

Beauty under the microscope

BY RAGASUDHA VINJAMURI

Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, they say. Here is someone for whom this holds so true. Dr Aruna Mene's full time profession as Hospital Consultant is constantly looking under microscope, analyse human tissues and identify disease causing bacteria and virus types. However, she sees astounding beauty in her pathological pursuits.

Her vibrant and ecologically green collage has adorned the cover of the Bulletin of the Royal college of Pathologists. The Nehru Centre, London is hosting exhibition of her exotic fabric collages from 24 to 27 September.

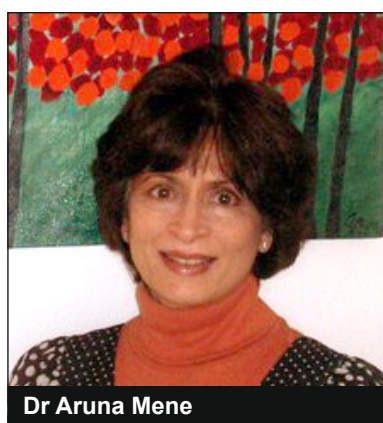
She speaks to our Cultural Correspondent Ragasudha Vinjamuri on her work.

How did you develop an inclination towards this art?

I have no formal training in art. Inspired by my mother, I used to do some fabric applique and painting. Initially I have used water colours for painting, but after relocating to Britain, I started using mixed medium and acrylics as it is easy to manage. I have then started with fancy quilting. There is a natural progression in my art. Now for the last 5 years, I am using only pure fabric.

How do you collect fabric and work on it?

I collect Batic materials and other fabric waste from Indian tailors from Bolton and London. I even use my husband's ties, my old gowns &



Dr Aruna Mene

kurtas. I have classified them colour wise, shade-wise and kept in transparent boxes. Fragments of fabrics are my palette. For example: I use pale blue fabric for sky. I do it on Canvass Board which is nice and firm, and iron on adhesive.

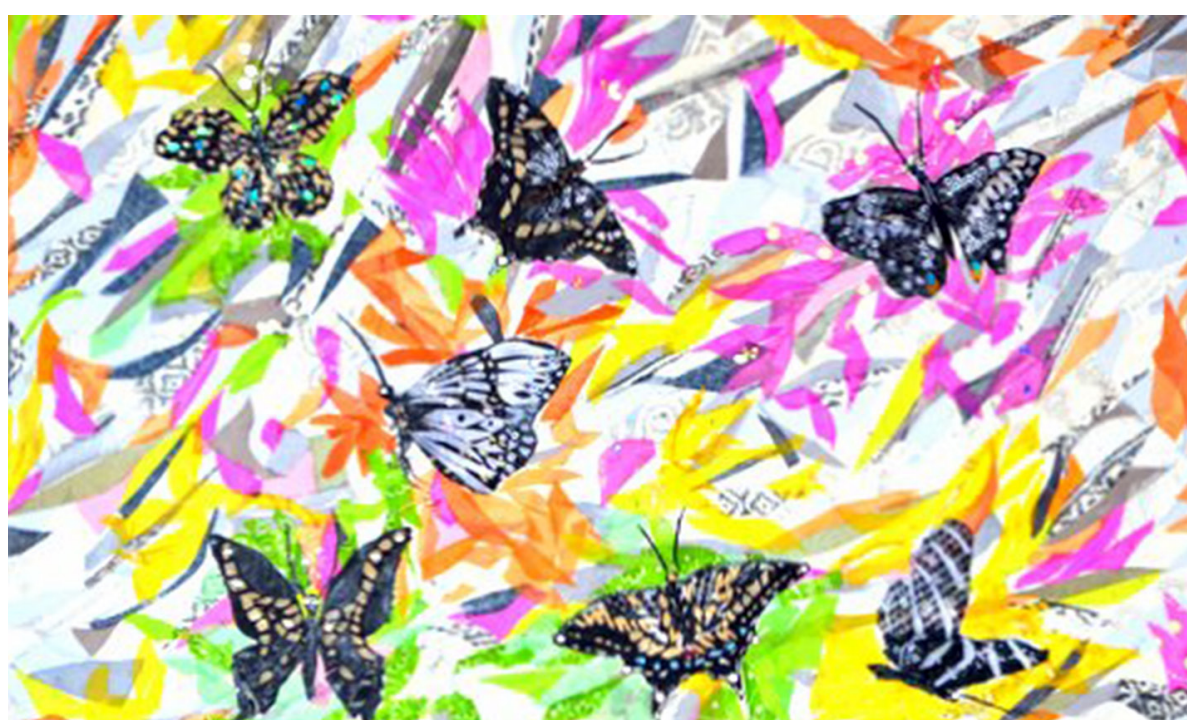
Tell us about Fabric Collages and some famous artistes.

Laura Breitman is a known name, among others. I have attended her weekend workshop out of curiosity and to get some ideas. I had some inputs on proportions, picture grade, but devised my own method. After finishing the picture, I varnish it with UV protector and then put on the glass and frame to avoid fading.

Barbara Shaw's fabric collages are famous too, though with a different methodology. Others do it as part of quilting art.

How long do you take to make these paintings?

It depends on the size of the work, complexity and other details. It takes from 4-5 days to two weeks. Very



A sample of Fabric Collage by Dr Aruna Mene

large ones may even consume 3-4 weeks, considering I get to work only few hours per week. Sometimes the ideas evolve and I change backgrounds. I also embellish with coloured stones, crystals and diamante.

I also do greeting cards for charity purposes.

Can you name some of your works that you are fond of?

Microscopic picture of cold virus affecting epithelium of nose, Coronary atheroma (cholesterol block of the artery) and Electron microscopic picture of myocardial cell (Heart muscle cell) are some of the works

that I am fond of. My most famous work is collage of whole human heart which was commissioned by and hung at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London, and also in Royal Blackburn Hospital.

How do you get ideas and inspirations?

I am a pathologist. I take microscopic histopathology as base. When I look through the microscope, I see patterned themes. In the section of tumour, I see a magical world. Landscapes, flowers and rivers. They depict the natural world and are so inspirational. I name my works "Happy Collages".

I also take inspiration from photographs that we click during our travels, of animals, green grass, flowers of different colours. I get inspired even by looking out of my window. Cherry blossoms, Red Hot Poker blooms, Banyan Tree etc. catch my eyes and capture heart.

How about other works?

Artiste Gustav Klimt from Austria is famous for his romantic pictures. He used beautiful colours in his work The Kiss. I have reproduced it in Collage, using different textures. Likewise, autumn colours in New England is a beautiful work too.

