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Rohini Sen, 2014, Photo: Bhagya Prakash k.

Of Injuries and Pain

by The Hindu
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This young artist's works tell you that one can overcome the trauma of injury and pain with time and patience

Three years ago Rohini Sen, an artist and a trained marathon runner tripped during one of the marathons on Brigade Road. She ignored the fall and decided to complete the remaining eight kilometre run despite the pain. What happened next changed her life completely.

“The next day my foot was swollen. Though it was fractured, it did not show in the X-ray, scan or MRI. It was only after a year and a half that the fracture was detected. That period was my biggest trial as no one could figure out what caused the pain or the swelling. It became so bad that I started to limp,” says Rohini.

She went through various therapies and “felt totally helpless” and even ended up being wheel chair bound. She started to draw then and the result is her current exhibition, at Gallery fivefortyfive in Indiranagar.

“The exhibition is titled The Efficacy of Exquisite Pain as these drawings reflect the emotions I went through during my struggle. It talks about befriending pain. Pain is an unwelcome guest to

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your body. Everyone wants to wish it away. I feel that my injury was telling me that my body needed to slow down, that it was to be nurtured and wanted me to connect with that pain.”

“Pain,” she says, “is also a gift as it helped me look into places I had not known existed in me before. Fitness was a such big part of my identity that going through an injury and not being able to run again gave me the time to stop and reflect at other things that I was normally neglecting,” says this artist, who trained “six hours” a day as a marathon runner.

She now works in schools in research and to develop programmes where art and running can be used as an integrated part of learning for children.

The paintings are intricate sketches in ink-coloured pencils. “That style comes from Madhubani paintings that I learnt from an award winning artist Shashikala Devi. Though I do contemporary drawing, my roots go back to Madhubani paintings,” explains Rohini, who is trained in Chitrakala Parishath in sculptures and also has a Masters degree in Arts Education from Rhode Island School of Design, USA.

“Being an artist you understand every activity you do in metaphors of art. It emerged strongly after the injury. Many runners are not reflective about the process of injury. They always look for an instant answer and cure, which is not always possible. My work is my way of telling athletes that sports is not about conquering your body. During my injury I put on 12 kilos. I was depressed and did not want to meet anyone as I did not look ‘fit’ and was immobile. Then I figured out that no matter what happened on the outside, I can always be beautiful on the inside.”

Today she is healed, but for Rohini, certain tasks are permanently connected to pain. “Climbing the stairs was so painful that even today when I see them, I go back in my mind to the time of my trauma. As one is going through severe pain, one should also remember that your family suffers with you. My art is about telling people that no matter what kind of pain or injury you have, you can overcome it with time. Patience is last word that one hates during pain. But yet, I will say that time will heal and restore. And, patience is the only way to deal with such trauma, even though its frustrating when you are actually passing through it.”

Her exhibition is on till July 4.