

'I'm constantly experimenting'

Artist Viraag Desai tells HT City about painting and sculptures, working with Dattapukur potters and more



Viraag Desai at work

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Artist Viraag Desai believes in experimenting and holds a keen interest in the history and future of painting. At present, this 26-year-old is busy creating pots and sculptures in collaboration with potters of Duttapukur and preparing for his one-month-long art residency in Spain. The young artist also designs interfaces for apps with the android app development team of Forcepower. Viraag, who has earlier worked with director Quashiq Mukherjee for art shows and Taasher Desh, will soon be promoting the movie via a series of art installations. Excerpts from a chat:

What is currently keeping you busy?

At present, I'm living two lives. Through the week I work at my studio in Dattapukur and on the weekends I work on my paintings and that is what interests and challenges me. I'm constantly experimenting with media, textures, using 'found' objects in my paintings.

You are working with Dattapukur potters. Tell us about it?

Dattapukur has an incredible cottage industry, filled with skilled potters.

Unfortunately, their work is undervalued. When a client wanted some unusually shaped/painted pots, it got me started on designing them, getting them fired in a large kiln, and then giving them colour and texture. Colouring is done using brushes and airbrush, and paint that I manufacture on site. We've moved now into embellishments like bet (cane) work and sculptures based on artist's drawings. We market these on our online store (shop.tejas-gallery.com) as well as in high-end stores in Chennai. I will soon be setting up two high-temperature ceramic ovens and these will take clay art to another level.

Isn't it unlikely for an artist like you to design interfaces?

(Smiles) I always wanted to do it and taught myself how to design interfaces for apps, which range from the overall aesthetic of the application to the design and use of buttons, dials and gestures. Since joining the Forcepower team we have developed several apps. Our main app, 'forcepower', itself is up for sale, while we have made others ranging from a digital restaurant menu to a blood-type identifier for hospitals.

You will be leaving for Spain for a month-long residency and then have shows lined up

in Kolkata and Chennai?

Yes, I will be flying to Spain in September. I will be working and exhibiting in Grazelema, Cadiz and Neilson Gallery. After which I hope to bring some of the work back to exhibit here in Kolkata. I will also be participating in a project called Art Chennai in February. For this I will be collaborating with Varun Gupta, a photographer, Priyanjoli Basu, a textile designer and artist Radhika Agarwala.

You worked with Q for Taasher Desh and a street show. Also are there any plans of working with him in future?

I worked with Quashiq Mukherjee for Taasher Desh. Since the movie is visually rich, I was brought on board for some sections that require unconventional sets and structures. For this I tapped in traditional Bengali folk art forms combined with more contemporary styles and materials. More recently, I helped him orchestrate a public art project that involved people from the street working together on a large painted collage. We will be working together for several upcoming projects. As of now since TD will be releasing soon we will be focusing on its promotion via a series of art installations at events.