

A TED lecture that Alwar 'Bala' Balasubramaniam gave a while ago, offered some insights into the way his mind operates and what themes tend to attract his fancy.

One thinks he said something about abstract ideas that engrossed him like 'skin,' 'footsteps,' 'traces'. Bala's new show, *Nothing from My Hands* at Talwar Art Gallery is on till April 27, and has three levels filled with materials and various concepts he has been treating lately. Or returning to.

There are mesh-like metals. Dreamy blobs emerging from false walls. Sand-smoothed stones. Overall, the experience is surreal.

And what you see is not what you get.

A plain vertical surface ends up having another story on its reverse.

It's a lifesize cast of the artist himself.

A fuzzy looking puffball, on closer inspections, reveals spiky needle points. Called the *Wild One*, this exhibit was based on a purple wildflower that is attractive to see, but lethal on touch.

Bala has frequently played with objects like hands and feet casts, depicting them as if they were magically emerging or disappearing into flat surfaces.

He explained that, "this show is about more than the solid object of hand and skin."

It is that empty space where one begins and the other ends."

The choice of something like, "iron rods welded together," create the idea of skin in material one would not normally associate with that actual organ.

Taking the idea further, there are footprints and traces from earlier works.

"When I began 20 years ago, what pushed me were the invisible spaces," Bala commented.

In his fibreglass piece, *Stone Waves*, a cluster of pseudo-pebbles are arrayed on the floor, as if worn out in the tide.

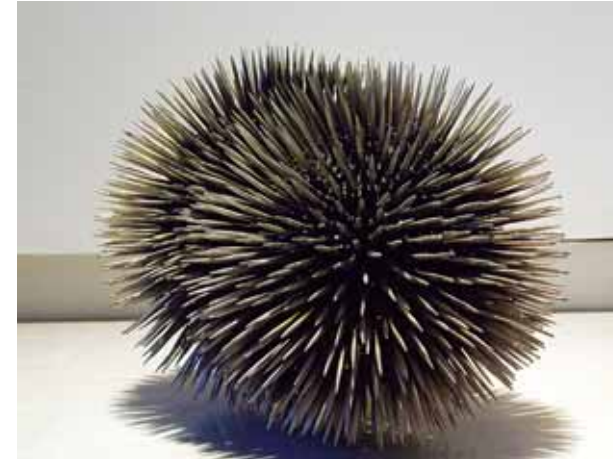
They look light, but are heavy on touch.

# Space beneath the skin

ALWAR SUBRAMANIAM spoke to SHANA MARIA VERGHIS about his show, *Nothing from My Hands*, where he experiments with a range of material including metal and fibreglass, to create sculptures and installations that sometimes border on the surreal



Endless Line Expanded Space



Wild One



Stone waves, Between Here and There (below)



A Balasubramaniam

He likes the contrast at his fingertips.

When he made the life cast, the intention was to see, 'how much volume a physical body occupies.'

"My mind is my main machine," he said, "Vermeer used the *camera obscura* (though there is no actual proof of this), to reproduce what is on 'the other side.'"

One of the sharp-maze-metal creations located on the rooftop, was

result of the artist "exploring magnetic and energy fields around objects."

He commented, "I work three ways. One is the 'Self in Progress,' the dreamlike figures and images through walls. (As if a hand was thrust through). Then there is the kind where don't know the end. As with the *Stone Waves*.

"The third are the surprise. The works with energy fields. It's like

making a discovery."

So titles read *Between Here and There*, *Breathing In and Out*.

Such like.

With references to textures of things. Like median lines on the palm of one's hand through skin-folds. Or "Lines from shadows."

The latter effect is with vinyl and plastic polymer on tracing paper.

For another dreamlike, temporariness feel.

There is nothing inside the small glass frames. Except for black-white lines reflections.

He said that some forms come by accident. "Like when I was welding." He is trained as a sculptor.

And the, "metal idea came from the use of wire mesh during the cooling process."

Balasubramaniam mused, "The art is secondary to the process. I feel it is more about questions we have as humans. Through sculpture, I can

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share this with others. But life is more important than art."

Someone who influenced his existential view as a man in a village near Tirulneveli known locally as 'Papanasham Swami.'

"He owned nothing. That idea intrigued me. The person is secondary to what he leaves behind."