

DEROBING THE MIND

A young artist pushes the limits of the sexual imagination in a fascinating show



VISHWAS KULKARNI

The good thing about Venkanna's success is that it has happened despite our art world. A lot of our esteemed gallery owners would visit his studio in Baroda, like his style, and cringe at the content.

"Can you work around the content?" they would request him. He didn't budge, until gallerist Abhay Maskara discovered him, and decided to showcase him uncensored at his gallery. The results are mesmerising.

T. Venkanna uses the sex-

ual imagination as his palette. This said, nothing is remotely erotic about the works here: they are more steeped in a disturbed, multi-layered, carnal chaos. These are almost demented, hormonally-overloaded scribbles that are so full of life that they transcend their pornographic syntax and emerge as a valid homage to the kink. Thus, a man turgid with pregnancy, a woman frying penises, men farting and masturbating – all perversions find their pride of place in *For Identity*, a show that strangely boasts of a contained, high-art quality.

"I like to play with the fluidity of the sexual imagination, the myriad possibilities that come to mind and brush when sexual thought achieves a degree of abstraction," says the young artist who has been picked up by London's Gallery Saatchi as part of their showcase to represent contemporary Indian art.

Venkanna, who usually

works with a good amount of colour, has chosen only black for his current show to indulge his personalised perversions. It gives his show a cave-man, atavistic edge, as though these works are meant to invoke some forgotten deities from a debauched, degenerate and yet an ironically liberated cult. In addition to the paintings a larger-than-life crown hangs precariously in the air, at the centre of which is a small black stool, atop which rests a tiny red cushion that, in turn, buttresses a miniature golden crown. A reference to the penis piercing the vagina? The artist doesn't spell it out for you with this one. Maybe it's only your own twisted mind at play. Do find out for yourself when you check out what this prodigious wonder has to offer.

For Identity by T. Venkanna is exhibiting at Gallery Maskara until Feb 22.