

Material connection

Sandilya Theuerkauf's sculptures of found materials urge us to examine our relationship with the environment, writes **Nikita Puri**

There's a certain meditative quality to Sandilya Theuerkauf's movements. He is carefully mounting one thorn after another on the wood he has collected from the scrub forests that surround his place of work and residence in Vardenhalli, a hamlet on the outskirts of Bengaluru city. After five years of working on a series of sculptures that are but one aspect of his discovery and rediscovery of the world around him, Theuerkauf is now ready for his debut show, "A Trail of Thorns".

Presented by KYNKYN.com, an online gallery for contemporary art, Theuerkauf's sculptures are on display starting today at the Bangalore International Centre. The physical exhibition, which is by way of being a call for greater environmental consciousness in art, will be on view relatively briefly but will continue online at KYNKYN.com until the end of March.

German-Indian Theuerkauf, 42, spent his childhood in Kerala's Wayanad, exploring the great outdoors. Now he spends his days with students at the Centre for Learning, an alternative school on the city's outskirts modelled on philosopher J Krishnamurti's teachings (this year marks his 125th birth anniversary). A teacher of nature and the environment,

Theuerkauf also doubles as a guide to help his students develop skills such as woodworking and bird-watching.

The gathering, collecting and sorting of raw material for his sculptures is as much a part of the artistic process as observing the world around him. This explains why photographer and filmmaker Manush John's documentation of Theuerkauf's work (seen in pictures used for this article) show him so often foraging for connections and new learnings in dry wooded scrublands, besides in his studio. His process demands all his physical and cognitive energies.

Theuerkauf has deliberately chosen not to title his 18 sculptures. Instead, he chooses to identify the sculptures by the names of the trees and plants the thorns come from, like the acacia trees or palms.

While the intention is to encourage viewers to be more attentive to their surroundings, Theuerkauf hopes one can see nature without one's vision being filtered by preconceived notions. Waterfalls and flowers, for instance, are often invoked as exemplars of natural beauty, he says, but even the beauty of his two main materials — found wood and thorns — can be remarkable. If only one pauses to really "see" them.

"We need to look beyond our own conditioning," says Theuerkauf. "It's not enough to have just academic knowledge of climate change and environmental degradation when the planet is facing a crisis." While some of his sculptures are structured assemblies of thorns in crown-like displays, other

explore different forms, like one in which the thorns march on in an upward ascent for as far as the foundation (wood) exists. This last piece is the largest of the collection and towers over the viewer at 10 feet. The smaller sculptures are designed to be mounted on walls.

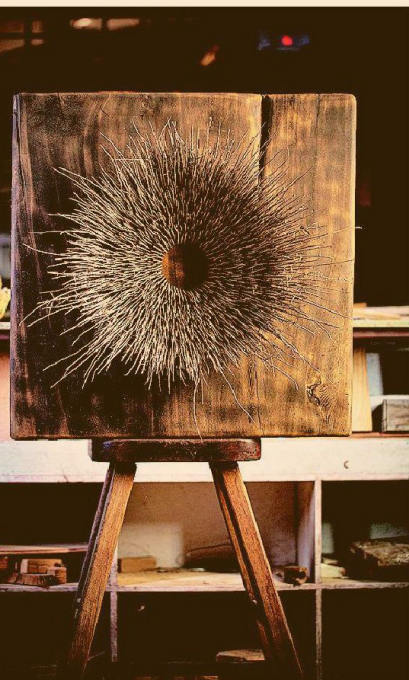
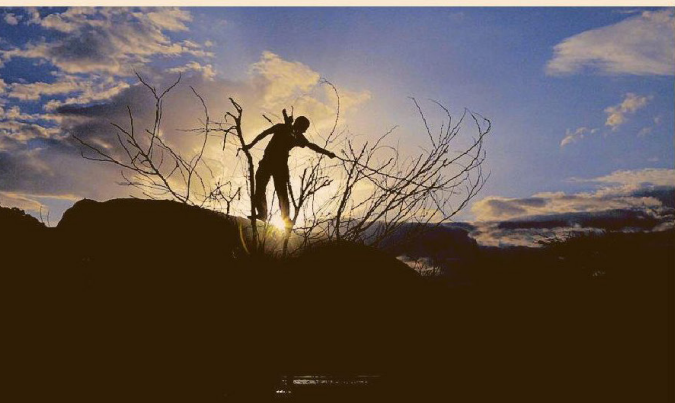
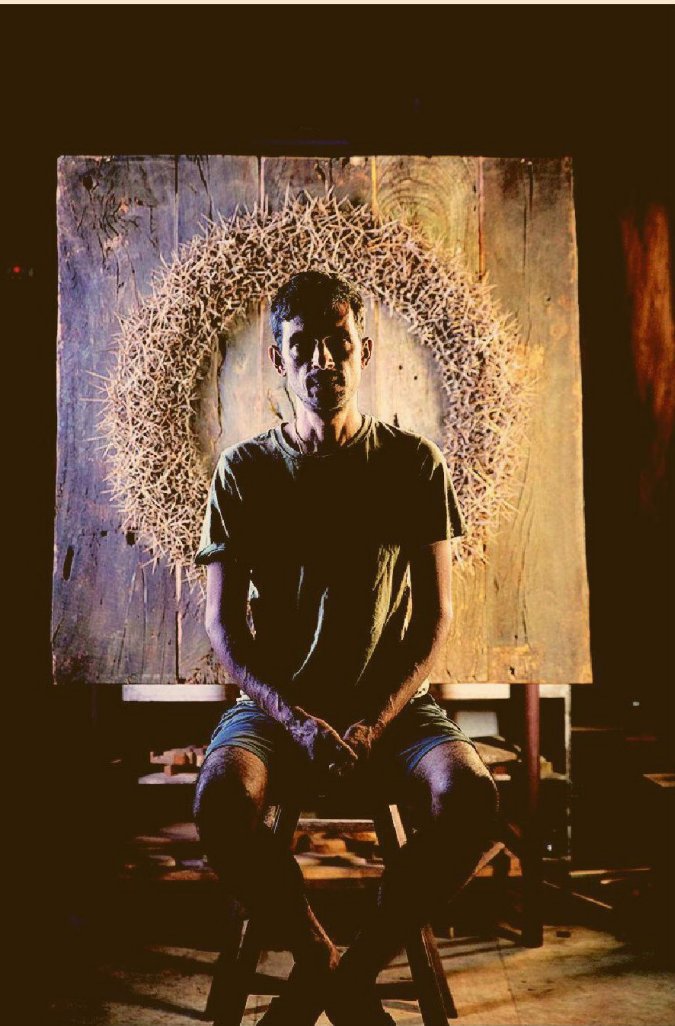
A play of both form and texture, the thorns in these densely mounted structures are only a channel of expression, says the artist. The character-inducing claw-like shapes of some of the thorns might have drawn him into a world of stories existing in an arid landscape, but they are far from the only things that Theuerkauf believes one must make time for.

The first show of the decade by KYNKYN.com (a play on the gallery's co-founder's name, Namu Kini), "A Trail of Thorns" marks the beginning of a calendar that will consciously focus on subjects such as sustainability and feminism. "For us art isn't just decoration. A work of art lives with a viewer for a long time so it should be something which has a continuous and meaningful dialogue with the audience," says Kini. Theuerkauf's craft is certainly a start.

The exhibition is on at Bangalore International Centre till February 19

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PHOTOS: MANUSH JOHN / KYNKYN.COM



(Top) The artist, Sandilya Theuerkauf; his art uses thorns and repurposed wood as raw materials

