

Today's Paper » FEATURES » METRO PLUS

An eye on culture

ANUSHA PARTHASARATHY



Zooming in On Virginie's photographs

Exhibition Virginie Vlamincq's photographs capture people's moods and the ambience in the temples of South India

There are nameless faces in Virginie Vlamincq's photographs but it doesn't matter who they are. It is their expressions and hands that form the centre of her pictures, whether it is the back of a crouching old man in a Nehru cap with his hands on a red temple wall with red and white stripes or deft fingers stringing together jasmine buds.

Virginie, a photographer from Belgium, moved to Chennai with her husband a year ago and has taken to the life and sounds of the city and its people. Most of her subjects revolve around temples and spirituality as she is intrigued by the air it exudes. "The temples here are so alive," she exclaims, "We miss these things in Europe. Here everything revolves around the temples and it's fascinating to see how everyone is the same inside a temple."

She has spent a good 30 years behind her camera, and has captured people and culture wherever she has travelled. "My forte is everyday life; the way people go about their routine. I like to approach people and take pictures, so that I know that they're comfortable with me. Hands and faces are what I usually click because you can know read a person mind through them," she adds.

Her exhibition, themed 'Southern Spirituality', reflects the vibrancy around and inside the temples she's visited. There is a picture of Lakshmi, the elephant outside the Manakula Vinayakar Temple in Puducherry. A little girl runs forward with a wide smile, the frills on her frock swirling up in the air while a man holds his hands together in prayer in the background. In yet another picture, a small girl points to an image etched into one of the stone pillars in a temple while a woman next to her has her eyes closed in fervent prayer.

An old flower seller reaches out to hold a freshly-strung garland, while a couple of others show hands making these garlands or bunching grass together. Some others are pictures of the temples themselves, silhouetted against a vast vermillion sky. Crows flutter around the gopuram. A man with a flowing beard and a printed shawl hanging from one shoulder is busy reading out from a small book. A boy, with holy powder smeared across half his face looks at the camera, a Ganesha pendant around his neck. These images are relatable and need no explanation. They are connected by the thread that loops flowers into garlands. And if you stand and observe them a little longer, they even tell you their stories. "Are these pictures or paintings," asks a passerby, as she tries to demystify its natural elegance.

Virginie's exhibition is on display at Hilton Chennai till October 30.

ANUSHA PARTHASARATHY

More In: [METRO PLUS](#) | [FEATURES](#)