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### Myths in many hues

"Men and Gods", a collection of paintings by French artist Christiane Durand, expresses her love for form

PHOTO: N. SRIDHARAN



#### STORIES AND SYMBOLS Christiane Durand explains one of her works

French painter and sculptor Christiane Durand has long had a fascination with the transmutation of form – human and animal, man and woman. So when she was travelled to the temples of Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Chidambaram last year, she became fascinated with the gods of Hindu mythology, their multiple forms and avatars.

"I was entranced by the many forms of Vishnu," she says.

Her journey didn't end there. She carried the stories and the many small papier mache figurines of gods and goddesses she bought at Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan back to Paris, sharing them with friends and family.

The result is her exhibition at the Cholamandal Centre for Contemporary Art at the Cholamandal Artist's Village, 'Men and Gods', a fantastically-coloured collection of paintings in which animals, humans and gods, ancient mythology and personal stories mingle to create a unique tapestry.

Each painting features the depiction of close friends of Christiane, fellow painters, sculptors and academics, and even her own daughter – a throwback, perhaps, to the 80s and 90s, when she specialised in doing abstract figuratives with live models.

It isn't just their forms the works portray, but also their stories, their attitudes and their beliefs, depicted through colourful symbols and ancient mythologies – not just Indian, but also Greek and Egyptian.

"I live in a part of Paris where a number of different populations live – Muslims, Jews, and Christians, Arabs, Indians, Turks, Russians and Africans," she says. "Over the years, I've become very interested in how people relate to different ritual objects and mythological images."

So, a single painting, 'Kindergarten', might bring together elements such as a fertility ritual done by women in Tamil Nadu and her own pregnant daughter back in France, with many symbolic representations of childbirth and fertility; another, 'Agitation about Creation' may combine the Egyptian snake symbol of

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creation and a figurine of Brahma, with images of her friends, historians and collectors of art. All the paintings are in bright and bold shades of greens, reds, yellows, blues, pinks and oranges — one of the hallmarks of her work — creating a sort of fantasy dreamscape where the human, the animal and the divine can intermingle effortlessly.

“These colours are expressive and surrealistic; they are the colours I see when people speak and share their inner feelings and desires,” she explains.

This quirky layering of stories and symbols, the real and the imagined in her work means these paintings, while highly personal, are also open to a multitude of interpretations by the viewer.

The exhibition is on till August 29.

D. K.

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