

Waves of change (Right)
Details from metal installation
Ocean's Breath; (below)
Parvathi Nayar. SPECIAL
ARRANGEMENT

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As you enter, you first hear the waves. "There is a point at which the sound builds up, till you are almost overwhelmed... then it recedes," says Parvathi Nayar, artist and curator of The Living Ocean, a hybrid art exhibition created for the new Moplah house at Chennai's DakshinaChitra Museum.

Describing the exhibition as a "jewel box," Parvathi explains how art, science and engineering combine for maximum impact, with the help of multiple artists.

"It all began with a film I made on an Urur Olcott Kuppam fisherman, S Palayam. Every day for the past five years, he has been going to the beach to record the wind, waves and ocean conditions. He has got reams and reams of information, and while he does not use the word 'climate change' he says things are changing," says Parvathi, adding, "I made the film to remind people that there is so much artisanal knowledge that we tend to ignore. And that people who work with the sea are critically important."

While discussing the film with Deborah Thiagarajan, the director of DakshinaChitra, they began to envision a show on the ocean. "We discussed what the form should be - she wanted something permanent, something for visitors, who are often tourists and a lot of students," says Parvathi.

The show explores climate change and its cascading effects on the ocean and related water bodies with a lot of infographics, says Parvathi, adding "When something is visually attractive it is easier to transmit information."

While it does deal with environmental challenges, the exhibition is hopeful and laced together with cheery energy.

For example, the Hashtag#Collective (an art



When art meets engineering

The Living Ocean, a hybrid art exhibition, merges art and science with the help of artists, fishermen, data analysts and engineers to demonstrate the effects of climate change

collective) has an interactive installation of endangered coastal birds from South India titled Hope Is A Thing With Feathers. As you walk around this installation, birds such as the black headed ibis, greater flamingo and marsh sandpiper appear and disappear. It is juxtaposed with the Birdsong sound installations by Madhu Viswanathan, featuring bird calls from the greater coastal area of Chennai. And Mary Symonds' reprinted watercolours, which offer an insight into the fish seen in Chennai waters in colonial times. Sculptor P Madhukar has also created a series of ghost crabs in upcycled metal titled Ghost in the Shell.

Art and engineering meet with Ocean's Breath, a suspended artwork created by Parvathi Nayar with Forms and Gears, a fixture building company. "This was a lovely collaboration. I wanted to do an installation of diatoms, which are unicellular algae



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Artist

found in water. They give us about 40% of the oxygen we breathe, and have fantastic forms as they are encased in silica shells. I have used them in my art for years," says Parvathi.

The result is a series of 10 intricate diatoms of two different sizes, with the whole artwork spanning 3.5 metres x 4 metres, suspended from the ceiling. "We created an abstract form, based on the idea of them suspended in the ocean," adds Parvathi, stating that it took months of collaborative work at the factory.

Stating that this is the first piece of art they have manufactured in 52 years of the company's existence, Regi Mathew, partner Forms and Gears, says, "The process was arduous, marked by numerous challenges and triumphs. From crafting intricate diatoms to ensuring structural stability, each step demanded a delicate balance of artistry and precision."

Yet, they persevered and the result underlines the central message of the show: a lot can be achieved when people work together, whether it is to create art or battle climate change.

The Living Ocean opens at DakshinaChitra Museum, Chennai, on April 13. It is a permanent exhibit.