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Life as canvas

Four differently-abled artists exhibit their labour of love at 'Never Say Die', which concludes today

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Even as it pours outside, the crowd trickles into a compact hall in Stella Maris College. The temporary gallery features large and small format works by four artists who are differently-abled. The paintings — almost nine of them — were sold even before the inauguration on Friday evening.

Organised as part of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3) by HeART BEAT Foundation, the show, titled 'Never Say Die', features the paintings of R. Udayakumar, who, due to spinal muscular atrophy, can only use his right thumb and index finger to paint; K. Narasimhalu, who had cerebral palsy in his childhood; Suvedha Ganesh, who is speech and hearing impaired; and Uttam Kumar, who has only one functional foot.

Udayakumar says he can paint inch by inch on his canvas with help from his father, who opens bottles of colours and places them within his reach. He says his work is based on 'Pointillism and Impressionism'. "I am inspired by the works of Picasso and M.F. Husain. I also follow the news online; a lot of the issues get reflected in my paintings," he says, even as his mother digs out a painting of Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi, who drowned off the Turkish coast in 2015.

As any other child, Udayakumar, who was diagnosed with muscular spinal atrophy when he was 10



A TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT Some of the exhibits
PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

months old, loved scribbling on walls. "Later, it became a passion. Now, I cannot think of doing anything else. While painting, I am completely into it. Fifty per cent of my concentration goes into maintaining my balance and the rest into bringing out the patterns," he says.

A movie about Udayakumar and Narasimhalu, created by Creative Zone, is screened at the venue. The crowd gasps as they watch

Narasimhalu finish a work of embroidery with his feet. Deftly, he inserts the needle into the pores of an embroidery mat and takes it out — repeating the process until he completes the image. At the venue, he skates on a wheeled board and halts in front of an embroidered work of a deer that he plans to do a bigger version of, and another of parakeets and peacocks that took him a year-and-a-half to make.

An initiative of V.S. Ramana, the foundation, which was founded in 2014, has helped the artists exhibit their works around India, and so far has been able to generate Rs. 8 lakh for them. Art critic Lakshmi Venkataraman has also been instrumental in giving the artists an initial platform, from where they have taken off to build their own profile.

The exhibition 'Never Say Die' concludes today.

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