

## Interferences in the divine



*By Aswathy Karnaver*

THIRUVANANATHAPURAM: The figures are grand and the deep colours befitting the gods. 'A State of Being' is about Gods and Goddesses who are seen as characters engaged in the dialectics of the canvas space. If you ask her why the Gods, Tina would say, "Mythological characters fascinate me. When I paint, they are the ones who occupy the canvas."

The Dubai-based debutant artist Smitha Menon, has chosen to sign her paintings with the pet name Tina. At her first solo exhibition being held at the newly-opened gallery - G 360 - run by Latha Kurien Rajeev, Tina has displayed a body of 25 works. The exclusive theme of mythological figures is rendered versatile with unorthodox expressions and interpretations.

For instance, Tina has a penchant for painting Lord Shiva. But her Shiva is not the ferocious dancer of thandava, but the family man who sleeps undisturbed on the lap of Parvathi, seeks the pleasures of parenthood in the company of his sons and is the eternally passionate lover.

"Shiva is the embodiment of strength and grace, the characteristics that I am drawn to. To me he is the ultimate lover more than anything else. On the other hand, I see Vishnu as the personification of calmness. But, I am not fond of many avatars of Vishnu. The reason I paint Vishnu is because I love to portray Lakshmi in his company," says Tina. The works are evidently well-informed by mythological texts, as the painting of Tripurasundari would illustrate. The maiden in deep red robes, caught in her wanton gait, is seen in the backdrop of metaphorical motifs.

"The symbolic representations of earth, water and underworld are coupled with symbols of the three forces of Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva. She is not as famous as Lakshmi or Saraswati, so in the background I have tried to explain who she is," says Tina. The blue lotus held by Parvathi and the white owl waiting for orders near a demure Lakshmi speak of the research that informs the paintings.

Tina's training as fashion designer seems to have an influence on her colour palette. The riot of bright hues is tempered by a discerning preference for winning combinations. The white of Lakshmi's sari is foregrounded on the deep blue of the night, while the yellow of the Ganeshas is mixed in an earthly green.

"My fashion school was running in Dubai until last year when I decided to call it quits to follow what I think is my true calling - to paint," Tina smiles to herself for having listened to the voice of her heart.

Her meeting with Latha Kurien Rajeev, through mutual friends, also happened around the same time as the revelation. The exhibition makes the perfect opening for G 360, a project that has been pending for years, says Latha.

"The concept of the zero space is very important in a gallery. So I was on the look out for a scenic ambiance devoid of embellishments on the inside that would steal the attention of the onlooker from the works of art. We hope to develop G 360 into a gallery that does justice to the concept," adds Latha.

The opening exhibition will conclude on November 19.