

Urging people to take up some form of art to rejuvenate themselves, several panelists of the healthcare and education industries speak of 'The Importance of Arts Post Covid' at The Little Festival

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SAHANA IYER

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On a trip to Germany, I came across the perfect example of why art is important. There was a concentration camp, where a Polish woman would smuggle people in, so the children at the camp could draw what it would be like if they got out of the camp. Once the war ended, these paintings — preserved by the woman in a container under her bed — were displayed in a museum. Then, a group of successful men and women (the children now grown up) showed up to see the paintings. They spoke of how the only reason they survived the camps is that they had hope, and the power of pencil and paper. That is the power of art. Art is hope." This story narrated by Krishnakumar B (KK), the artistic director of The Little Theatre, at a panel discussion called 'The importance of arts post COVID' at The Little Festival speaks to the artist in everyone.

During the pandemic, many picked up (again) various forms of art as a hobby, as therapy, as a skill and much more. Despite the urgency and trauma that the world faced, art still found a way to thrive. Discussing this and encouraging the audience to keep up their artistic spirit alive were two panels at the event: one discussing the importance of arts in healthcare and the other, in education.

A medley of health and art

The first panel comprised Dr R Padmavati, director of SCARF, Dr Arasar Seeralar, retired director ICH, paediatrician, neonatal specialist, PWC Davidar, IAS (retired), advisor to TNeGA, and Ashri-



Ashrita Keshav

TREATING TRAUMA THROUGH ART

ta Keshav, Kuchipudi dancer, psychologist and expressive art therapist, with moderator Dr Rohini Rau, trustee at The Little Theatre, Internal Medicine/Functional Medicine doctor and TED fellow.

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PWC Davidar



Rathi Jaffer

void of any movement or exercise. "During COVID, one of the main drawbacks was that we had become sedentary. Art engages your body and mind fully, there is oneness with the soul. It's important to integrate art into your life... There was a lot of depersonalisation we saw in the healthcare industry and we can't blame doctors and nurses because if they get involved, there would be no self-preservation. There were programmes world over (mostly abroad), where they would set aside time and practise art, music, dance, theatre to express what they felt," in-

formed Ashrita, adding that these practices increased self-efficacy and made them more efficient and mindful.

There was also the question of the mental health of hospital workers. Dr Arasar shared the joy that dance brought to Indian healthcare workers who were constantly in the presence of death. "We had one video done by the interns who were dancing.

This was shared on WhatsApp and seeing this, other groups got inspired too. And at some point, it even became a competition about which hospital's performance is the best. When given the opportunity to destress, even the ones consid-

ered strict began dancing. It is about having a healthy space in hospitals. We also worked with some hospitals to paint in-patient wards, in themes, so it allows the mind to restore. You should not allow your mind to run on one track. The more tracks, the more cognitive functions and you become better and stay alert," he noted. The panel spoke also of the human nature to focus on perfection, rather than enjoying the artform and encouraged us to move away from the former, towards the latter.

Art in education

The second panel featured Rathi Jafer, director at InKo, S Bhavanishankar, director-strategy, research and innovation, Lalaji Memorial Omega International School, Divakar Subramaniam, musician, composer, music educator and ethnomusicologist, Janaka Pushpanathan, director South India, British Council, with moderator Krishnakumar. Rathi and Janaka shed light

on how the idea of art and performance changed during the pandemic when everything went digital and "phygital" (hybrid). "Overnight, we had to move everything to digital. We managed to put out a lot of research work. Some data was hard-hitting. We found that, during the pandemic, 50 per cent artists were losing out on 80 per cent income," shared Janaka. She added that while it is great to learn an artform, say, an instrument, art is about having a conversation, and allowing yourself to think beyond the routine.

Where organisations facilitating arts spoke of adjusting and adapting to the new conditions, the educators spoke about the scope of involving art in education. "There are no practical difficulties in involving art in education. The belief system that we carry and the boxes we're in... anything outside of language is maths and science. The other subjects were, at best, co-curricular or, at worst, extra-curricular. So, this is the branding of finer aspects of life. They have been pushed to the back burner, but nothing stops us. As schools or educational insti-

tutes, we are engaged in assimilating arts in different forms. Language and maths are taught through rhyme, repetitive patterns are taught through rhyme. Biology has a certain aspect to drawing. (There is art in) everything we experience in the education landscape but it goes unnoticed," explained Bhavanishankar, while Divakar added that arts is not co-curricular or extra-curricular.

There was a lot more that was discussed and a lot more to be spoken, but as the panel ended for the night, amid a horrid rainy night, it had certainly inspired the schoolgoing children (and a few adults) in the crowd to search for the artist in them.

Art in education is certainly something we have to start talking about but it is embedded already. Now it is time to realise art as education.

S Bhavanishankar

FOCUS ON ENJOYING

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Photos: Sriram R

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Panel at Chennai's 'The Little Festival' calls for treating trauma through art

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Panel discussion of 'The importance of arts post COVID' (Photo | Sriram B, EPS)

By Sahana Iyer

Express News Service

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The isolation, boredom and devastation during the pandemic left us all in a state devoid of any movement or exercise. "During COVID, one of the main drawbacks was that we had become sedentary. Art engages your body and mind fully, there is oneness with the soul. It's important to integrate art into your life...There was a lot of depersonalisation we saw in the healthcare industry and we can't blame doctors and nurses because if they get involved, there would be no self-preservation. There were programmes world over (mostly abroad), where they would set aside time and practise art, music, dance, theatre to express what they felt," informed Ashrita, adding that these practices increased self-efficacy and made them more efficient and mindful.

There was also the question of the mental health of hospital workers. Dr Arasar shared the joy that dance brought to Indian healthcare workers who were constantly in the presence of death. "We had one video done by the interns who were dancing. This was shared on WhatsApp and seeing this, other groups got inspired too. And at some point, it even became a competition about which hospital's performance is the best. When given the opportunity to destress, even the ones considered strict began dancing. It is about having a healthy space in hospitals. We also worked with some hospitals to paint in-patient wards, in themes, so it allows the mind to restore. You should not allow your mind to run on one track. The more tracks, the more cognitive functions and you become better and stay alert," he noted.

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Focus on enjoying

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