

CHHOTA SHAKEEL'S 1 ST EXHIBITION - A bunch of underprivileged kids empowered by NGO Aseema showcase their art at the prestigious Harmony Art Show alongside celebrated artists like Sunil Padwal, Ajay De and Jogen Chowdhury.



Shakeel Khan is 14, and he's been with Bandra-based NGO Aseema, that works towards promoting the rights of underprivileged street children, for a year. His face takes on a determined look as he shifts cardboard boxes packed with artworks at Nehru Centre, the venue for the 10 th Harmony Show. Ask him about his paintings, and his face lights up with innocence. "What I love is that my art gets transformed into products, and people actually buy them!" says Shakeel, as he spells out his name for you in English.

He points to a framed collage depicting a fire, and explains the history behind it. "I have always been fascinated by a burning flame - its colour, power and the way it dances. When I was told to make a collage, I thought of cutting up magazines to create a blazing fire," says the young artist whose work is on sale for Rs. 3,000.

Aseema kids have been showcasing their work for the last four years at the Harmony Art Show. This year's special is an entire section dedicated to papier-mâché products - animal figurines, masks and trays, priced between Rs. 500 and Rs. 2,000. "My favourite is a mask I've made out of methi seeds. Each time I put it on, I transform into someone else," Shakeel grins.

Besides educating children, Aseema hones their creative abilities through exhibitions like this one. Says Armeen Kapadia, product manager for Aseema, "Our kids are a storehouse of talent and our annual exhibition is testimony to that. We work closely with the Wharton Business School and SP Jain Institute of Management, which help develop a marketing plan for our products."

While all proceeds of the show go towards education of the children, Chairperson Dilbur Parakh says that in reality, Harmony has helped them achieve a bigger goal. "We are trying to get away from the charity approach that surrounds an NGO. It is empowering for children to see that they are paying for their own education through the sale of their work. And that's why each piece sold has an economic as well as an emotional impact."

But the encouragement this year is not just in the form of sales. "One of our patrons has instituted the Vasanti Arun Award for two budding artists. This year it will go to 17-year old Ramesh Ghayal from St. Andrews College and 12-year old Sunita Gaddam from St. Joseph 's School," says Dilbur.

The Harmony show is on till April 9 from 10 am to 7 pm. Other items on sale include stationary, gift bags, wrapping paper, paperweights and other decorative items, priced between Rs. 15 and Rs. 1,000.

KANIKA PARAB, Mid-day
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