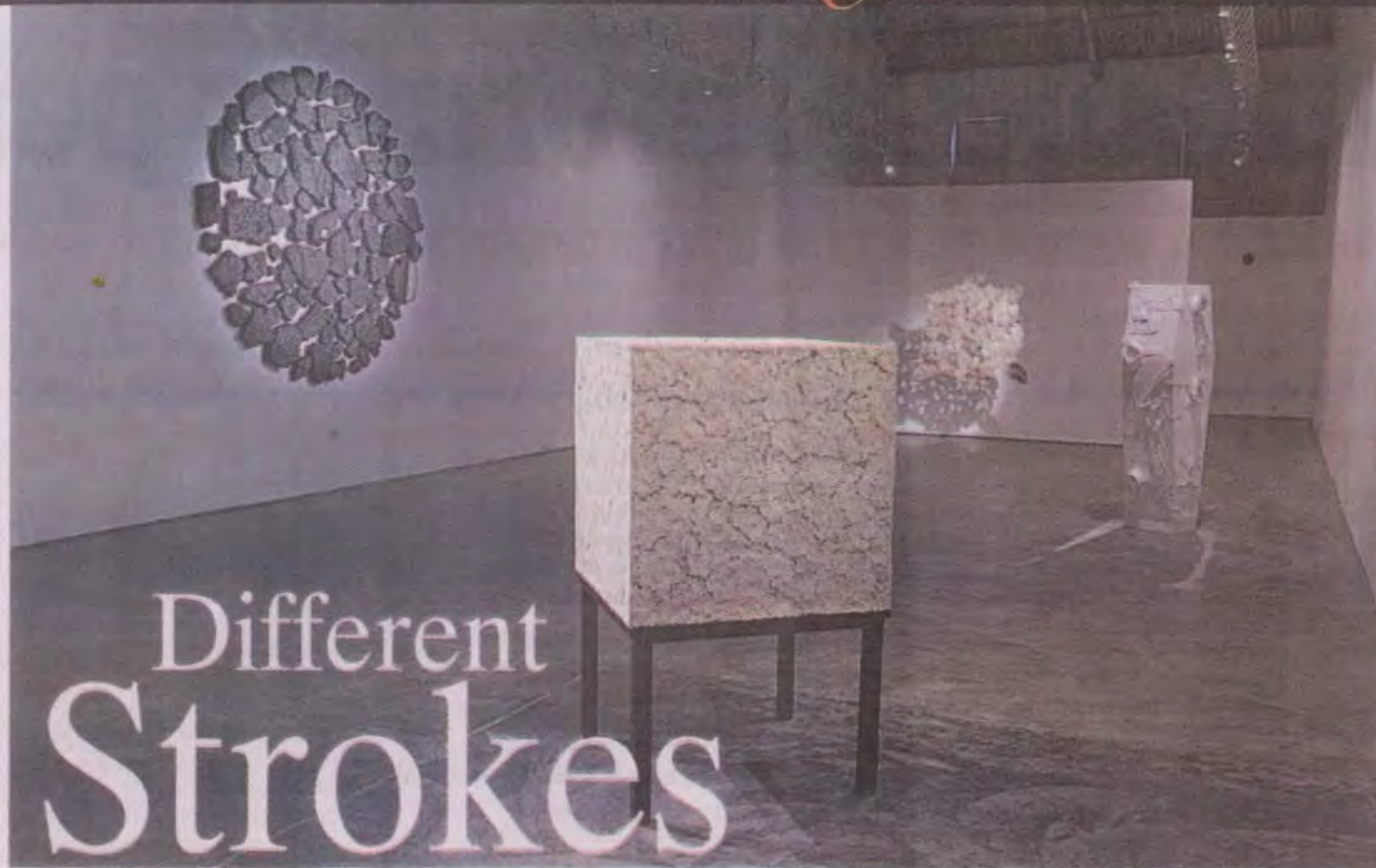
As is often seen in Venkanna's work, the figures in the paintings are nudes. The drawings on each canvas contain several layers of meaning, exploring the basic idea of these ele-

ments, while also exploring the things that might challenge their existence. Yet, this show might be one of the most conventional in terms of content that the gallery has hosted in a while. The last show, for instance, was a solo by Faridabad-based artist Shine Shivan, who explored questions of gender identity through his large, constructed fantasy creatures.

When Maskara opened his gallery in 2008, the idea, he says, was never to be different or host shows that were labelled differ-

Different Strokes

From floating dolls to dust sculptures, Gallery Maskara, which celebrates its fifth anniversary, continues to showcase unconventional, edgy art



(Clockwise from left) Prashant Pandey's 2012 show "Shelf Life II"; "Tetanus Midas" in 2011 was Priyanka Choudhary's second solo at the gallery; Venkanna's solo at the gallery explores the five major elements. This is an image from "Sky"

private venture, which has given him complete independence and the freedom to exercise his personal choices.

The gallery has since hosted exhibitions consistently and also been the venue for a number of artists' first solo shows, including Venkanna, Shivan, Delhi-based Priyanka Choudhary and Jaipur-based Prashant Pandey. Each of them consequently believe Maskara has contributed to their journey as artists. "For me to have my first solo show — an installation of scaffolding — in that space was very important," says Choudhary. "The gallery space is so inspiring and Abhay is more about the art than anything else."

Venkanna, too, believes likewise. "Abhay and the gallery have been genuine contributors to my jour-

HIGH FIVE

TALK lists some of the attention-grabbing shows held at Gallery Maskara

PRIYANKA CHOUDHARY'S first solo exhibition, "Nul to Now", was held in August 2010 and comprised a gigantic scaffolding installation among other things.

FEBRUARY 2011 saw a solo show by Belgian artist Ruben Bellinkx, titled "The Trophy", consisting almost entirely of video projections.

IN JULY 2011, Venkanna's solo show at the gallery, "Open Studio: Printmaking", was a seven week-long residency during which he created works using printmaking while being watched by visitors.

TITLED HOLD ON, a group show by artists Josh Smith, Mansoor Ali, Marek Ranis, Satellite Bureau and Stuart Keeler that opened in November 2011, explored the idea of holding on in a constantly evolving world.

NARENDRA YADAV'S third solo show, "Brought Up As Rabbit", was held in March 2012 and talked about the "western bias" among other things.

ney. He's more interested in the artists' ideas than the mediums they use. This has helped me tremendously."

With "Pancha Mahabhuta", the gallery has also opened a smaller space towards its back end. The two sections are partitioned by a wall. This space may, as it is now, feature works by artists other than the ones being showcased in the main space, or not, as the show demands. "It's a flexible space, but it will never compromise the main exhibition space and priority will be given to the artist," says Maskara.